

# Lee Navigation Forum

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## Notes of the meeting

The second meeting of the Lee Navigation Forum (LNF) was held on Tuesday 16 November, 4:30-6:30pm on Zoom. It was attended by representatives from:

Broxbourne Cruising Club  
Broxbourne Rowing Club  
Canal & River Trust  
Lea Rowing Club  
Lee Valley Boat Centre  
National Association of Boat Owners (NABO)  
National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA) London  
South Island Marina  
Spring Lee Cruising Club  
Lee Valley Regional Park Authority  
Hertford Anglers  
Lee Angling Club

Apologies:

Moo Canoes

Hopkins Van Mil (HVM) was present to facilitate the meeting and act as meeting secretariat. The meeting began with introductions from each member of the Forum given the attendance of new Forum members. Discussion followed the agenda, circulated in advance of the meeting.

### 1. Update since last meeting

HVM thanked those who commented on notes from last meeting of the Forum and reminded the meeting of the purpose of the Forum which had been agreed at the first meeting - to create a respectful environment in which to:

- Create a log of issues causing concern, and use subsequent meetings to work through them, with all Forum members bringing relevant evidence and information to discuss them effectively
- Incident reporting
- Consider broader safety issues
- Focus on and working towards solutions to the above.

Update from Matthew Symonds (Canal & River Trust) on the outcome of the sub-group meeting (Fri 29 Oct) to discuss the no-mooring sections and existing rules and regulations. Specific actions from meeting updates can be found in the materials circulated by HVM prior to this meeting.

In response to this update on no-mooring sections and existing rules and regulations, NBTA London confirmed that they will share a position paper on the different zones for discussion at the next meeting. The position paper identifies where there is/ isn't agreement with no-mooring zones from NBTA London members.

- ACTION 1: NBTA London share position paper on no-mooring zones with HVM and Canal & River Trust. HVM will circulate position paper with all Forum members in advance of the next LNF meeting.
- ACTION 2: Canal & River Trust will issue a response to NBTA position paper

Update from Ros Daniels (Canal & River Trust) on commissioning Nash Maritime to conduct a navigational risk assessment. The scope of the assessment, e.g. whether a desk-based exercise activity or an on-site assessment using a range of technological solutions, will be agreed over the next few weeks.

- ACTION 3: Canal & River Trust will share the scope of the navigational risk assessment once agreed

## **2. Vegetation, dredging and debris removal**

Peter Birch, Asset Manager (dredging), Canal & River Trust provided the Forum with an introduction to this agenda item. Peter highlighted important factors around dredging, including:

- Cost: Annual spend between £7-8 million, with a baseline target cost of £100K per km but can be twice that in urban areas
- Frequency of surveys: whole network surveyed every 4-8 years, with busier places more regularly.
- Action impacted by: severity of blockage, customer comments, significance of disruption
- Priority list: can take 1-2 for action. A separate programme looks at smaller, localised problems that don't require full scale dredging (addressed on scale and severity of impact)
- Last survey on River Lee in 2017: showed majority of survey was low priority compared to other areas in network. Next survey due in 1-2 years
- What's currently being done: due to mooring difficulties, team have been resurveying River Lee from a mooring perspective
- Three important parts of the process:
  - (1) What the problem is e.g. sedimentation/weed growth?
  - (2) Where it is e.g. in the cross section of the water way and in the lineage?
  - (3) What is the impact it is having on users?

In response to the introduction to dredging, vegetation and debris removal Forum members logged the main issues causing concern, bearing in mind the three important parts of the process set out by Peter:

- Sunken boat outside Springfield marina which has been there for approximately 1 month
  - Canal & River Trust confirmed that they followed up reports of sunken boats following the last Forum meeting. Confirmed that there are currently seven recorded as sunk in the Lee and are in the process of being removed (with one due to be raised imminently)
- Lee Bridge Road and Old Ford Lock: carpet of green duckweed which is usually gone by the beginning of October. Has grown in thickness and is holding debris e.g. lumps of wood. Risks damaging craft and is the biggest issue at the moment for rowers
- Outgrowths of pennywort, a non-native invasive species, at Broxbourne: up to eight areas of up to 4m<sup>2</sup> each. Concern about continued growth

