

BRIEFING NOTE: STRUCTURES OR CRAFT IMPEDING THE NAVIGATION

No Navigations Should Be Obstructed

It is an IWA principle that no navigations should be obstructed by structures, either floating or founded on the bed of the navigation, which reduce the original design width. This is seen as tantamount to filling in part of the navigation and building on it.

IWA recognises that exceptions to this principle may be appropriate in certain situations but each one must be considered on its own merit, and if accepted must not be seen as setting a precedent for future development.

Structures taking up part of the navigation may impact on the passage and/or mooring of boats, either now or in the future and may restrict other one-off uses such as the organisation or local event.

Where such structures have been introduced in the past, design has generally been poor, based on prefabricated units located on floating pontoons. Such structures tend to degrade faster than their equivalent on land and maintenance is more difficult resulting in a progressive deterioration of the visual aspect. Servicing, access and refuse disposal are further problems that are not easy to resolve for floating structures. Even when such structures are designated with a limited life, in practice this is not always adhered to as removal or replacement is problematic.

Examples

Edgbaston Tunnel, Worcester & Birmingham Canal – this is an example of the channel being reduced from double to single boat width so as to provide a wider towpath. IWA was pleased that the towpath extension was cantilevered out, maintaining the water if not the navigation width, and allowing the full width to be retrieved at a later date.

Paddington Basin – the increases to the public realm by reducing the water area and introducing landscaping were against IWA's principle. It was a particular concern in this location where maximising moorings is essential to mitigate against the general loss elsewhere in London.

Salthouse Dock Liverpool – suggestions were put forward to develop floating commercial structures as a link between Liverpool City and the Albert Dock Complex. IWA was concerned that the popular visitor mooring were not prejudiced. The appearance of visiting boats in Liverpool Docks has been a success story and the continuing demand suggests that more berths are required.

Boats used for permanent commercial use

Although IWA considers that converted boats are more acceptable than building based structures, IWA will voice a concern if these are not appropriate, or they block water space that could be better utilised.

As an example, office barges in London do not appear to have been a great success and their value is questionable in locations surrounded by an oversupply of office accommodation.

Floating food outlets, for example in Bancroft Basin, Stratford-upon-Avon, are also questionable when they take up vital visitor moorings whilst providing a facility that could easily be accommodated on adjacent land. We recognise that this brings considerable income

to the navigation authority and encourages the public to visit and enjoy the waterways, but we will object if the balance of these outlets to visitor moorings is wrong.

Members may recall IWA's successful objection to a planning application for a Chinese restaurant in Gas Street Basin, Birmingham many years ago. It is hoped that with a more responsible attitude, historic and iconic locations such as this are not under threat from such projects now, but IWA members must remain vigilant. The need to increase income from new sources must be balanced against the needs of all waterway users.

Navigation Committee encourages branches and members to be vigilant against any such proposals and to consider carefully whether their benefits outweigh any loss of water space amenity. Navigation Committee will continue to monitor these on a national basis.