

National Bargee Travellers Association

Consultation response: National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system

Introduction

The National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) is a volunteer organisation formed in 2009 that campaigns and provides advice for itinerant boat dwellers on Britain's inland and coastal waterways. This includes anyone whose home is a boat and who does not have a permanent mooring for their boat with planning permission for residential use. The NBTA is the only national organisation in Britain dedicated to upholding and defending the rights of itinerant boat dwellers. The NBTA has members on all the major navigation authorities' waterways and beyond. The navigable inland waterway system in Britain is home to an estimated 15,000 to 50,000 Bargee Travellers. There are as yet no accurate statistics for the number of people living on boats either with or without a permanent mooring in the UK. The NBTA deals with approximately 200 individual cases each year.

General

It is disappointing that there are no proposals to include consideration of the planning approach to boat dwellers, either with permanent moorings or who are itinerant – that is, without permanent moorings, in this consultation. Having said that, we wish to emphasise our support for the responses to this consultation from the Gypsy and Traveller communities. We agree that it is important in Gypsy and Traveller cases as well as in boat dweller cases for planning judgment to be able to be applied to the facts of each individual case; that a 'rules-based' approach would make it significantly harder for decision makers to do so; and that, specifically with regard to weight, shifting to a largely binary approach means that nuance and planning judgement will be made more difficult to consider and apply.

Response to specific questions

We are responding to Questions 48 and 48a of this consultation only.

Question 48 – strongly disagree

Question 48a – Chapter 6 of the consultation document states “It is also essential to support a diverse range of accommodation and mix of tenures to speed up the building of homes, and create thriving and resilient communities across our towns, cities, and rural areas alike ... This chapter sets out new proposals to meet these objectives. It ... incorporates relevant policies from the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, strengthens expectations around tenure mix and meeting a diverse range of housing needs...”

However, despite this statement, nowhere in the proposed revised Framework is there any reference to the provision of temporary and permanent residential moorings for boat dwellers, despite the requirement in Section 124 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to assess the need for these. There is no acknowledgement that boats add to the diversity of the housing mix, or that boats can provide homes that are much more affordable than bricks and mortar – even though at least one local authority, Oxford City Council, has adopted a policy that boats can provide affordable housing. There is no reference to the minimal impact of residential moorings on the Green Belt, compared to bricks and mortar

dwellings. There is no consideration of the fact that canals were historically industrial spaces and transport routes and therefore qualify as Grey Belt.

There is no consideration that the boat dwelling communities in England, both itinerant and static, are thriving, diverse and strong communities that these proposals ought to include. Finally there is no consideration of the benefits of introducing a new Use Class for residential moorings to reflect their significantly lighter environmental and visual impact compared to bricks and mortar dwellings. All of these considerations need to be included in the revised Framework.

National Bargee Travellers Association
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