

Milton Keynes Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment

Final Report
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RRR Consultancy Ltd



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Executive Summary

Introduction

- S1. In July 2023 Milton Keynes City Council commissioned *RRR Consultancy Ltd* to undertake a Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (BDAA). The requirement to assess the accommodation needs of boat dwellers follows the introduction, in the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016), of a requirement to consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored¹. Also, in March 2016 DCLG published its draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats².
- S2. This BDAA complies with the DCLG guidance by quantifying the accommodation needs of boat dwellers in the Milton Keynes administrative area between 2023 and 2040. This is in terms of both permanent residential and temporary moorings for boat dwellers. The results will be used to inform the allocation of resources and as an evidence base for policy development in housing and planning.
- S3. To achieve the study aims, the research drew on several data sources: a review of secondary information; consultation with key stakeholders including housing and planning officers, boat yard owners and managers, and boat dweller representative organisations. These provided an extensive range of quantitative and qualitative data enabling a robust and reliable assessment of accommodation needs.

Policy context

- S4. The requirement to assess the accommodation needs of boat dwellers follows the introduction, in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, of a requirement to consider the needs of people residing on places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored. In March 2016 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (as it was then called) published draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats.
- S5. This needs assessment covers all households residing permanently on any type of boat and adopts the National Bargee Travellers Association's (NBTA) definition, which defines a boat dweller as:

¹ s124 Housing and Planning Act 2016 (c. 22) p.58

² DCLG Review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats: draft guidance (March 2016) located at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-housing-needs-for-caravans-and-houseboats-draft-guidance>. Although it remains in draft form, correspondence to RRR Consultancy from the MHCLG dated 17 May 2021 confirmed that the government remains committed to finalising the guidance.

“Someone who lives aboard a vessel (which may or may not be capable of navigation), that the vessel is used as the main or only residence and where that vessel is either (i) moored in one location for more than 28 days in a year (but may occasionally or periodically leave its mooring); or (ii) has no permanent mooring and navigates in accordance with the statutes appropriate to the navigation such as inter alia s.17(3)(c)(ii) of the British Waterways Act 1995 or s.79 of the Thames Conservancy Act 1932”.

- S6. The Canal and River Trust plays an important role in managing the waterways running through the Milton Keynes local authority area. The Trust provides guidance on ‘waterway proofing’ planning policies as well as guidance on boaters without a home mooring. Many of the findings discussed throughout this report relate to how key agencies and organisations such as the Environment Agency, and the Canal & Riverside Trust can help improve the conditions of boat dwellers in Milton Keynes.
- S7. In terms of a local planning context, Policy D7 (‘Canalside Development’) of the Milton Keynes Local Plan 2016-2031 (adopted March 2019) sets out the criteria for development alongside canals.

Stakeholder Consultation

- S8. Consultations with key stakeholders offered important insights into the main issues regarding boat dwellers residing on Milton Keynes’s waterways. This was undertaken using an online survey, and telephone and face-to-face interviews. It is apparent from the stakeholder consultation that people are drawn to living on boats for various reasons. Some see it as a personal preference, enjoying the unique lifestyle it offers. Others find it a more affordable option compared to traditional housing, especially when considering the escalating costs of houses and utilities.
- S9. Despite these advantages, boat living comes with significant challenges. In the Milton Keynes area, boat dwellers often have to keep moving their boats along the canal, which impacts on their participation in civic life. The costs associated with mooring permissions, obtaining permanent resident moorings, and the challenges in accessing essential services like healthcare and mail due to the constantly changing addresses are significant issues. There’s also a scarcity of water for boat dwellers in the area, restrictions, and fees for mooring points, and a shortage of permanent mooring sites close to necessary facilities like health centres and schools. Ensuring the security of the boats and finding moorings with necessary services are also major concerns.
- S10. The demand for existing permanent moorings in the Milton Keynes local authority area is high. Marinas are often full, and the growing number of boat dwellers in the borough, combined with the layout of canals and rivers, presents challenges in finding available space. This demand is seemingly increasing, influenced by rising housing costs, making boat living an attractive alternative.

- S11. Potential locations for new moorings include areas close to public transport and shops, with lakes like Willen Lake and Caldecotte Lake being considered suitable. Opinions vary on whether these new moorings should be owned and managed by the local authority, privately, or through a combination of both. The main barriers to delivering new mooring places include limited locations for new marinas, the cost of construction and operation, the need for planning permission, and potential opposition from developers. Space limitations and the impact on other residents are also significant concerns.
- S12. Stakeholders acknowledged the health, education, and service needs of boat dwellers. The lack of a permanent address impacts on their ability to obtain GP appointments, access non-emergency health services, register with schools, and even vote. Challenges related to utilities, waste disposal, maintenance, and security are more pronounced for boat residents. Overall, the challenges faced by people living on boats encompass a wide range of issues, from access to services and community inclusion to the practical aspects of maintaining and securing a boat.

Accommodation need

- S13. Accommodation need for the study area was assessed using analysis of primary and secondary data. The accommodation needs calculation steps are based on a model in accordance with both previous³ and current Practice Guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2016). It contains seven basic components, five assessing need and two assessing supply, which are applied to each sub-group, based on secondary data.
- S14. Table S.1 summarises the number of permanent residential moorings, required over the period 2023-2040. It shows that a further 139 permanent residential moorings are needed over the 17-year period within the borough. However, it should be noted that the need for 94 of the 124 additional moorings arising from boat dwellers residing on leisure moorings during the first five-year period i.e. 2023-2028 – can be met by changing mooring licenses from leisure to permanent residential. This leads to a net need of 30 additional moorings during the first five-year period.

Table S.1 Permanent residential moorings need 2023-2040	
	No.
2023-2028	124
2028-2033	6
2033-2038	6
2038-2040	3
Total	139

Milton Keynes BDAA 2023

³ DCLG Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments, October 2007 located at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7838/accommneedsassessments.pdf

- S15. In relation to transit provision, it is recommended that the current transit moorings are made available for longer periods out of season. It is also recommended that these provisions are upgraded. This includes ensuring easy access to the bank and clear and secure facilities to secure the boats, electric and water hook-ups, toilet and household waste facilities, access to parking within walking distance, and ensuring that the emergency services can access moorings.

Conclusions

- S16. Finally, this report provides a range of recommendations determined by those which are specifically relevant to the local authority's planning policies; recommendations which are not within the remit of planning policy but could be considered by the local authority; and general recommendations:

Local authority planning policy recommendations

- As stated in Table S1 above, a further 139 permanent residential moorings are needed over the 17-year period within the borough. However, it should be noted that the need for 94 of the 124 additional moorings arising from boat dwellers residing on leisure moorings during the first five-year period i.e. 2023-2028 – can be met by changing mooring licenses from leisure to permanent residential.
- According to stakeholders, the most suitable places for any new permanent or transit moorings in the local authority area are Willen Lake, Caldecotte Lake, and the Grand Union Canal.
- Whilst Policy D7 of the Local Plan (2016) ('Canalside Development') determines objectives for canalside development, it would be useful for the local authority to consider adopting the CRT (2017) principles for planning and designing waterways to inform emerging/future Local Plans.
- Ensure all new moorings have access to facilities such as toilet and household waste disposal provisions. If possible, all authorised moorings (residential and visitors' moorings) should have access to electric and water hook-up points, and for residential moorings to have individual access and a secure post-box.

