

ISIS LOCK PROPOSAL FOR HEIGHT RESTRICTION ON RIVER BOOM: CONSULTATION REPORT

6th February 2012

at Castle Mill Stream, Oxford

There were 19 responses to this consultation. In summary :-

- Ten people were supportive of the height restriction
- Six people were against the height restriction proposal
- Three further people made comments about the boom in general, but did not make a direct response to the consultation proposal.

Of the ten people who were supportive of the height proposal :-

- Two people were concerned at the possibility of the 'overstaying/problem boat' issue being moved elsewhere.
- Two people would also like the visual impact of the boom amending also
- One respondent made suggestions on an amended methodology for the height restriction (and associated signage amendments)
- One respondent suggested that the height could be lowered to be more effective, to say 1m.

Of the six people who were against the height proposal:-

- Two respondents were concerned that it would not solve the boat problem and it would move it elsewhere.
- Three mentioned visual intrusion – although this was mainly directed at the boom itself.
- One respondent felt that the boom/height restriction was not legal.

Recommendations

That the three authorities involved in the consultation :

- BW, OCC and EA – progress with the installation of the height restriction

The EA have considered the suggestions made regarding amendments to the height restriction made above – the height of the restriction is not possible to change. They have responded to BW on other points regarding materials & signage. The height restriction will now be progressed during February / March 2012.

Jeff Whyatt
Waterway Manager, British Waterways

APPENDIX: COPY OF CONSULTATION PAPER ISSUED November 2011

Proposal for height restriction on river boom at Castle Mill Stream, Oxford: your views invited

Over the past year, you will have noticed changes on the waterways near where you live: in particular, the introduction of a boom across the southern section of Castle Mill stream just below Isis Lock which joins the stream with the Oxford Canal.

We are writing on behalf of the above authorities to explain the background to this work and to invite your comments on the final step needed to complete the project.

There were two related reasons for introducing the boom. During the 2009 winter, several vessels entering the Castle Mill stream from the Oxford canal got into difficulty due to the strong flow. This is always a risk at times of fast flowing water if boats moor in the area to the south of Isis Lock. The boom reduces this risk.

The river banks are not suitable for the mooring of residential boats and they do not have planning consent for this use. The Rewley Park Management Company and residents of the authorised moorings on the Hythe Bridge arm have lodged complaints on several occasions about the impact of unlawfully moored boats on local residents.

Unlawful mooring against British Waterways' land and the associated unauthorised use of the facilities provided for the legitimate residential moorings in the area dates back some years. On one occasion, BW took enforcement action and removed the offending boats, only for others to take up subsequent occupation. This was not good use of public money.

Before deciding on the boom, we considered a range of options for reducing unlawful mooring and improving safety, and we concluded that the boom was by far the most practical and cost-effective solution. It was constructed at minimum cost because we were able to economise on contractor time by installing the piles at the same time as the landing stage below Isis Lock. The Environment Agency donated other material that was no longer needed on River Thames structures, and Oxford City Council made a modest contribution to the installation costs. None of the three bodies supporting this consultation have deep pockets and we are all subject to the stringent public expenditure cuts that we're all aware of. We believe that the boom is the best value and most sustainable solution to a problem that has troubled many local residents for some years. We also believe that these considerations must take precedence over the appearance of the structure which we understand some people have objected to.

Castle Mill stream is not part of the main River Thames but there is a right of navigation for small craft such as canoes and rowing boats when it is safe. This was the reason for the gap between the two parts of the boom. Unfortunately, some particularly persistent boaters continue to disregard danger signs and have managed to navigate their way past the boom to once again take up residence.

HEIGHT RESTRICTION PROPOSAL

To install a height restriction between the centre two piles of the boom. This will allow the passage of small craft but prevent access by larger boats. The height restriction would consist of a rigid steel wire with a cleat on each end connected to the pile and padlocked at each end to enable access by Environment Agency and British Waterways staff. The height restriction set at 1.5m above normal water level would be highly visible and feature plastic floats at 0.5m intervals along the wire. This would prevent injury should a person be struck by it. A 'Warning Maximum Height 1.5m' sign would also be hung from the height restriction.

We are consulting local residents and organisations with an interest in this subject to contact us with their views on the above proposal. Please address these to consultation@britishwaterways.co.uk before 9th December 2011. If you object to the proposal, please indicate what practical alternative method you would prefer for ensuring that boats are not moored unlawfully within the stream and that safety risks to vessels and people are controlled.

Please note that the scope of this consultation does not extend to the positioning of the boom and nearby landing stage. These matters have been subject to recent independent and extensive examination through both BW's and EA's formal complaints processes. The results of this have confirmed the status quo in respect of the principle attributes of these structures. British Waterways is however considering minor adjustments to the landing stage to make the turn into the navigation stream from/into Isis Lock a little easier. This will be the subject of a separate short consultation with boaters.

Jeff Whyatt Waterway Manager South East British Waterways	John Copley Head of Environmental Development Oxford City Council	Matt Carter Waterway Operations Manager West Thames Area Environment Agency
--	---	---