

OFFLINE AND ONLINE LONG TERM MOORINGS: Policy briefing paper

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Introduction & background

- 1.1. For many years BW has stated an intention to encourage offline moorings, and over time to limit, and eventually reduce the number of boats moored long term along the line of the waterways. This stems from customer feedback that long lines of moored boats reduce the enjoyment of cruising, a view that was confirmed in our autumn 2006 annual survey of boat owners views. This suggested that the average boater would like to see a maximum of 15 boats per site with at least 6 miles between sites¹. Our early summer '06 survey of active boaters interviewed while cruising suggested that this group may be even more critical of online moorings wishing to see no more than 10 boats at a time. It would be a major challenge to achieve either of these densities throughout our network in the short to medium term.
- 1.2. Our 2006 survey of boat owners (based on a statistically valid random sample of licence holders) indicated the following picture of the current moorings market and people's preferences². Percentages are of 809 respondents with a home mooring :

Type of mooring	% of boaters currently on this type of site	% of boaters preferring this type of site
Offline marina	44%	56%
Lay-by or basin	11%	16%
Online	45%	28%

More specifically, 25% of people currently moored on linear sites say they would prefer to be in an offline site. We conclude from this that there is currently unsatisfied demand for offline and lay-by or basin moorings.

- 1.3. We note from the IWA's Policy Statement on Long Term Offline Moorings and their Facilities (January 2006) that IWA:

"recommends and supports the general provision of off-line mooring basins of all sizes in appropriate locations with facilities ranging from basic to comprehensive, to meet a variety of boaters' needs. The aim should normally be to reduce linear moorings by the creation of new moorings off-line. Generally, new long term linear moorings should be resisted."

- 1.4. British Waterways is committed to:

- (a) Facilitating growth in supply of moorings to meet the increases in demand anticipated over the coming decade.

¹ I would like to ask some questions about the number of boats moored along the line of the waterways

(a) What do you think is the maximum acceptable number of boats to be lined together at long-term moorings along a narrow canal? (based on an average boat 40 foot long)

(b) How far apart along the canal do you think lines of moored boats should be? (In miles or metres)

² "If you could choose any type of mooring, which would you prefer?"

- (b) Working with the private sector to provide a wide choice of mooring facilities throughout our network to meet the needs and demands of boaters.
- (c) Encouraging provision of off-line moorings.
- (d) Reducing the number of on-line moorings in places where they detract from the use and enjoyment of the waterways and/or where demand for them falls as a result of increased offline provision.

1.5. We recognise that the viability of private sector investment in off-line moorings must not be undermined by:

- (a) BW creating new on-line moorings that would serve the same customers as those projected for proposed new off-line moorings.
- (b) BW charging mooring fees for its own sites that are below the local market price

2. Investment in new offline moorings

Last year, we took positive steps to promote the investment in new offline moorings that is essential both to meeting long term growth in demand for boats on our network, and to creating the opportunity to begin the control of linear moorings that so many of our stakeholders desire. Our Inland Marina Investment Guide, associated website and New Marinas Unit help developers to progress new marina schemes. We are pleased to report early signs of success. 828 new offline berths were opened on the canal network in the year to 31st March 2007 and we expect a further 1,750 to open during 2007/8. Our target is to have influenced the creation of a total of 10,000 new offline berths by 2015.

3. Controlling expansion of online moorings

- 3.1. BW consent is required for all long term mooring along the line of the canals. A minority of mooring sites are unauthorised and we are committed to resolving all outstanding disputes with relevant site operators as a matter of urgency.
- 3.2. There is a general presumption against new, online, long term moorings, **particularly on the towpath side of the waterway**. Well-designed lay-by mooring³ developments on the off-side will be regarded as off-line sites for the purposes of this policy and will be approved through our standard procedures detailed on www.britishwaterways.co.uk/marinadevelopment.
- 3.3. The following considerations will be used to determine the acceptability of a new on-line mooring proposal. The same criteria will apply, whether the proposed site is owned by BW or a third party.

New online moorings will be acceptable only if all of the following criteria apply:

- (a) there is clear excess demand for moorings in the area⁴ with no vacancies at comparable BW or third party sites.
- (b) there is no prospect (short or long term) of new off-line mooring development.
- (c) there is low density of existing on-line moorings in the area
- (d) there are no operational or environmental constraints to online moorings at the proposed location. Constraints include high boat traffic volumes, water availability, and navigational safety.

³ A widening or extension to the waterway where boats are not moored within the main navigation channel.

⁴ The geographical area within which local customers would be prepared to consider a mooring – typically (but not always) within 30 – 40 miles of where they live.