General local authority recommendations

- There is a need for a network of 14-to-56-day transit moorings, administered on an affordable permit system. A potential model is the Cambridge City Council 'Residential Mooring Licence'⁴ albeit with changes such as access according to level of need in the same way as social housing, rather than access on a 'first come first served' basis.

⁴ See: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/residential-boat-mooring-licence>

- To consider adopting the Oxford community-led model which aims to develop affordable moorings for the local community.
- The local authority could consider helping to meet the needs of households unable to afford to own a mooring or the rental costs of existing moorings by renting or leasing small parcels of local authority owned land to them and assisting with planning applications and mooring development.
- For the local authority to consider alternative funding mechanisms for new marinas and mooring places such as: acquisition funds; loans for private mooring provision through Community Development Financial Institutions; and joint ventures with members of the boating community.
- According to stakeholders, including boat dwellers, there is a lack consistency in allocating moorings in the borough. As such, it is recommended that guidance is developed regarding how moorings are to be allocated to households on marina waiting lists.
- Provide training and workshop sessions with local authority and service provider employees (and elected members) to help them to further understand the key issues facing the boat dwelling communities.
- The local authority to work closely with key organisations including the National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA) and the Canal and River Trust (CRT) to determine how the accommodation needs of boat dwellers can best be met.
- The local authority to take a lead role in formalising communication processes between relevant housing, planning and enforcement officers etc. in both the study area and neighbouring local authorities.
- For the local authority to consider embedding the accommodation, service, and support needs of local boat dwellers into, for example, Community and Homelessness Strategies, Local Plans and planning and reporting obligations.

Other recommendations

- For relevant agencies to work together to ensure a consistent approach to the enforcement of rules regarding how long boat dwellers can reside on temporary moorings in the local authority area.
- There needs to be better sharing of information between agencies which deal with the accommodation, service and support needs of the local boat dwelling community.

1. Introduction

Study context

1.1 In July 2023 Milton Keynes City Council commissioned *RRR Consultancy Ltd* to undertake a Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (BDAA) for the period up to 2040. The requirement to assess the accommodation needs of boat dwellers follows the introduction, in the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016), of a requirement to consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored⁵. Also, in March 2016 DCLG published its draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats⁶.

Methodological context

1.2 To achieve the study aims, the research drew on a number of data sources including:

- Review of secondary information: a review of national and local planning policies and analysis of secondary data.
- Consultation of key stakeholders including housing and planning officers, boat yard owners and managers, and boat dweller representative organisations by an online survey, telephone and face-to-face interviews, and boat yard visits.

1.3 The above provided an extensive range of quantitative and qualitative data enabling a robust and reliable assessment of accommodation needs.

Waterways in Milton Keynes

1.4 There are three main waterways running through Milton Keynes: the Great Ouse, the Ouzel (or Lovat), and the Grand Union Canal. These waterways are integral to the character and environment of Milton Keynes, adding to its unique urban design and providing recreational spaces for residents and visitors alike.

The Great Ouse

1.5 The Great Ouse is approximately 143 miles (230 km), making it one of the longest rivers in the United Kingdom. It originates in Northamptonshire, flows through Buckinghamshire (near Milton Keynes), Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and finally into the Wash near King's Lynn in

⁵ s124 Housing and Planning Act 2016 (c. 22) p.58

⁶ DCLG Review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats: draft guidance (March 2016) located at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-housing-needs-for-caravans-and-houseboats-draft-guidance>. Although it remains in draft form, correspondence to RRR Consultancy from the MHCLG dated 17 May 2021 confirmed that the government remains committed to finalising the guidance.

Norfolk. Known for its scenic beauty, the river supports a variety of wildlife and is popular for boating, fishing, and riverside walks. This river is well-known for its navigability. It is popular for boating, particularly in the stretches near Milton Keynes and further into the counties of Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire. The river accommodates a variety of boats, including narrowboats, cruisers, and even small leisure crafts. There are several locks along the river to manage water levels and enable navigation.

The River Ouzel (or Lovat)

- 1.6 The River Ouzel, also known as the River Lovat, is approximately 20 miles (about 32 km) long. This river, which runs through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, is a tributary of the River Great Ouse. It passes through or near several towns and villages, including Leighton Buzzard and Milton Keynes, before joining the River Great Ouse near Newport Pagnell. The River Ouzel is an important feature in the landscapes of these areas, contributing to the local ecosystems and providing scenic views along its course. The river is an important feature of the linear parks in Milton Keynes. It enhances the natural landscape of the area and provides habitats for various aquatic and bird species.
- 1.7 The River Ouzel is smaller and less navigable compared to the Great Ouse. While it might be navigable for small, shallow-draft boats, canoes, or kayaks in certain sections, it is not as widely used for navigation as the Great Ouse. The navigability can depend on the water level and the specific sections of the river.

Grand Union Canal

- 1.8 While not a river, this significant waterway passes through Milton Keynes, linking London to Birmingham. It intersects with the River Great Ouse and is an important part of the Milton Keynes' water network. The Grand Union Canal is one of the longest canals in the UK, with a total length of about 137 miles (220 km). The canal links London to Birmingham, passing through various towns and cities, including Milton Keynes. Historically, it was a major part of the UK's industrial transport network.
- 1.9 A 21km (13mile) stretch of the Grand Union Canal in the Borough passes through rural, semi-rural and urban landscapes. It is an important recreational and wildlife corridor. Several stretches of the canal have an extra pathway alongside the towpath, known as the "Broadwalk", for use by pedestrians and cyclists. The Council will consult the Canal & River Trust on all major proposals affecting the canal.
- 1.10 In addition to the Grand Union Canal, Milton Keynes Council is a member of the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Park Consortium, which has been set up to support the delivery of a new and nationally recognised Waterway Park linking Bedford and Milton Keynes⁷.

⁷ Milton Keynes Local Plan 2016-2031 (adopted March 2016) p.205.

Definition Context

- 1.11 The Housing and Planning Act 2016 requires Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored. The term 'houseboat' is not defined by DCLG guidance. According to the HM Revenues and Customs:

“A houseboat is defined for the purposes of VAT as being a floating decked structure which:

- is designed or adapted for use solely as a place of permanent habitation
- does not have the means of, and which is not capable of being readily adapted for, self-propulsion” (HMRC VAT Notice 701/20, December 2013).

- 1.12 It is important to note that the above definition refers to a type of boat dwelling rather than households who reside on boats. Also, there may be boat dwellers who are licensed to permanently reside on other types of boats.

- 1.13 This BDAA adopts the broader National Bargee Travellers Association's (NBTA) definition who define a boat dweller as:

“Someone who lives aboard a vessel (which may or may not be capable of navigation), that the vessel is used as the main or only residence and where that vessel is either (i) moored in one location for more than 28 days in a year (but may occasionally or periodically leave its mooring); or (ii) has no permanent mooring and navigates in accordance with the statutes appropriate to the navigation such as inter alia s.17(3)(c)(ii) of the British Waterways Act 1995 or s.79 of the Thames Conservancy Act 1932”.

- 1.14 The NBTA definition is the most comprehensive available and that which most accurately encompasses the range views expressed through the stakeholder consultation.

Summary

- 1.15 The need for Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to consider the needs of people residing in or resorted to houseboats is determined by the Housing and Planning Act (2016). In March 2016 the DCLG published draft guidance on periodically reviewing the housing needs for caravans and houseboats. It provides advice on how to consider the needs of people residing in caravans or houseboats where they differ from those of the settled community.

