

BWS LOWLAND USERS GROUP DISCUSSION MARCH 2004. GROUP COMPOSITION.

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The discussion group members comprised commercial boat organisations, established and new charity boaters, society boat members, private leisure and residential boat owners and angling and cycling interests.

DISCUSSION PHILOSOPHY.

While it is more obvious what the system might look like in 10 years time it is less obvious how it develops from its current position of boating activity. Together with substantial grant aid BW requires to generate on-water revenue, which, at this stage, is only from minimal boating [most of which has arisen from the need to justify and support the initial grant aid]. It is therefore, at this stage when facilities and services are sparse, important to create a level playing field in order to stimulate a mixed market economy. This can only be achieved by a strategic pricing and moorings policy that is felt fair, transparent and unambiguous among and between all categories of on-water activity. The largest sector of activity is the charity club. The growing sectors are commercial and private leisure. This raised the following issues which were considered with some resolution. There was acknowledgement that this can be merely an opening for further yet necessary and urgent debate.

ISSUES.

1. Currently there is a range of charges in addition to a fixed mooring charge. Is everyone clear about this?

NO.

Aside from questions of value for charges and disputed principles of policy regarding turnover charging, there was a view that quasi commercial charity trading is not conducive to new essential and indeed continuing viable commercial trading and is essentially unfair trading[.Commercial operators costs are salaries and wages, loan charges, tax and regulatory charges as well as capital costs and depreciation which, in charity boats, are offset by grant aid and volunteering.

2. Is there a future for the charity/society?

YES

It was recognised that without this sector the canal may not be open today and that there is a continuing community need. This is also embedded in local government, BW and Scottish Executive policy.

2.How then should the charity/society sector evolve?

URGENTLY AND COLLECTIVELY

Issues of changing charity legislation need to be addressed.

Some societies are solely community support on a very small scale [e.g. Falkirk and 1940] or are supporting defined [or need to be more clearly

defined]sectors of society[e.g. Nolly Barge and Seagull Trust]. However, established societies are in part commercial operations [e.g. LUCS and FCCS]. BW needs to categorise charity/society and create a level playing field. Considerations to be made are for a social sector:

- 1.a) define social sector
- 1.b) define broad community.
- 2.a) clarify-without trading arm
- 2.b) clarify with trading arm.

3.What are the categories of commercial users?

NOT CATEGORISED EITHER

-e.g. hire boats-weekly residential, day boats, hourly boats [mainly self drive - may be helmed]

trip boats- half day, day, several days [scenic with or without services e.g. catering, events, corporate hospitality, business training].

The current system of BW trading agreements does not provide clarity and transparency in their charges [currently under discussion nationally] It is important therefore that any changes to society/charity boat charges do not just fall into an already ambiguous system.

4. Is a pricing equilibrium the answer?

YES

BW requires to :-

- * Categorise commercial operation [no blanket 6 1/2%]
- * Categorise charity, society regarding trading etc
- * Compare business overheads for any paying business customer.
- * Incentivise current as well as new traders until the market is established [this needs also full services and facilities] in ? years time.

CREATE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD WHICH IS TRANSPARENT AND IS BASED ON THE CURRENT FACILITIES AND SERVICE LEVELS