

NEWS RELEASE - 28 May 2021



London's boaters to descend on Hackney to defend the right to moor

On Sunday 13 June 2021 the River Lee in Hackney, London will be filled with a flotilla of boats protesting against the Canal and River Trust's introduction of new mooring restrictions on the Lower Lee and Broxbourne - restrictions that boaters say are just the start of the CRT's plans to prioritise leisure over living on Britain's waterways. The protest will bring boaters from all over London and beyond to resist the displacement of boaters and to protect their homes.

A 'towpath protest' of boaters on foot and canal wanderers alike will gather at Walthamstow Marshes before following in the flotilla's wake to Hackney Wick, raising awareness of the Canal and River Trust's discriminatory policy changes, and how they threaten people's livelihoods. Towpath users can chat to boaters stationed on the towpath to find out more about the restrictions and the campaign to resist them, before heading back to Walthamstow Marshes for the conclusion of the protest with speeches and entertainment in the form of a circus show, children's activities and live music.

The CRT plans to implement 10km of 'water safety zones' (previously named 'water sports zones') near rowing clubs on the River Lee, which will remove up to 400 mooring spaces in East London and 150 in Broxbourne. The zones will also ban wider boats from mooring alongside narrow boats. Many of these boaters are parents raising families on their boats and the difficulties introduced by the zones will force them out of their children's school catchment areas.

The National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) argues that the policy is profoundly ill-conceived, particularly in the context of a housing crisis and a pandemic. They also argue that evacuated canals will turn the towpaths into the danger zones they once were, prior to the growth in the boating population.

"The number of incidents per year is very small, with 4 incidents per year over the last 6 years, on average. Despite the small numbers, the CRT has done nothing to investigate these

incidents to establish contributing factors. They have not tried to understand the issue they claim to be solving because they are not genuinely interested in the issue. They are using safety as a fig leaf for a prior agenda" argues Ian McDowell, chair of the London branch of the NBTA. "The limited data that CRT has provided simply does not demonstrate a need for this policy," he continues, "and yet the impact on the boating community will be drastic. Many boats in London are homes. These planned 'safety zones' will displace many boat dwellers from these areas."

The CRT claims that collisions with powered boats have risen, but in fact information disclosed by a Freedom of Information request to the CRT revealed that the number of collisions between rowing boats and powered boats has actually fallen. An NBTA spokesperson said: "It is shoddy and irresponsible policy-making. The CRT did not talk with boaters about the issue at all until we forced their hand. They haven't sought low-impact solutions first and have stated in a Freedom of Information response that they don't believe they have a responsibility to conduct risk assessments when introducing policies of this sort."

The Hackney flotilla follows on from the Broxbourne flotilla on 17 April 2021 that included representatives from Broxbourne's own Cruising Club. Support from the local community in Hertfordshire was passionate, with many affirming how they love the boats, and see no need to introduce these confusing and unnecessary 'Safety Zones'.

After powerful demonstrations of collective boater resistance to the zones, the Canal and River Trust (CRT) agreed in May 2021 to open a formal consultation on the Water Safety Zones, with the participation of representatives from NBTA London and other stakeholders. While a consultation is a step in the right direction, it can only be successful if CRT provides qualitative data demonstrating the existence of a safety issue. NBTA London believes that the Safety Zones proposal should be scrapped, and any measures coming out of the consultation should be impact-assessed to ensure they are not harmful to the lives and wellbeing of liveaboard boaters.

Notes for editors:

Details of the Hackney flotilla protest:

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2021/05/15/hackney-flotilla-protest/>

Hackney flotilla protest Facebook event:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/832507674027229/>

More information about the 'water safety zones':

NBTA campaign page: <https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/water-safety-zones-campaign/>

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2021/03/02/mooring-spaces-under-threat-on-the-lea/>

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2021/03/27/share-the-space-stop-the-safety-zone/>

Background information on NBTA resistance:

The Broxbourne boat protest took place on 17 April 2021 at Kings Weir, Broxbourne at 12 noon.

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2021/04/01/broxbourne-flotilla-against-the-so-called-safety-zones/>

A protest picnic on Walthamstow Marshes on 9 May 2021. Over 200 people joined across the 5 hour picnic.

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2021/05/17/stop-the-safety-zones-protest-picnic/>

NBTA's statement in response to the CRT consultation U-turn.

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2021/05/16/our-actions-have-impact-lets-keep-going/>

Attached documents:

- Pictures of Broxbourne Flotilla – please credit NBTA London when using these.
- [Hackney Flotilla protest poster](#).

Contact:

For more information, please contact NBTA London at: nbtalondon@gmail.com or 07841 650 994.

The National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) is a volunteer organisation formed in 2009 that campaigns and provides advice for travelling boat dwellers on Britain's inland and coastal waterways. This includes anyone whose home is a boat and who does not have a permanent mooring for their boat with planning permission for residential use.

<http://www.bargee-traveller.org.uk/>

<https://nbtalondon.wordpress.com/>