- 1.16 The purpose of this assessment is to quantify the accommodation and housing related support needs of boat dwellers in the Milton Keynes administrative area for the period up to 2040. This is in terms of both permanent residential and temporary moorings for boat dwellers. The results will be used as an evidence base for policy development in housing and planning.

- 1.17 To achieve the study aims, the research drew on several data sources: a review of secondary information; and extensive consultation with key stakeholders including housing and planning officers, boat yard owners and managers, and the National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA). These provided an extensive range of quantitative and qualitative data enabling a robust and reliable assessment of accommodation needs.

2. Policy context

Introduction

- 2.1 To assess the current position, existing documents have been examined to determine what reference is made to boat dwellers' issues. The intention is to highlight areas of effective practice in the study area, and examine the extent to which local authorities are currently addressing the issue. Furthermore, understanding the current position will be important in the development of future strategies intended to meet accommodation need and housing related support need among boat dwellers.

National legislation and guidance

Housing and Planning Act 2016

- 2.2 The Housing and Planning Act gained Royal Assent on 12 May 2016. Section 124 amended section 8 of the Housing Act 1985, which now provides that:

(1) Every local housing authority shall consider housing conditions in their district and the needs of the district with respect to the provision of further housing accommodation. [...]

(3) In the case of a local housing authority in England, the duty under sub-section (1) includes a duty to consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to their district with respect to the provision of...places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored.

- 2.3 Importantly, according to correspondence between *RRR Consultancy Ltd* and DCLG (27 October 2016), DCLG stated that it is for local housing authorities to determine how to assess and understand the accommodation needs of people who reside in or resort to the area with respect to the provision of caravan sites or houseboats. This means that there is no "standard" methodology that can be followed i.e. it is for each authority to prepare (and justify) an appropriate methodology.

DCLG Draft Guidance on Housing Needs (Caravans and Houseboats) (March 2016)

- 2.4 In March 2016 DCLG published its draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats. It states that when considering the need for caravans and houseboats local authorities will need to include the needs of a variety of residents in differing circumstances, for example:

- Caravan and houseboat dwelling households:
 - who have no authorised site anywhere on which to reside

- whose existing site accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable, but who are unable to obtain larger or more suitable accommodation
 - who contain suppressed households who are unable to set up separate family units and
 - who are unable to access a place on an authorised site, or obtain or afford land to develop on.
- Bricks and mortar dwelling households:
- Whose existing accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable ('unsuitable' in this context can include unsuitability by virtue of a person's cultural preference not to live in bricks-and-mortar accommodation).

2.5 The DCLG draft guidance recognises that the needs of those residing in caravans and houseboats may differ from the rest of the population because of:

- their nomadic or semi-nomadic pattern of life
- their preference for caravan and houseboat-dwelling
- movement between bricks-and-mortar housing and caravans or houseboats
- their presence on unauthorised encampments or developments.

2.6 Furthermore, it suggests that as mobility between areas may have implications for carrying out an assessment, local authorities will need to consider:

- co-operating across boundaries both in carrying out assessments and delivering solutions
- the timing of the accommodation needs assessment
- different data sources

2.7 The Guidance remains in draft form at the time of this BDAA, and so does not carry the same status as other guidance and legislation. It is unclear when – if at all – this guidance will lose its “draft” status. Nonetheless, it is of some value for those preparing accommodation needs assessments.

Local planning policies and documents

Milton Keynes Plan:MK 2016-2031

2.8 Policy D7 of the Local Plan (2016) ('Canalside Development') states that:

A. Development alongside canals should help meet the following objectives:

1. Improved public access to an enjoyment of the waterway, including those with impaired mobility.
2. The protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats.
3. The retention and enhancement of significant waterside buildings and their settings.
4. Within employment areas, the provision of wharf facilities for freight transfer.
5. New buildings should present active frontages to the canal and be in keeping with local character in terms of scale, design and materials.
6. Development proposals in the vicinity of the Canal should also take into account the potential for localised flooding from the Canal.
7. Development proposals along the proposed route of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Park should:
 - i. Safeguard the route for future delivery; and
 - ii. Maximise the opportunity to deliver aspects of the Waterway Park which are of mutual benefit to the Waterway project and development proposals.

(Milton Keynes Plan:MK 2016-2031 p.206)

Waterways agencies and organisations

Environment Agency

- 2.9 The Environment Agency (EA) is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. It is responsible for the management of the River Thames and other river channels that join their main courses (although none of the rivers in Milton Keynes flow into the Thames). The EA requires boats to be registered or licenced if the owner wishes to keep or use their boat on inland waterways, such as rivers and canals. It also operates a number of short-term (usually 24-hour) moorings along the Thames. Some sites require the user to pay a fee, either for mooring at any time, or after an initial free period.

Canal & River Trust

- 2.10 The Canal & River Trust replaced British Waterways in July 2012. The Trust is a registered charity whose main aim is to protect over 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales. The Trust only own around 4% of the land adjacent to the waterways and therefore regard influencing developments on this land as essential to develop and protect the places that local communities value and create. They suggest that there is a need to 'waterway proof' planning policy at different spatial levels in order to help unlock the economic, environmental and social benefits offered by the waterways and to secure long-term sustainability.

2.11 The Trust's principles for planning and design as set out in its 'What your local waterway can do for your community' (2017) document include⁸:

- Individual waterways and water spaces need to be viewed as an integral part of a wider network, and not in isolation.
- Water should not be treated as just a setting or backdrop for development but as a space and leisure and commercial resource in its own right. The 'added value' of the water space needs to be fully explored.
- Waterways themselves should be the starting point for consideration of the development and use of the water and waterside land – look from the water outwards, as well as from the land to the water.
- A waterway's towing path and its environs should form an integral part of the public realm in terms of both design and management.
- It is important that the siting, configuration and orientation of buildings optimise views of the water, generate natural surveillance of water space, and encourage and improve access to, along and from the water.
- New waterside development needs to be considered holistically with the opportunities for water-based development, use and enhancement.
- Improve the appearance of the site from the towing path and from the water
- It should be recognised that appropriate boundary treatment and access issues are often different for the towing path side and the offside.

2.12 The Trust also provides guidance on boaters without a home mooring. It states that if a boat is licensed without a home mooring it must move on a regular basis. Unless a shorter time is specified by notice the boat must not stay in the same place for more than 14 days (or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances). This accords with S.17 of the British Waterways Act 1995⁹. As such, subject to stops of permitted duration, those using a boat licensed for continuous cruising must genuinely be moving, in passage or in transit throughout the period of the licence. Importantly, the Trust states that shuttling backwards and forwards along a small part of the network does not meet the legal requirement for navigation throughout the period of the licence¹⁰.

Boat dweller representative organisations

The National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA)

2.13 The 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

⁸ Canal & River Trust, (2017), 'What your local waterway can do for your community' p.10

⁹ British Waterways Act 1995 located at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1995/1/enacted>

¹⁰ Canal & River Trust, Guidance for Boaters Without a Home Mooring (no date)

planning permission for residential use. The NBTA seeks to represent the interests of all live aboard boat dwellers (“Bargee Travellers”) in respect of:

- pursuing the lifestyle
- upholding minority demographic rights
- lobbying at both central government and local government levels
- defending the legal rights of members
- assisting (as far as possible) with marine emergencies and
- engagement with the local community

2.14 In 2019 the NBTA published best practice guidance for undertaking boat dweller accommodation needs assessments. It emphasises that boat dwellers' use of land and utilities is different from that of people living in buildings. It suggests that boat dweller accommodation needs assessments should include assessment of health, education, and family needs of boat dwellers. It also suggests that those undertaking BDAs consult with agencies and organisations who work closely with the boat dweller community¹¹.