- Area above Dobbs Weir: towpath bank silting up with willows growing in the river behind the boards that protect the bank. Concern that if there was flooding it could cause a tree to wash out and cause damage
- Significant dumping of red diesel into the river contaminating wildlife
  - Confirmation from Lee Valley Regional Park that the Environment Agency and Canal & River Trust were notified and responded by putting out booms to prevent spread of diesel. Lee Valley Regional Park notified the Forum that this has been linked to changes in legislation related to the use of red diesel which may lead to an increase in dumping of diesel across London
- Reports of ongoing weed growth: duckweed at Limehouse Cut and north of Old Fort Lock. Concerns raised that weed problem has been noted for years and there has been a lack of action to clear it
- Sediment settling: raised that scope of dredging is small e.g. at Pymmes Brook and south rail bridge. In response, Canal & River Trust confirmed that this was part of spot dredging rather than full scale dredging

Forum members discussed the use of a spreadsheet and map which can be used to notify Canal & River Trust of the areas causing significant concern. Forum members **agreed** that an interactive map and spreadsheet where issues in relation to dredging and vegetation could be recorded would be a useful tool. This tool will be a way to raise issues of concern, think through the longer strategy and allow Forum members to support the Canal & River Trust's work. Forum members **agreed** to gather information and add to the spreadsheet and map once an appropriate method has been confirmed. The map and spreadsheet should address:

- The source of the issue e.g. weeds/ siltation
- The sort of issue e.g. navigation/ obstruction/ too shallow mooring
- Where it is (via logging on the map)
- What impact the issue is having on river users

In a discussion about the practicalities of using a map and spreadsheet as a tool for logging issues, there were suggestions on how this could be delivered:

- Use of What3Words to log locations on the spreadsheet for Canal & River Trust to integrate with mapping system
- Use of colour coding on a map to identify source and sort of issue
- **ACTION 4:** Canal & River Trust to identify and develop the best way for Forum members to log issues using a combination of spreadsheet/mapping
- **ACTION 5:** Canal & River Trust to add the initial identified issues (as above) to agreed method of logging for HVM to circulate to the Forum in advance of the next meeting<sup>1</sup>.
- **ACTION 6:** Forum members to add issues of concern relating to vegetation and dredging to the collaborative map and spreadsheet

A query raised about reporting issues such as fallen trees and whether this was the type of issue to be reported in this Forum or through enquiries at CRT London. Concerns raised by rowing club that

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<sup>1</sup> **Post meeting note:** timetable for Forum meetings to log issues using the tool provided will be from the last week of November until the January Forum meeting. Peter Birch will attend the February Forum meeting to provide an update on the issues logged. The areas under consideration for logging issues are the two proposed water safety zones and the stretch of the river in between the zones.

fallen trees and branches had caused rowers to capsize and wanted clarification on the process of reporting and receiving a response back from the Canal & River Trust.

- The Canal & River Trust **clarified** that the Customer Service Enquiries is the correct process to be used
- The process for logging issues of immediate concern was **clarified** as being through the Canal & River Trust's website: [canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/reporting-litter-weeds-and-pollution](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/reporting-litter-weeds-and-pollution). It was **agreed** that this process should be widely publicised. It was suggested that the role of the Forum is to focus on logging issues that prevent the river users sharing the water safely in the long term.

### 3. Focus topics for future meetings

HVM shared options for the focus of the next meeting:

- River usage: information, education and awareness campaigns
- Risk assessment: examining collisions & near misses to identify what could have prevented them or mitigated the impact on the safety of those involved

Given what was heard from the Canal & River Trust in relation to the risk assessment, it was **agreed** by Forum members that the next meeting should focus on information, education and awareness campaigns. The discussion will inform steps towards having the tools in place for spring next year. The next meeting of the Forum will focus on:

- The kind of things useful to include in an education and information awareness campaign
- How Forum members can support the information and awareness activities
- How Forum members can communicate and work on the initiative to promote safe usage of the River Lee
- Bringing together what kind of information would be useful, what should be included in a campaign and how Forum members can work together.

