



All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

Residential Boating

Tuesday 14th April 2026 1-2pm Portcullis House Room U

Present: Wendy Morton MP (Chair), Lee Dillon MP, Ella Parry-Davies (National Barge Travellers Association), Rex Walden (Residential Boat Owners Association), Matthew Symonds (Canal and River Trust), Lucy Burchnall (Broads Authority), Charlie Norman (IWA), Roger Stocker (IWA), Amy Tillson (IWA), Tim Clarke (Accessible Waterways Association), Ann Bellfield (National Association of Boat Owners)

1. **Apologies received due to parliamentary business on the day:**
Received from Bill Esterson MP, Uma Kumaran MP, Phil Brickell MP, Helen Morgan MP, Ruth Cadbury MP, Baroness Jones
2. Welcome and introductions
3. Speakers:

Ella Parry-Davies National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA)

Ella Parry-Davies gave an introduction to the National Barge Travellers Association. She gave an estimate of 50,000 people living on boats 8500 of which do not have a home mooring, distributed across 21 different navigation authorities. 33.7% of boaters report a disability, which is a higher proportion than the national average.

She explained the public right of navigation and the British Waterways act of 1995 which stipulates that boats must move to a new place every 14 days unless a longer stay is reasonable.

The NBTA agrees that boats should be licenced and respect legislation, and advocates for maintaining existing British Waterways Act 1995 requirements with support for boaters to be licenced and on the move every 14 days unless longer is reasonable. They are pleased to note that CRT are getting more support staff to help boaters.

She referred to The Future of Licencing: Report of the Commission on Boat Licencing (October 2025), highlighting the policies that the association considered to be of concern.



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

They are campaigning for:

- Maintaining existing legislation
- No powers to evict boaters and seize boats
- No refused licences and less serious breach of the rules
- No differential prices across the waterways
- No electronic trackers on boats

Rex Walden Residential Boat Owners Association (RBOA)

Rex Walden outlined that RBOA and NBTA policies are aligned. He explained how it is difficult to know exactly how many people live on boats. The RBOA tried to get to the Office of National Statistics to include boats however they did not so few statistics are available. And RBOA survey showed an average of 1.8 people per boat which amounts to 54,000 individuals across 30,000 vessels.

He gave an overview of the types of people living on boats:

- Retired Couples – Living the Dream
- Young Professionals
- Key Workers
- Divorcees
- People who love boats and boating
- Ex Military veterans (many suffering from mental health issues)
- Homeless people, this point was clarified to mean that such people, while not technically homeless, are still vulnerable..

He also referred to the amendments to the Renters Rights Bill 2025, which proposed additional security of tenure for residential boaters. He questioned why the CRT wanted to prevent these changes. RBOA's long term goal is also equal rights for boaters with land dwellers. He also added that boaters are often treated with disrespect including incidents of assault and abuse.

4. Round Table Discussion

Questions from Lee Dillon MP covered boat security, towpath maintenance, and waste provision. Representatives noted that boat squatting can occur but is uncommon. There was broad agreement that the reduction in towpath litter bins has negatively affected all users, alongside concerns about fly-tipping being incorrectly attributed to boaters. The Canal & River Trust (CRT) representative highlighted the need for more evidence before changes to the Renter's Rights Bill and explained that boaters often lack access to bulky waste services due to not being tied to a single local authority.

Discussion also covered legal and policy issues. It was noted that case law under the 1995 Waterways Act remains limited, although equality adjustments are in place for some individuals. Participants highlighted differences between CRT and Environment Agency



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waterways, as well as growing concerns about boat theft and proposals for a national boat register.

Attendees noted the absence of consistent national planning policy, leading to local interpretations and requirements. Examples were given of planning conditions that do not reflect the realities of residential boating. It was confirmed that a written parliamentary question will be submitted on including residential boaters in national planning policy. The Broads Authority shared that its local plan includes relevant provisions and guidance.

Finally, wider challenges facing residential boaters were discussed, including limited availability of moorings and difficulties accessing services such as voter registration, driving licences, insurance like pet insurance, and GP registration without a fixed address.

Wendy Morton MP concluded by thanking those present for sharing the issues that impact residential boaters that MPs were not aware of.

5. Next Steps

Wendy Morton MP confirmed that the written question on residential boaters in the national planning policy framework would be submitted later in the week

Lee Dillon MP explained that prior to his election he had a background in housing and sits on the Housing and Communities & Local Government Select Committee so he will be able to bring some of these issues to that committee in the future.



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