Summary

2.15 The requirement to assess the accommodation needs of boat dwellers follows the introduction, in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, of a requirement to consider the needs of people residing on or resorting to places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored. In March 2016 DCLG published its draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats.

2.16 The Environment Agency and Canal & River Trust play important roles in managing waterways. The Agency requires boats to be registered or licenced if the owner wants to keep or use it on inland waterways, such as rivers and canals. It also operates a number of short-term (usually 24-hour) moorings along the Thames. The Trust provides guidance on ‘waterway proofing’ planning policies as well as guidance on boaters without a home mooring.

¹¹ National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA), *Best Practice Guide for Boat Dweller Accommodation Needs Assessments under Section 124 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016*, March 2019.

3. Stakeholder consultation

Introduction

- 3.1 Consultations were undertaken using an online survey and telephone discussions with a range of stakeholders including Milton Keynes Council officers, representatives from boat dweller organisations including the National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA), neighbouring local authorities, and parish councils. The aim of the consultation was to obtain both an overall perspective on issues facing boat dwellers, and an understanding of local issues specific to the study area.
- 3.2 Themes raised through the consultations included:
- the main issues facing boat dwellers
 - the main barriers to delivering new mooring places
 - suitable places for new moorings
 - preferred type of mooring management
 - traveling patterns and transit mooring needs
 - the relationship between local boat dwellers and the settled community; and
 - access to health, education and other services.

This chapter presents brief summaries of the consultation and highlights the main points that were raised. Please note that the views below are expressed by the stakeholders and are not necessarily the views of the authors.

Boat Dwellers' Accommodation Needs

- 3.3 Stakeholders mentioned several reasons as to why someone might choose to move from living in bricks and mortar accommodation to living on a boat, particularly in the context of sustainability:
1. Choice: The decision to live on a boat could be a matter of personal preference.
 2. Cost: Living on a boat may be considered a more affordable option compared to traditional housing.
 3. Financial constraints: Some individuals may choose boat living due to a lack of financial resources.
 4. Cheaper living: The overall cost of boat living, including potential savings on utility bills and Council Tax, may be a driving factor.
 5. Mobility and lack of a fixed address: The ability to travel from mooring to mooring and not having a fixed address can be appealing. This may be motivated by costs, difficulty obtaining mortgages, and property prices.
 6. Downsizing and cost savings: Boat living may be chosen as a way to downsize and achieve more cost-effective living arrangements.

7. Increasing costs of houses and utilities: Escalating costs of houses and utilities in traditional homes could drive individuals to opt for the lower costs associated with boat living.
8. Sustainability benefits: The potential elimination of fossil fuel travel, such as cars, and a more automatic inclination to walk and cycle for transportation contribute to the sustainability appeal.
9. Easy mobility: The ease of moving around is highlighted as a factor in favour of boat living.

3.4 Overall, the motivations for moving from bricks and mortar accommodation to living on a boat include considerations of cost, financial constraints, mobility, downsizing, and sustainability preferences.

3.5 The main accommodation issues for people residing on boats in the Milton Keynes City Council area include the requirement to continually move their boats along the canal, hindering their full participation in civic life. There are concerns about the cost of permissions to moor, obtaining permanent resident moorings, and challenges in accessing services such as GPs and receiving mail. Other issues include a lack of water for boat dwellers in the area, restrictions or fees/fines for staying too long at mooring points, insufficient mooring points for the number of boat dwellers in the local area, and a shortage of permanent mooring sites with proximity to essential facilities like health facilities and schools. Additionally, finding a mooring with services and ensuring the security of the boat are mentioned as significant concerns.

3.6 The main accommodation issues facing people residing on boats in neighbouring local authority areas appear to be similar to those in Milton Keynes. Common concerns include the lack of mooring points, challenges in accessing services, and a need for increased security for boats. Boat dwellers in Buckinghamshire tend to reside on the River Thames and the Grand Union Canal near Iver (Slough Arm). Additionally, one stakeholder from a neighbouring local authority area mentions a specific need for mooring points at the Wolverton 'secret garden' to facilitate access to community services for boat dwellers.¹²

3.7 The perceived level of demand for existing permanent moorings in the area seems to be generally high. Respondents express the need for more moorings, citing factors such as marinas consistently being full, a growing number of boat dwellers in the borough, and challenges in finding available space due to the layout of canals and rivers in the region. Some mention that the demand appears to exceed the current availability, with indications that this demand is increasing, possibly influenced by rising housing costs, prompting more individuals to choose boat living as an alternative. Overall, the consensus is that there is a need for additional permanent moorings in the area.

¹² The "Secret Garden of Wolverton" is a community-led project that transformed a once-neglected space into a thriving green area. The garden is nestled behind houses and other buildings, making it a peaceful escape from the urban environment.

Travelling patterns

- 3.8 The main traveling patterns of people residing on boats in the local authority area include traveling near amenities and using the Grand Union Canal as the main waterway in the borough, offering a centralized travel route. Some boat users park in residential places, while others stay within the Milton Keynes boundary, returning to marinas or getting temporary moorings. Overall, the responses indicate a mix of travel near amenities, residential areas, and a focus on the central waterway within the borough.
- 3.9 The main traveling patterns of leisure cruisers (those who do not live on the boat but use it for leisure) in the area involve day trips and longer journeys, including visits to the cruising club marina in Great Linford. Additionally, there are through journeys from the main cruiser hirer centres north and south of the city. Some respondents mention general movements "up and down" without specifying particular destinations. One response highlights the desire to bring leisure cruisers into the town for a more enjoyable and practical connection through the borough. Overall, the information indicates a mix of local and through journeys for leisure cruising in the area.
- 3.10 The impact of Covid-19 and related restrictions on households residing on boats in the Milton Keynes local authority area is discussed in the responses. There was an observed increase in the usage of the canal towpath for walking and cycling during the restrictions, potentially raising concerns among liveaboard boaters about maintaining social distancing. Some boaters felt at increased risk due to their need to use the towpath to access their boats and the proximity of others. There is a lack of detailed information on specific needs or challenges faced by boat dwellers during this time. One response indicates that visits were made to check if they needed support, while another suggests that restrictions may have affected the movements of boat dwellers, potentially impacting access to services. Overall, the responses highlight concerns related to social distancing and potential restrictions on access to care and essential services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The provision of new moorings

- 3.11 Potential locations for new moorings in the local authority area include areas from Fenny Lock southwards, close to public transport and shops. Lakes such as Willen Lake and Caldecotte Lake are also suggested as suitable places. The Grand Union Canal is highlighted as the most obvious place for moorings in Milton Keynes at present. Additionally, less busy areas with fewer built-up surroundings around waterways are proposed as potential sites for new moorings. One respondent suggested that any new moorings should comply with the CRT's new marinas process, and a focus on navigational safety and water resources.
- 3.12 Opinions on whether new moorings should be owned and managed by the local authority, privately, or a combination of both vary. Some express a preference for private ownership, while others believe that publicly owned facilities may be more responsive to the needs of users and the community. The economic considerations of users are mentioned as a factor influencing the decision. There's also a suggestion for a combination of both, with potential

cooperation between private ownership and the local authority. The need for protections for boat owners is emphasised, irrespective of whether the moorings are publicly or privately run. Overall, the responses indicate a mix of preferences for private, public, or a collaborative approach to ownership and management of new moorings.