Forum members **agreed** that a joint educational piece, providing advice, guidance and information to all River Lee users would be useful and could bring together different users of the Lee in something that can be shared by all.

- Campaigns should be joint branded and multi-focused with consideration into how to include everyone who is sharing the river. It was raised that some river users aren't able to be directly contacted by the Trust, so it is crucial that the Forum ensures that these people are engaged and informed
- Information should be something that everyone on the towpath can understand and the Forum stressed the importance of consistency of messages. Concern that too much information is targeted to boaters and more could be done to ensure all river users should be included in the communications campaign.
- Suggested that it would be helpful to know what is already out there in terms of education and information from different users of the Lee to see if these can be joined up
  - **ACTION 7:** HVM share a call to Forum members to share their current information and guidance. HVM will collate the information received and prepare a paper for discussion at the next Forum meeting as a starting point for conversations (including information from the Trust on the improper mooring process)
- Information to include towpath etiquette: to be a story for everyone in how we use the towpath, maintaining consistent messaging for everyone.

The Canal & River Trust shared an update on the implementation of the next steps of the improper mooring process. It was **confirmed** that the Canal & River Trust would not be moving to the next stage of the improper mooring process as per the previous announcement, given the importance of the education and information work on the River Lee, and the positive response to such work being undertaken at the moment. The Trust **confirmed** that until the New Year they would continue to look at signage and postcards being left on boats as part of education and information awareness. The Trust also **confirmed** that the Canal & River Trust Director of Health and Safety was pursuing contacts within the policing network in response to concerns around towpath safety.

The Forum opened up a discussion in light of the information shared by the Trust in relation to the extended period of communication and education before the next steps in the improper mooring process are begun.

- Clarity was sought by liveaboard boaters on the improper mooring process, raising concerns about the use of postcards on boats as this can be an indication that no one is living there which raises significant safety issues
  - Canal & River Trust **confirmed** that they will continue to walk towpaths and talk to boaters but will not formally start the process that leads to license renewal.  
**Confirmed** following the meeting that the next stage of the improper mooring process will begin on Monday 10 January
  - ACTION 8: NBTA London and Canal & River Trust to have a conversation about a safer way to notify boaters of improper mooring
- Concerns were shared by rowing clubs about the ongoing hazard to rowers due to delay of enforcement of no-mooring regulations and what was understood to be encouragement by some in the boating community to ignore no-mooring signs
- Concern from liveaboard boaters that emotions on both sides (rowers and boaters) are not equally considered and that boaters have not been represented in the same way

HVM acknowledged the concerns and issues that have led to the creation of the Forum and stressed the role of the Forum in constructive and solution focused dialogue.

**Agreed** that the next Forum meeting will be on education, information and awareness.

#### 4. AOB

HVM asked for Forum responses to the size of Forum membership in response to other organisations outside the areas focused on who have asked to join the Forum.

- **Agreed** that if the Forum becomes too large the purpose the focus, efficiency and solution focused approach is likely to be lost given how closely the Forum must work together. A point was raised that the Forum should ensure that we are allowing everyone's voice to be heard
- Where other river users would like to be involved, this could be a decision made by the group, based on whether involvement would add value
- Canal & River Trust shared that there had been interest from another commercial operator, cruising club and rowing club
- Suggestion that if people would like to participate in the Forum, they can have the opportunity to provide input in response to Forum meeting notes after each meeting
- Suggestion that it would be useful for Forum members to have a structure for feedback on meeting notes

- ACTION 9: HVM will share meeting notes within one week of the meeting. Forum members will have two weeks to comment after which meeting notes will be shared on the Canal & River Trust website. Other interested river users can respond to meeting notes by contacting HVM at [info@hopkinsvanmil.co.uk](mailto:info@hopkinsvanmil.co.uk)

**Agreed** that it is most useful to have a small and focused group. The focus of the Forum should remain on why it has been initiated, to move towards solutions that river users can work together on whilst recognising that the Lee Navigation Forum is not a decision-making body.

- ACTION 10: HVM share date of next meeting with Forum members.
- ACTION 11: HVM to circulate agenda and papers for the next meeting on education, information and awareness within five days of the agreed meeting date.

HVM 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021