

STATEMENT FOR Housing and Major Projects Policy Dev scrutiny panel, 19/11/113

Thank you for the invitation to make this short statement in response to your Task and Finish Group report on boat dwellers and river travellers. I believe you already have a copy of our written response to Cllr Jackson, and of the email from our Chief Executive, Richard Parry to Jo Farrar which proposes a high level meeting, to include Tamsin Phipps, the Chair of our Kennet & Avon Canal Partnership, with the purpose of finding a more collaborative way forward for our two organisations.

Canals and rivers are a national treasure and local haven for people and wildlife. It's the job of the Canal & River Trust to care for this wonderful legacy, protecting and improving it for all to use and enjoy. We are keen to inspire and engage with individuals and communities to deliver the economic, social and environmental benefits which waterways have the potential to generate.

When preparing to set up the Canal & River Trust, the Government consulted and determined the objectives for the new charity in conjunction with the Charity Commission. These require us, amongst other things, to maintain our canals and rivers for public benefit, including in particular, public benefit for navigation. Following some debate, an objective to provide homes for people was not included. Notwithstanding this, we believe that residential boaters can be a real asset to the waterways, provided that the boat has a home mooring where it can lawfully be left when not being used for navigation or it 'bona fide' navigates throughout the period of its licence. This is the position set out in the statutory powers and duties which we inherited intact from British Waterways. We are not at liberty to ignore these, nor the newly added obligations to operate within our clearly defined charitable objectives which focus on provision of public benefit, not personal benefit such as provision of moorings for residential use free of charge

We have engaged intensively over the past four years with representatives of boat dwellers along with other types of boater, anglers and local residents in efforts to develop a mooring plan which most fairly balances the strong demand for short term mooring whether by boat hirers, leisure or residential owners with the needs of anglers, local residents and other towpath users. Unfortunately, consensus on a set of rules relating to mooring along the canal towpath has so far eluded us, but we are currently consulting on a mooring plan developed by our local waterway partnership. This closes on 28th November and has so far attracted over 300 responses. We will of course assess any plan for compliance with relevant legislation before implementing it.

At the root of the current tensions of course is the inadequate provision of suitable long term moorings for residential boaters away from the towpath. We would like to see all local authorities which have ad hoc residential communities along the canal towpaths create plans to encourage appropriate residential boat harbours on the non-towpath side or in purpose built basins as part of their housing provision.

We will continue to work in partnership with the local community in all aspects of our management of both canal and river navigation within the city and I hope we can look forward to more sustained dialogue on matters of common interest in future.