

I have lived on a boat for 13 years and have raising 2 children aged 6 and 11 aboard. During my time on the waterways I have seen a significant decline in moorings. Since 2007 there have been fifteen mooring sites removed, when there are more boats and we desperately need more provision.

We are used to driving rubbish and waste tanks to waterside facilities; the challenge of lack of facilities at Mead Lane is not justified. In fact there is a toilet disposal point just below the Jolly Sailor pub, so Mead Lane is in fact one of the more convenient moorings for boaters.

Travelling between towns and districts makes access to healthcare, employment and education challenging to a lot of boaters. As a marginalised group, there is little research regarding boaters, making us a somewhat hidden, or less-visible community. Professor Margaret Greenfields 2013 study (the first in the UK and in fact commissioned by BANES Council), shows health outcomes for boaters to be much poorer than those of people who live in houses. There are many factors as to why, but her study clearly cites stability of housing underpins health and wellbeing outcomes. Today's Cabinet vote is therefore crucial in terms of creating or depriving a community of housing stability.

Over the years I have been subjected to discrimination by the settled community. I've been called dirty and unsightly, accused of leaving litter behind. These assumptions are not based on fact, but prejudice. Article 8 of the human rights act 'Respect for your private and family life' includes the right to respect for your home. It states 'It is a right to enjoy your existing home peacefully.' We are entitled to that right.

Inequalities have always existed for boaters, but are now more challenging due to Covid-19. As a local authority you committed not to move people from Mead Lane during the pandemic. This demonstrates that you are able to take decisions or create regulations if the risk or impact (in this case a global pandemic) is understood and visible.

Reflecting on the Equality Impact Assessment it is clear that the 'not applicable' rating given, highlights that the impact on boaters is not fully understood. To illustrate this point I ask: how many Cabinet members had to make additional plans in order to practically participate at tonight's online meeting? Did you have to consider whether there was enough solar power in your batteries to power your laptop? Or if your internet signal was consistent enough to last the meeting? If these points weren't an immediate consideration like they are for us, then I would suggest that insight into the day to day challenges or impacts of our way of life are not widely understood and visible. Therefore, how is it reasonable to make an informed decision which has huge consequences for so many of us?

Inequalities for boaters will not disappear overnight. You have heard the issues and have the power to use your vote to protect the hundreds of boaters in your constituency. We have seen how a local authority can respond when it fully appreciates the impact of a visible issue.

Tonight, I therefore respectfully ask Cabinet to vote no to points 1, 2, 3 and 4.