



**ROBIN EVANS CUSTOMER MEETING
The Bear Hotel, Devizes, 13 July 2008**

Issue: Why does BW not allow End of Garden Moorings to be continued when a house with an End of Garden Mooring is sold if it's so keen to increase income?

Response: Where a house with an existing End of Garden Mooring is sold, the South West Moorings Policy does allow for the mooring to be continued, subject to a favourable engineering assessment and environmental impact assessment being carried out. The Kennet & Avon Conservation Management Plan that was entered into as a condition of the Heritage Lottery Funding requires BW to resist mooring on the off-side of the canal and as a result new requests for EOG Moorings in rural areas are being declined.

Issue: The Bath Valley is almost an unbroken line of permanent linear moorings, proposals to create off-line moorings have been refused by the local business unit and the situation is so bad that we aren't send hire boat customers down to Bath anymore as there are no places for them on the visitor moorings.

Response: BW is aware of the high level of over-staying in the Bath Valley and is doing what it can, within the legal processes that it must follow, to alleviate this problem. The New Marinas Unit has been set up to ensure that all proposals for off-line mooring provision are dealt with openly, fairly and consistently. In addition, where new off-line facilities are being made available BW is reducing its own linear moorings by one berth for every 10 new off-line berths created.

Issue: Why hasn't BW applied for Cruise way Status for the Kennet & Avon Canal and how can it expect third party operators to invest in the canal while it remains a Remainder waterway in parts?

Response: British Waterways remains committed to making an application for the Kennet & Avon Canal to be re-designated as 'Cruise way'. However, in the current financial climate it believes that because this inherently increases the burden and liability on government that it is not the right time to make such an application. Potential investors should not be put off by the Remainder status for the Kennet & Avon Canal – there are many examples of very profitable marina and boat hire business flourishing on Remainder waterways across the network.

Issue: Does British Waterways feel that the 1995 Act gives it the powers it needs to deal effectively with all the boats on the K&A?

Response: There are a number of other pieces of legislation, in addition to the 1995 Act, that BW calls on in managing its boating activities. At the end of the day, BW doesn't feel inclined to look for further legislation to help it regulate activity but to use negotiation and persuasion to get better results. Of course it finds the processes and timescales need to bring the non-payers and the over-stayers to book frustrating, but it doesn't feel more legislation is the answer.

- Issue:** Local communities that live alongside the canal do experience conflict with boaters and would like to know what BW can and is doing to alleviate the concerns of local residents.
- Response:** Paul Griffin gave an overview of the processes involved in dealing with non-payers and over-stayers and described how BW has just invested in additional enforcement staff to enable it to bring about resolutions more quickly. BW is committed to helping to broker better relations between rural communities and boaters and will continue to work with parish councils to try to improve matters.
- Issue:** Proposal under consultation to lock either end of the Kennet & Avon Canal and staff it with people able to sell licences to non-licensed vessels. There were various views expressed for and against and the suggestion to work with the Environment Agency was made more than once.
- Response:** These plans are currently on hold while alternatives are being investigated and costed. Unfortunately, it doesn't appear to be possible to share this role with the Environment Agency. Further details will be given out through the user forum in due course.
- Issue:** BW isn't taking enough action against non-compliant continuous cruisers and is continually trying to chase up licensed boaters for not displaying their licences when the problem derives from BW not issuing the renewals quickly enough in the first place.
- Response:** Paul Griffin gave further details about the processes used to follow up on boaters over-staying of visitor moorings and re-iterated the fact that additional enforcement staff will enable many more cases to be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. He cited two cases that have been to court where the boaters have faced significant fines for overstaying. Simon Salem apologised for any problems customers had experienced as a result of the boat licensing function transferring from Watford to Leeds and gave an assurance to look into a specific case raised within the meeting.
- Issue:** We, the customers, used to be your eyes on the canal and help with licensing enforcement by reporting unlicensed boats. These days, we feel that it's all done in house and that our reports are unwelcome.
- Response:** It is important that we follow the correct procedures and that we record our boaters movements accurately in order to bring about successful prosecutions but we continue to welcome information from our paying customers to enable us to make sure that we've got all the major offenders covered.
- Issue:** Condition of the canal: Paddles not greased, bank erosion, poor vegetation management leading to a narrowing of the navigable channel, lock gates leaking, pounds running dry
- Response:** John Ward outline the routine, cyclical maintenance plans for the maintenance of the canal and the monthly, annual and quinquennial inspection programme and touched again on resourcing issues and the need to prioritise. A member of the audience advised the meeting that all the maintenance works were discussed at the user forum and advised other people present at the meeting to attend the forum.

Issue: It was felt that the User Forum needed a tighter agenda and that BW was guilty of giving too many presentations and just talking about plans to do things rather than actively achieving works.

Response: Robin assured the meeting that the User Forums should be about two way communication and that he'd be encouraging BW people to be much more honest about what they can and can't deliver rather than perhaps trying to give people a crumb of comfort that their requirements might be met.

Issue: With the moves afoot to restore the Wilts and Berks canal, is BW forging a strong relationship with Swindon Council?

Response: Robin described BW's role within the restoration of the Wilts and Berks as a very 'junior' partner. He underlined the need for BW to be forging good relations with our local authorities but touched on how difficult that could be, given the number of authorities through which our waterways run.

Issue: Could the K&A host a visit by the Working Boats project as it would be such a great educational opportunity?

Response: Simon Salem outlined BW's educational packages promoted through WoW to KS2 pupils. Terry Kemp from the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust outline the Trust's commitment to education and it's mission to Enhance, Protect and Promote the canal and Bill Fisher, also of the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, felt that the Trust could host such a visit. Susie Mercer, BW's Marketing Manager, asked for volunteers to come forward who might be interested in taking part in a joint training day with a couple of BW people to provide a couple of supported educational events each year.

Issue: There are insufficient slipways on the K&A and this is such a good way to get young people involved in the waterways.

Response: It was agreed that it was a great to get people interested and that this kind of activity might well attract lottery funding. It was also mooted that where slipways were within BW operational yards and depots it might be possible to put safeguards in place to allow the public to use them.

Issue: What does BW think of the Adam Smith report and its recommendation to privatise the waterways?

Response: Robin assured the meeting that privatisation would not happen; the waterways can never be fully self-financing and as such cannot be privatised. He described the improved relationship between BW, its board and government and said that the on-going review of BW's status was throwing up some interesting ideas such as Community Interest Companies that may be worth further investigation. Robin assured the meeting that he would be doing all he could to ensure the future wellbeing of the network and that the relationships with government and the local authorities were key.