- 3.13 The main barriers to delivering new mooring places in the Milton Keynes local authority area include limited locations for new marinas, particularly as much of the canal runs through a linear park where increased residential use might compromise recreational activities. Some lakes that could be suitable are currently off-limits for mooring. Other barriers mentioned include the cost of construction and operation, financial viability, the need for planning permission from the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and the Canal & River Trust, as well as potential opposition from developers near new housing developments. Obtaining consent from landowners, navigational safety considerations, and the overall lack of private investment are also identified as challenges. Additionally, concerns about the impact on other residents, space limitations, and the need for funding and planning permission are highlighted as significant barriers to creating new mooring places in the area.
- 3.14 It was suggested that the numbers of visitor moorings have increased in recent years due to the provision of new moorings and re-categorization of existing ones. Some respondents expressed a need for transit/temporary/visitor moorings. One suggests that there is space for four such moorings in the local area, while another supports the idea to regulate between visitors and more permanent moorings. Additionally, some mention the potential usefulness of additional transit or visitor moorings along the canal or similar areas. Overall, the responses indicate a mix of perspectives on the need for and potential locations of transit/temporary/visitor moorings.

Boat dwellers and the local community

- 3.15 The responses reflect a variety of views on the importance of the relationship between those who live in houses and flats with those who reside on boats in the area. Some respondents emphasize that the relationship should not be different from that between people living in different estates and grid-squares. Others express the importance of integrating boat dwellers into the community and ensuring that their needs are met. Some note that the preferences for more integration may vary between boat dwellers and those living in homes. Suggestions include providing good access to work, services, and facilities for permanent moorings and including boat people in local events and services. A few responses highlight the significance of maintaining a positive relationship through measures such as providing allocated spaces for boat residents, regular community meetings, and ensuring that housing developments do not negatively impact existing moorings. Overall, the views indicate a recognition of the boat dwellers as part of the local community, with an emphasis on inclusion and addressing the needs of both groups without affecting accommodation quality.

Health, education and other service needs of boat dwellers

- 3.16 There is awareness of health, education, and service issues experienced by households residing on boats. Access to services is identified as a general issue, and it is suggested that having permanent moorings could improve access. Concerns are raised about the impact of not having a permanent address on obtaining GP appointments and accessing non-emergency health services. Additionally, difficulties in registering with schools or GP services due to a lack of fixed addresses are mentioned, potentially contributing to a demographic skew toward single men or couples without children among boat dwellers. Finally, the issue of boat households being unable to vote due to the lack of a permanent address is highlighted. Overall, the responses indicate a range of challenges related to health, education, and service access for households residing on boats.
- 3.17 People living on a boat may face several key differences and challenges compared to those living in traditional housing. The highlighted points include:
1. Access to services: Boat dwellers may encounter challenges in accessing various services such as healthcare, education, and community services.
 2. Utilities, waste disposal, damp, maintenance, and dry docking: Challenges related to utilities, waste disposal, dampness, boat maintenance, and the need for dry docking can be more pronounced for boat residents.
 3. School places, doctors, and dentists: Boat dwellers may face difficulties in securing school places for their children and accessing essential healthcare services like doctors and dentists.
 4. Limited skilled labour, services, and moorings: Challenges include limited access to skilled labour for boat repairs or servicing, a lack of moorings, and restricted access to various services and facilities.
 5. Perception, mistrust, and use of facilities: There may be a perception of boat dwellers using facilities paid for by taxpayers, leading to mistrust. Access to community services is also highlighted.
 6. Access to health services: Boat residents may encounter challenges in accessing health services.
 7. No fixed address and changing mooring locations: The absence of a fixed address can pose challenges for tasks like receiving mail and registering for services. The changing location of mooring sites contrasts with the permanence of fixed house addresses.
 8. Security and charges: Concerns about security and the necessity to pay charges to different agencies are mentioned as additional challenges for boat dwellers.
- 3.18 Overall, the challenges faced by people living on boats encompass a range of issues related to access to services, community inclusion, utilities, healthcare, education, and the practical aspects of maintaining and securing a boat.

Summary

- 3.19 It is apparent from the stakeholder consultation that people are drawn to living on boats for various reasons. Some see it as a personal preference, enjoying the unique lifestyle it offers. Others find it a more affordable option compared to traditional housing, especially when considering the escalating costs of houses and utilities. The lack of financial resources also plays a role, with some seeing boat living as a cheaper alternative, saving on utility bills and council tax. The lifestyle offers mobility and the lack of a fixed address, which appeals to those struggling with the high costs of mortgages and property prices. Downsizing to a boat is another reason, seen as a way to achieve more cost-effective living arrangements. Additionally, boat living is perceived as more sustainable, with reduced reliance on fossil fuels for transportation, and the ease of mobility is another attractive factor.
- 3.20 Despite these advantages, boat living comes with significant challenges. In the Milton Keynes area, boat dwellers often have to keep moving their boats along the canal, which impacts on their participation in civic life. The costs associated with mooring permissions, obtaining permanent resident moorings, and the challenges in accessing essential services like healthcare and mail due to the constantly changing addresses are significant issues. There's also a scarcity of water for boat dwellers in the area, restrictions, and fees for mooring points, and a shortage of permanent mooring sites close to necessary facilities like health centres and schools. Ensuring the security of the boats and finding moorings with necessary services are also major concerns.
- 3.21 The demand for existing permanent moorings in these areas is high. Marinas are often full, and the growing number of boat dwellers in the borough, combined with the layout of canals and rivers, presents challenges in finding available space. This demand is seemingly increasing, influenced by rising housing costs, making boat living an attractive alternative.
- 3.22 Travel patterns of boat residents include traveling near amenities and using the Grand Union Canal as the main waterway. Some park in residential places, while others stay within Milton Keynes, returning to marinas or securing temporary moorings. Leisure cruisers, who use boats for recreation rather than as a permanent residence, engage in day trips and longer journeys, with limited detailed information available on their specific travel patterns.
- 3.23 Regarding the provision of new moorings, potential locations include areas close to public transport and shops, with lakes like Willen Lake and Caldecotte Lake being considered suitable. The Grand Union Canal is the most obvious place for moorings in Milton Keynes. Opinions vary on whether these new moorings should be owned and managed by the local authority, privately, or through a combination of both. The main barriers to delivering new mooring places include limited locations for new marinas, the cost of construction and operation, the need for planning permission, and potential opposition from developers. Space limitations and the impact on other residents are also significant concerns.
- 3.24 The responses indicate a variety of views on the relationship between those living in houses and flats and those residing on boats. The importance of integrating boat dwellers into the

community, ensuring their needs are met, and maintaining a positive relationship through measures like providing allocated spaces and including boat residents in local events is emphasised.

- 3.25 Finally, the health, education, and service needs of boat dwellers are acknowledged. The lack of a permanent address impacts on their ability to obtain GP appointments, access non-emergency health services, register with schools, and even vote. Challenges related to utilities, waste disposal, maintenance, and security are more pronounced for boat residents. Overall, the challenges faced by people living on boats encompass a wide range of issues, from access to services and community inclusion to the practical aspects of maintaining and securing a boat.