Exceptions:

- (i) Visitor moorings will continue to be located along the towpath or offside
- (ii) A proportion of visitor moorings may be allocated temporarily to boaters requiring a home mooring for winter months only.
- (iii) Moorings for the following types of boats will be permitted along the towpath or on the offside, providing that they bring significant clearly defined benefits to the location, and that there are no operational or environmental constraints as per para 3.3 (d):
 - Commercial boats and boats providing services for tourists and day visitors (e.g. trip and passenger boats, floating shops and restaurants),
 - Historic/feature boats
 - Community boats operated for charitable purposes
- (iv) Permission will normally be granted for just one boat to be moored adjacent to the garden of a private residential property on the offside of the canal providing that there are no operational or environmental constraints as per para.3.3 (d).
- (v) Where there is an acute shortage of moorings and new marinas are under development, temporary additional offside moorings may be approved. Mooring permits will specifically state that these are temporary and make clear that they will be terminated when new off-line moorings become available in the area. A minimum of 6 months notice will be given to customers on temporary sites.
- (vi) BW craft may be moored as required for operational purposes, but they should be located away from designated visitor moorings. Where operational craft do need to moor occasionally at visitor moorings in order to use or maintain facilities, their stay time should be limited to the time required for this purpose.

4. Procedure for reducing existing online moorings

- 4.1. Because of the upturn in activity in new marina developments noted in paragraph 2 above, we believe the time is now right to limit and to start to make some reductions in online moorings. On the basis that new marinas will target nearby online customers with their marketing, it seems sensible to make nominal reductions to online moorings whenever a new offline site opens.
- 4.2. In November 2006 there were approximately 9,500 online moorings on the BW network. We will reduce this number as new offline capacity comes onto the market. This will be done in a ratio of 1:10 – i.e. we will cut one on-line berth for every ten new berths created off line. Reductions will be made within the geographical market supplied by the new offline marina within 12 months of the opening date of the new site. For the purpose of clarity, we will make the reductions within a 30 mile radius of the new marina berths.
- 4.3. Our target is for 10,000 new offline berths to trigger a 1,000 cut in the existing 9,500 online berths by 2015. Para 3.3 includes provision for some increase in online moorings where there is no prospect of offline investment. These will be in geographically distinct areas and they will not be counted against the 1:10 offset rule applicable elsewhere. So, we would expect the total number of online berths in 2015 to remain marginally above 8,300.
- 4.4. Reductions in online moorings will take place through a mix of the following:

- (a) Reducing the size of, or closing BW's directly-managed online sites.
 - (i) Boaters on long term moorings scheduled for closure will receive at least 12 months notice to leave the site (6 months for those on temporary sites as per 3.3(ii) above).
 - (ii) Moorings may be reduced by natural wastage as people leave the site.
 - (iii) Reductions will not necessarily fall within a single business unit, particularly where the new marina is close to an administrative boundary. Reductions should be made where the benefits (/costs) are maximised (/minimised). Examples would be benefits from improved customer satisfaction from eliminating long lines of moored boats or closure of mooring sites which have lowest profitability
- (b) Where an application to develop an offline marina is received from the operator of nearby existing on line moorings, BW's response to the initial application will indicate the extent to which we will require the number of on line moorings to be reduced.
- (c) Where legally possible, terminating (subject to notice) or not renewing agreements, for privately owned offside sites. Such sites targeted for closure will be identified as unsuitable on the basis of criteria (a) and/or (e) in para 4.5.

4.5. When selecting BW sites to be closed or reduced, we will weigh up and balance the following considerations in respect of all our long term moorings within the relevant catchment area:

- (a) The size of the site and local density of online moorings. The higher the local density, the stronger would be the argument to reduce the online moorings.
- (b) The popularity of the site. Other things being equal, those with fewer people on any waiting list or expression of interest database would be more likely to be reduced or closed.
- (c) The profitability of the site. Other things being equal, those with higher costs and/or lower prices would be more likely to be reduced or closed. If the site has particular operational difficulties or is in need of investment to refurbish it, this could be a reason to close it. It is anti-competitive for BW to offer moorings at a price below that at which efficient local private operators of similar moorings in the area could break even.
- (d) Whether the mooring site is occupying water space that could be used to better effect in a different way. For example, for temporary or visitor moorings, or to accommodate a new trip or day boat hire operation. If the moorings are towpath side, this is an added reason for reducing or closing.
- (e) Whether the site presents a navigational hazard – e.g. on a bend where visibility for passing boats is reduced, or where traffic volumes are particularly high.
- (f) Proximity of alternative mooring sites – if there are plentiful alternatives in the area offering boaters a good choice of moorings, the justification for closing it would be stronger.
- (g) Whether the site includes berths with residential planning consent. Because these moorings are so scarce in relation to demand it is unlikely that we would consider closing authorised residential moorings.
