
Boat Dwellers Site Assessment Paper

June 2022



Elmbridge
Borough Council
... bridging the communities ...



1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to explain how the accommodation needs of boat dwellers can be met within Elmbridge Borough as part of the preparation of the new Local Plan (2037). It sets out the need identified in the Boat Dwellers Accommodation Assessment (BDAA) 2022 and explains what actions the council has taken to identify land to meet this need.
- 1.2 The results of this paper have informed the development of relevant policies in the emerging Local Plan.

2. Policy Framework

- 2.1 Provisions set out in the **Housing and Planning Act** include a duty (under Section 8 of the 1985 Housing Act that covers the requirement for a periodical review of housing needs) for local authorities to consider the needs of people residing, or resorting to, in their district with respect to the provision of sites on which caravans can be stationed, or places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored. The BDAA 2022 sets out the borough's need.
- 2.2 The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021** states that 'the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes)' (Paragraph 62). Therefore, it is important to consider the housing needs of all living or wishing to live in the borough.
- 2.3 Most important to this paper is the NPPF's policy on identifying land for homes and it states that, 'Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area' (Paragraph 68).
- 2.4 Although there is no explicit reference to houseboat dweller accommodation in national policy or guidance, identifying housing needs for different groups in the community and identifying land to accommodate these are key factors.

3. Establishing Need

- 3.1 The BDAA 2022 identified a need for 10 licenced permanent moorings on the Thames in the Elmbridge Borough Council area. This is based on the stated need of boat dwellers moored on unlicensed and insecure permanent and temporary moorings.
- 3.2 The 10 licenced permanent moorings are the expressed need for 5 years from January 2022 based on the plans of the interviewed boat dwellers for the next 5 years. It was not possible for consultants of that assessment to produce a robust estimate of the need beyond 5 years. Please see the BDAA for further information.

4. Land availability

- 4.1 In May 2022, letters were written to the landowners of public land alongside the River Thames. This included the areas of Elmbridge Borough Council and of the neighbouring Local Authorities, the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council. The letter asked landowners whether there is any land available to accommodate 10 permanent residential moorings.
- 4.2 The following table summarises the responses.

Landowner	Summary Response
Elmbridge BC	Unaware of any sites along the navigable rivers which the council owns and which could be suitable for permanent residential mooring sites.
Kingston BC	Not aware of any land owned by Kingston Council that could be available for additional permanent moorings, therefore we are unable to assist in meeting this identified need.
Richmond BC	The Local Plan includes a presumption against new proposals for houseboats (Policy LP19). Within Richmond borough, the River Thames is designated Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) and therefore the character and openness of the river are safeguarded from inappropriate uses. The London Plan 2021 further provides the policy framework in Policies SI 16 and Policy SI 17, and the issue was considered at the Examination in Public (see paragraphs 537 and 538 in the Panel Report 2019). Paragraph 9.16.3 refers to the London Mooring Strategy, produced by the Canal and River Trust, which has

	identified zones for potential additional moorings elsewhere in London.
Spelthorne BC	Not in a position to assist due to existing demand for land for boat dwellers in Spelthorne.
Surrey County Council	Not aware of any appropriate opportunities in terms of SCC's landholdings to accommodate permanent residential moorings. Currently, there is also a particular need to avoid compromising other SCC needs/service requirements affecting identified SCC owned riverside opportunities, for example land that could be part of the RTS flood defence scheme.
Environment Agency	Have no land within our ownership available for permanent residential moorings on the River Thames in your borough or neighbouring areas.

- 4.3 Many landowners discussed the cost of providing residential moorings with reference to site access, landing stages and providing appropriate facilities. Other expenses mentioned were the Environment Agency's licencing fees. The cost of providing managed residential sites was considered more suitable for a commercial operator.
- 4.4 Another issue that was mentioned was the Environment Agency's projects, such as the Lower Thames Project which includes work on flood defences. Until this was completed, it would be difficult to assess any potential land for residential purposes. Some landowners raised a potential issue associated with the proximity of the house boats and their associated residential use with the public land that is usually in leisure use.
- 4.5 It was considered that some of these issues could change in the future, such as the completion of flood defence projects and land availability in general. The county stated that exact sites could be considered on a case by case basis.
- 4.6 The comments received were important for the council's understanding of some existing barriers
- 4.7 None of the landowners were able to confirm that land was available to meet the borough's identified need.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 This document confirms that there is currently no public land available along the River Thames within Elmbridge Borough area or its neighbouring authorities for the allocation of boat dweller accommodation to meet the identified need set out in the BDAA 2022.
- 5.2 Although the need identified is not going to be met through site allocation, draft policy INF6 will help assist in ensuring that any windfall proposals for boat dweller accommodation are considered. This can be kept under review and considered as part of the land availability assessment.