4. The accommodation needs of boat dwellers

Introduction

4.1 Given that the requirement to determine the accommodation needs of boat dwellers was only recently introduced by the DCLG Draft Guidance on Housing Needs (Caravans and Houseboats) (March 2016), there is no established method to determine needs. As such, the need for permanent residential moorings in the study area is assessed according to DCLG (2007) guidance and supplemented by data provided by the local authorities and consultation with stakeholders. Please note that the calculation of accommodation needs was based on consultation with key stakeholders such as marina owners and managers. Whilst surveys were undertaken with around 10 boat dweller households, the sample size was too small to determine accommodation needs.

Accommodation supply

4.2 There are three marinas in Milton Keynes and some marinas close to the border with neighbouring authorities. There are also several waterways in the local authority area which accommodate moorings e.g., the Grand Union Canal. There are 258 registered moorings in the local authority area, with 187 used as leisure moorings, and 71 used as permanent residential moorings.¹³ The marinas are mainly owned and managed by the private sector, with the exception being Campbell Wharf Marina, which is managed by The Parks Trust, an independent, self-financing charity. Table 4.1 shows the type and number of moorings in the local authority area:

	Leisure	Residential
Woodley Headland Marina	31	27
Campbell Wharf Marina	91	20
Willowbridge Marina	25	0
Campbell Park H3 and H4	0	9
Grand Union Canal	0	5
Lionhearts Cruising Club	40	0
Black Horse Moorings	0	10
Total	187	71

4.3 Through consultation with stakeholders, it is evident that around half of the 187 boat dweller households temporarily move off moorings to fulfil conditions of marinas' mooring policies i.e. boat dwellers residing on a non-residential mooring are unable to stay for 52 weeks of the year.

4.4 According to stakeholders, waiting lists for moorings on local marinas are extensive. However, they have not been used to determine accommodation needs because a waiting list may not be an accurate reflection of demand for moorings e.g. applicants may register on

¹³ Moorings used by people who cruise the waterways for recreational purposes and do not permanently reside on a boat.

several waiting lists. Also, it is not possible to distinguish between the need for moorings in contrast to the demand for moorings.

- 4.5 There are 'constant cruisers'¹⁴ in the local area, who reside on boats, but do not have any form of authorised mooring. Based on consultation with stakeholders, it is estimated that there are around 50 constant cruisers residing in the local authority area. It is important to note that not all constant cruisers have a need for permanent residential moorings and may prefer not to reside at a fixed location. However, according to stakeholders around 25 require permanent residential moorings in the local authority area.

Accommodation needs

- 4.6 Table 4.2 summarises the permanent residential accommodation needs of boat dwellers in the borough for the period 2023-2028.

Table 4.2 Estimate of the need for Permanent Residential Moorings 2023-2028	
1) Current identified permanent residential moorings	71
<i>Current residential supply</i>	
2) Number of unused residential moorings available	0
3) Number of household units on permanent residential moorings expected to leave the study area in next 5 years	0
4) Number of residential units on permanent residential moorings expected to move into housing in next 5 years	0
5) Permanent residential moorings planned to be built or to be brought back into use	0
6) Less permanent residential moorings with temporary planning permission (occupied)	0
Total Supply	0
<i>Current residential need: Moorings</i>	
7) Residential units seeking permanent residential moorings in the area, excluding those already counted as moving due to overcrowding in step 12	94
8) Estimated residential units on temporary moorings requiring permanent residential moorings in the area	0
9) Estimated residential units on unauthorised moorings/constant cruisers requiring permanent residential moorings in the area	25
10) Residential units identified on unauthorised tolerated moorings requiring permanent residential moorings in the area	0
11) Residential units currently overcrowded on permanent residential moorings seeking permanent residential moorings in the area, excluding those containing an emerging residential unit	0
12) New residential units expected to arrive from elsewhere	0
13) New residential unit formations expected to arise from within existing family units	5
Total Need	124
<i>Balance of Need and Supply</i>	
Total Additional Permanent Residential Moorings Requirement	124
Annualised Additional Permanent Residential Moorings Requirement	25

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¹⁴ A boat dweller whose permanent residence is a boat but has no permanent mooring i.e. they constantly cruise. They may temporarily use transit moorings but such stays are usually limited to between 24 hours and 14 days.

Requirement for permanent residential moorings 2023-2028

4.7 Determining the accommodation needs of boat dwellers uses the same process as determining the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. The following sections show the steps of the boat dwellers accommodation needs calculations.

Supply of moorings 2023-2028

Step 1: Current permanent occupied residential moorings

4.8 Based on information obtained through this study there are currently a total of 71 occupied authorised permanent residential moorings in the borough.

Step 2: Number of unused permanent residential moorings available

4.9 According to marina data there are 0 vacant permanent authorised residential moorings in the borough.

Step 3: Number of household units on permanent residential moorings expressing a desire to leave the borough

4.10 There are 0 households on a permanent residential mooring in the borough who stated that they intend to permanently leave the borough and vacate the mooring in the next 5 years.

Step 4: Number of household units on permanent residential moorings expressing a desire to live in housing

4.11 This was determined by survey data. It is assumed that anyone currently living on boats planning to move into housing in the next five years (step 5), and thereby vacate a mooring, would be able to do so. A supply of 0 moorings was expected from this source.

Step 5: Permanent residential moorings planned to be built or brought back into use

4.12 This is determined by local authority data. As there are no planning permissions or pending applications for moorings in the area, there are 0 new moorings expected to be built or brought back into use during this period.

Step 6: Residential moorings with temporary planning permission

4.13 This is determined by local authority data. There are currently no occupied moorings with temporary planning permission located in the borough.

Need for permanent residential moorings 2023-2028

Step 7: Residential units on moorings seeking permanent residential moorings in the borough

4.14 Guidance (DCLG, 2007) suggests that those moving from authorised mooring to authorised mooring should be included in the needs section. This category of need overlaps with those moving due to overcrowding, counted in step 12, and so any residential units which are both overcrowded and seeking accommodation are deducted from this total. Through evidence collected as part of this consultation it is estimated that there are around 187 boat dweller

households residing on leisure moorings of which 94 require a permanent residential mooring within the borough.

Step 8: Residential units on temporary moorings seeking permanent residential moorings in the area

4.15 The accommodation needs of households residing on temporary moorings but requiring permanent moorings is considered by this step. There are currently no households residing on temporary moorings with a need for permanent moorings.

Step 9: Residential units on unauthorised moorings/constant cruisers seeking permanent residential moorings in the area

4.16 Guidance (DCLG 2007) indicates that it should be considered whether alternative accommodation is required for households residing on unauthorised moorings. There are around 50 'constant cruisers located in the borough'. However, according to stakeholders around 25 require permanent residential moorings in the local authority area.

Step 10: Residential units on unauthorised developments seeking permanent residential moorings in the area

4.17 This is where land is owned by the boat dweller or by someone who has given consent for the boat dweller to reside at that location, but the land does not have planning permission. A need for 0 moorings currently arises from households residing on tolerated unauthorised moorings.

Step 11: Residential units on overcrowded permanent residential moorings seeking residential moorings in the area

4.18 Guidance (DCLG, 2007) indicates that those on overcrowded moorings should be provided with moorings of an adequate size. Households which also contain a newly formed residential unit that has not yet left are excluded. This is because it is assumed that once the extra unit leaves (included in the need figures in step 14) their accommodation will no longer be overcrowded.

