

## **BRIEFING NOTE: MIXED USE OF TOWPATHS**

This briefing note sets out The Inland Waterways Association's views on the mixed use of towpaths by different groups of users.

Waterway towpaths are a wonderful national resource, providing well over 3,000 miles of near-continuous path which is available to all. The standard of provision and maintenance varies, so IWA advocates that the high standards of the best areas should be copied more widely. In general, the number of walkable towpaths has been increasing and towpaths are well-used.

The original purposes of towpaths were to enable boats to be towed by horses or manpower and to provide access to, from and along the waterway by licensees or permit holders. Nowadays, in addition to boaters they are used by walkers, dogs, horses, anglers, cyclists, and canoeists – and in some places people live next to them. Towpaths are managed by navigation authorities and local authorities and although they are generally permissive footpaths, some canal towpaths and most riverside paths in England and Wales are public Rights of Way. In Scotland, cyclists have access provided they respect the Outdoor Access Code. This wide variety of paths and users means that it is important for people to understand the needs of others and be aware of their own impact and behave considerately. Canal & River Trust, in consultation with users, has developed a [Towpath Code](#) as part of its Share the Space Campaign.

### **Boating and Horses**

Boat licences include terms and conditions that are intended to help achieve a harmonious atmosphere. In particular, boaters 'must not do (or carelessly fail to do) anything which will cause damage or nuisance to any person or their property'.

In selecting a mooring, think about the surroundings: a boat moored alone in a quiet country area may be seeking peace and isolation, while fishing club markers on the towpath may signal a fishing competition the next morning. If mooring rings, bollards or piling are available, use them in preference to mooring pins which can damage the canal bank and be a hazard to people and animals.

When moored, be aware of possible impact of your activities on others. Excessive noise from people, dogs, engines, generators or heaters can be a particular problem, especially in residential areas. Make sure you know how much noise or smoke your engine, generator or diesel central heater makes outside, and do not run them near houses or other occupied moored boats if there is a possibility of noise or fumes. Licence terms require that electricity generators, including the boat's engine, must not be run between 8pm and 8am unless moored completely out of earshot of other people. If it is appropriate to run the engine while moored, do not run it in gear otherwise damage to the waterway banks may result. Be aware of the external noise created by radio, television or music, and try not to impose your taste in listening on others. Keep an eye on your chimney and avoid persistent smoking. Avoid overspilling onto the towpath by keeping your belongings on the boat and not using it as a base for powered equipment to do repairs to your boat.

### **Horses**

IWA supports the use of a horse to tow a boat where the path is suitable. Horses should not be ridden on towpaths except where the towpath is also a bridleway.

## **Dog Walking**

Towpaths are good places for dog walking, but a long narrow path with widely separated exits can lead to conflict between dogs and other users. Dogs can behave aggressively towards people approaching them, in a spirit of defending their owners. Incidents of intimidation and even attacks by dogs have been reported – so please be aware of the potential issues and keep dogs on a lead where possible. Also, please do clear up excrement and dispose of it safely as you would do in other public spaces.

## **Cycling and Powered Vehicles**

Cycles are a long-established aid to boating and means of access to canals. Along with wheelchairs, mobility aids and prams they are the only wheeled vehicles permitted on towpaths (unless specially designated for powered vehicular traffic). In recent years towpaths have become increasingly popular as cycle routes, which is to be welcomed as long as cyclists consider other users of the towpath, ride at a safe speed, dismount at obstacles such as low, narrow or blind bridges, and take care when passing walkers and anglers.

## **Angling**

Many stretches of waterway are leased to angling clubs, which often sell day tickets. Anglers should avoid fishing at locations where boat crews need access, such as locks, bridges, turning points and official mooring sites and landing places. Keep tackle away from the towpath and be aware that walkers and cyclists may be passing behind you. Also, remember that boats can be people's homes and respect their privacy. In turn boaters should behave considerately towards anglers, avoid their tackle and pass at an appropriate speed.

[Additional advice for cyclists](#) can be found on the IWA website.

More detailed guidance on use of towpaths can be found in IWA's Towpaths Policy, one of a series of IWA Policy documents that can be [found in the library](#).