Step 12: New residential units expected to arrive from elsewhere

4.19 In the absence of any data derivable from secondary sources on the moving intentions of those outside the borough, it is assumed that the inflow of boat dwellers into the area will be equivalent to the outflow i.e. net 0 moorings over this period (based on 0%).

Step 13: New residential unit formations expected to arise from within existing household units on permanent residential moorings

4.20 It is determined that this will result in the formation of 5 new households requiring residential moorings during this period.

Requirements for residential moorings 2028-2040

4.21 The BDAA determines that in 2023 there were 71 permanent residential moorings within the borough. As Table 4.2 states, there is a net need for an additional 124 permanent residential moorings during the period 2023-2028. It is assumed that by 2028 the need for 124 additional moorings will have been met. As such, there will be a total of 195 permanent residential

moorings in Milton Keynes by 2028. The accommodation needs calculations for the 2028-2033 period apply the base figure of 195 permanent residential moorings by 2028.

- 4.22 The assessment estimates the future permanent residential moorings provision for the period 2028-2040. Based on the draft Milton Keynes Housing and Economic Development Assessment (HEDNA) (March 2023), it is estimated that the number of households will increase by 3.27% for the period 2028-2033, 3.17% for the period 2033-2038, and 1.23% for the period 2038-2040. For the period 2028-2033 an estimated 6 moorings will be required due to newly forming household units i.e., applying 3.27% to 195.

Table 4.3 Estimate of the need for permanent residential moorings 2028-2033	
Residential Moorings as at 2028	
1) Estimated permanent residential moorings occupied by boat dwellers	195
Supply of permanent residential moorings	
2) Number of residential units on permanent residential moorings expected to move out of the study area	0
Total Supply	0
Need for permanent residential moorings	
3) Residential units moving into the study area (100% of outflow)	0
4) Newly forming residential units	6
Total Need	6
Additional Need	
Total additional permanent residential moorings requirement	6
Annualised additional permanent residential moorings requirement	1.3

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- 4.23 The additional accommodation needs for 6 additional moorings over the period 2028-2033 means that by 2033 there will be a total of 201 permanent residential moorings in Milton Keynes. As Table 4.4 shows, an estimated 6 moorings will be required due to newly forming household units i.e., applying 3.17% to 201.

Table 4.4 Estimate of the need for permanent residential moorings 2033-2038	
Residential Moorings as at 2033	
1) Estimated permanent residential moorings occupied by boat dwellers	201
Supply of permanent residential moorings	
2) Number of residential units on permanent residential moorings expected to move out of the study area	0
Total Supply	0
Need for permanent residential moorings	
3) Residential units moving into the study area (100% of outflow)	0
4) Newly forming residential units	6
Total Need	6
Additional Need	
Total additional permanent residential moorings requirement	6
Annualised additional permanent residential moorings requirement	1.3

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- 4.24 The additional accommodation needs for 6 additional mooring over the period 2033-2038 means that by 2038 there will be a total of 207 permanent residential moorings in Milton Keynes. As Table 4.5 shows, an estimated 3 moorings will be required due to newly forming household units i.e., applying 1.23% to 207.

Table 4.5 Estimate of the need for permanent residential moorings 2038-2040	
Residential Moorings as at 2038	
1) Estimated permanent residential moorings occupied by boat dwellers	207
Supply of permanent residential moorings	
2) Number of residential units on permanent residential moorings expected to move out of the study area	0
Total Supply	0
Need for permanent residential moorings	
3) Residential units moving into the study area (100% of outflow)	0
4) Newly forming residential units	3
Total Need	3
Additional Need	
Total additional permanent residential moorings requirement	3
Annualised additional permanent residential moorings requirement	0.6

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Requirements for transit moorings 2023-2040

4.25 It should not be assumed that all boat dwellers require permanent residential accommodation. Boat dwellers who continuously traverse the waterways without a need for a permanent residential mooring are known as 'Bargee Travellers' or 'constant cruisers'. Whilst the CRT manage short-term transit moorings in the local authority area, there remains a need for greater flexibility in relation to the amount of time boat dwellers are permitted to reside on transit moorings.

Summary

4.26 Table 4.6 shows that a further 139 permanent residential moorings are needed during the 17-year period in Milton Keynes.

Table 4.6 Permanent residential moorings need 2023-2040	
	No.
2023-2028	124
2028-2033	6
2033-2038	6
2038-2040	3
Total	139

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5. Conclusions on the evidence

Introduction

- 5.1 This final chapter draws conclusions from the evidence. It then makes a series of recommendations relating to meeting the identified need for moorings, site management and facilities, and recording and monitoring processes. The recommendations throughout this chapter are put forward by *RRR Consultancy* for the authority to consider in accordance with respective policies and constraints.
- 5.2 The chapter begins by presenting an overview of the policy changes, followed by review of the needs and facilitating the needs of needs and facilitating of needs for boat dwellers. It then concludes with key recommendations.

Policy Changes

- 5.3 In March 2016 the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs for caravans and houseboats. It states that when considering the need for caravans and houseboats local authorities will need to include the needs of a variety of residents in differing circumstances including, for example caravan and houseboat dwelling households and households residing in bricks and mortar dwelling households.
- 5.4 The Housing and Planning Act 2016 requires Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to consider the needs of people residing on or resorting to places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored. However, the term ‘houseboat’ is not defined by DCLG guidance. As such, the accommodation needs determined by this assessment uses a definition developed by the NBTA in response to stakeholder consultation:

“Someone who lives aboard a vessel (which may or may not be capable of navigation), that the vessel is used as the main or only residence and where that vessel is either (i) moored in one location for more than 28 days in a year (but may occasionally or periodically leave its mooring); or (ii) has no permanent mooring and navigates in accordance with the statutes appropriate to the navigation such as inter alia s.17(3)(c)(ii) of the British Waterways Act 1995 or s.79 of the Thames Conservancy Act 1932”.

- 5.5 The NBTA definition is the most comprehensive available and that which most accurately encompasses the range views expressed through the stakeholder consultation.
- 5.6 According to correspondence between *RRR Consultancy Ltd* and DCLG (27 October 2016), the DCLG stated that it is for local housing authorities to assess and understand the accommodation needs of people who reside in or resort to the area with respect to the provision of caravan sites or houseboats. This means that there is no “standard” methodology that can be followed i.e. it is for each authority to prepare (and justify) an appropriate methodology.

New accommodation provision

- 5.7 Due to the transient characteristic of boat dwellers it is not possible to identify with certainty all existing households residing on boats in the study area. However, the assessment has provided an estimation of need and identified the general circumstances of boat dwellers requiring permanent and transit residential moorings. The accommodation need in Milton Keynes Borough derives mainly from boat dwellers residing on leisure moorings requiring permanent residential moorings and constant cruisers who require permanent accommodation in the local area.
- 5.8 Table 5.1 summarises the number of permanent residential moorings, required over the period 2023-2040. It shows that a further 139 permanent residential moorings are needed over the 17-year period within the borough. However, it should be noted that the need for 94 of the 124 additional moorings arising from boat dwellers residing on leisure moorings during the first five-year period i.e. 2023-2028 – can be met by changing mooring licenses from leisure to permanent residential. This leads to a net need of 30 additional moorings during the first five-year period.

	No.
2023-2028	124
2028-2033	6
2033-2038	6
2038-2040	3
Total	139

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- 5.9 In relation to transit provision, it is recommended that the current transit moorings are made available for longer periods out of season. It is also recommended that these provisions are upgraded. This includes ensuring easy access to the bank and clear and secure facilities to secure the boats, electric and water hook-ups, toilet and household waste facilities, access to parking within walking distance, and ensuring that the emergency services can access moorings.

Facilitating new provision

- 5.10 A key issue remains the facilitation of new authorised residential moorings. This assessment recognises that some of the accommodation need could be addressed through affordable or supported housing. It is important to recognise that as well as those who choose to reside on boats, there are those who reside on boats not out of choice, including those who would otherwise be homeless. It is important to note that some of the boat dwellers with substance misuse or mental health issues require not only housing but help and support to enable them to reside in housing.
- 5.11 Key organisations such as Milton Keynes City Council and CRT could collaborate to determine which locations moorings along the Milton Keynes's waterways could be used for permanent moorings or long-term winter moorings.

- 5.12 One model that could be adopted in Milton Keynes is the Oxford community-led project which aims to develop affordable moorings for the local community, held by the community, capturing the enthusiasm of many boaters to preserve the biodiversity of the river and canal and improving areas along the towpath for visitors¹⁵. A report by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Environment Committee (2013) recommended that community moorings should be considered as a viable option (although it also recognised that this could lead to charges at moorings where there are currently none)¹⁶.
- 5.13 The benefits of a community-led approach to residential moorings include:
- Boaters have greater control over the design and management of sites
 - Boaters have greater control over the costs of moorings.
 - The site could be potentially more affordable due to lower overheads if managed by a community group bringing volunteer labour.
 - Allocations of moorings could be more transparent and based on need rather than the price someone is willing to pay.
 - Groups are more rooted in the local community and often want to improve the biodiversity, sustainability and useability of the moorings site for the wider community. Many groups encourage visitors to the waterway through biodiversity and other leisure opportunities.
- 5.14 There are now around 9 community-led mooring projects or boaters' cooperatives across the UK that are either established or in early development stages, with the majority having been set up in the last 5 years.
- 5.15 One example in London is Hermitage Community Moorings (HCM)¹⁷ – a co-operative which built, owns, and operates a mooring on the Thames in Wapping next to what used to be known as Hermitage Wharf. It provides moorings for up to 23 vessels enabling a mixture of historic live-aboard barges, and visitor vessel use. HCM provides well-managed river access for local people, including educational and recreational facilities.
- 5.16 HCM was created by a small, dedicated community over the course of about 6 years and is the first development of its kind on the Thames for more than a generation. The co-operative members entirely self-funded the planning, design, management, construction, installation, and operation of the harbour. The infrastructure is designed to create a small, close-knit community of people committed to boat use and the preservation of historic craft.

The location of new provision

- 5.17 According to stakeholders, the most suitable places for new moorings in the local authority area are Willen Lake, Caldecotte Lake, and the Grand Union Canal.

¹⁵ See: <https://collaborativehousing.org.uk/2022/02/02/launching-the-research-report-into-community-led-moorings-in-oxford.html>

¹⁶ GLA Environment Committee 'Moor or less – Moorings on London's waterways', November 2013.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.heritagemoorings.com/>

- 5.18 The precise location (along with services and facilities) should be drawn up in consultation with boat dwellers and other stakeholders to ensure any additional provision meets their needs, is in appropriate locations, and is deliverable.
- 5.19 There are general principles involved in determining the location of new mooring provision. Ensuring that new moorings are located in a safe environment is important although the impact of land costs on determining feasibility must also be considered. The settled community neighbouring the moorings should also be involved in the consultation from an early stage. There may be scope for expanding existing moorings, authorisation of unauthorised moorings, and change of status to some of the moorings at the marinas to meet some accommodation need.
- 5.20 When identifying and revising current and future moorings, it is important to consider the impact on landscape and biodiversity of new moorings. In particular, new moorings should not adversely impact on the character or appearance of the surrounding area, protected species, priority habitats, or designated wildlife sites.
- 5.21 In terms of identifying broad locations for new permanent moorings, there are a number of factors which could be considered including:

Costs

- How do land costs impact on feasibility i.e. is it affordable?

Social

- Does the proposed location of the new provision lie within a reasonable distance of school catchment areas?
- Sustainability – is the proposed location close to existing transport routes?
- Proximity of social and leisure services – is the proposed location close to leisure facilities such as sports centres, cinemas etc. or welfare services such as health and social services etc.

Availability

- Who owns the land and are they willing to sell / lease?
- Is access easy or will easements across other land be needed both for residents and services/utilities?
- Are utilities close enough to service the provision at realistic prices?

Deliverability

- Does the proposed location meet existing general planning policy in terms of residential use, for example in relation to flooding and the historic environment?
- Can/will the owner sell / lease the land easily and quickly?
- Can utilities be connected to the proposed provision?

Summary

- 5.22 The policy process that follows on from this research will also need to consider how the identified needs relating to boat dwellers can be supported through the planning process. The study also highlighted a number of issues relating to the management and condition of provisions.
- S17. Finally, this report provides a range of recommendations determined by those which are specifically relevant to the local authority's planning policies; recommendations which are not within the remit of planning policy but could be considered by the local authority; and general recommendations:

Local authority planning policy recommendations

- As stated in Table S1 above, a further 139 permanent residential moorings are needed over the 17-year period within the borough. However, it should be noted that the need for 94 of the 124 additional moorings arising from boat dwellers residing on leisure moorings during the first five-year period i.e. 2023-2028 – can be met by changing mooring licenses from leisure to permanent residential.
- According to stakeholders, the most suitable places for any new permanent or transit moorings in the local authority area are Willen Lake, Caldecotte Lake, and the Grand Union Canal.
- Whilst Policy D7 of the Local Plan (2016) ('Canalside Development') determines objectives for canalside development, it would be useful for the local authority to consider adopting the CRT (2017) principles for planning and designing waterways to inform emerging/future Local Plans.
- Ensure all new moorings have access to facilities such as toilet and household waste disposal provisions. If possible, all authorised moorings (residential and visitors' moorings) should have access to electric and water hook-up points, and for residential moorings to have individual access and a secure post-box.

General local authority recommendations

- There is a need for a network of 14-to-56-day transit moorings, administered on an affordable permit system. A potential model is the Cambridge City Council 'Residential Mooring Licence'¹⁸ albeit with changes such as access according to level of need in the same way as social housing, rather than access on a 'first come first served' basis.
- To consider adopting the Oxford community-led model which aims to develop affordable moorings for the local community.
- The local authority could consider helping to meet the needs of households unable to afford to own a mooring or the rental costs of existing moorings by renting or leasing

¹⁸ See: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/residential-boat-mooring-licence>

small parcels of local authority owned land to them and assisting with planning applications and mooring development.

- For the local authority to consider alternative funding mechanisms for new marinas and mooring places such as: acquisition funds; loans for private mooring provision through Community Development Financial Institutions; and joint ventures with members of the boating community.
- According to stakeholders, including boat dwellers, there is a lack consistency in allocating moorings in the borough. As such, it is recommended that guidance is developed regarding how moorings are to be allocated to households on marina waiting lists.
- Provide training and workshop sessions with local authority and service provider employees (and elected members) to help them to further understand the key issues facing the boat dwelling communities.
- The local authority to work closely with key organisations including the National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA) and the Canal and River Trust (CRT) to determine how the accommodation needs of boat dwellers can best be met.
- The local authority to take a lead role in formalising communication processes between relevant housing, planning and enforcement officers etc. in both the study area and neighbouring local authorities.
- For the local authority to consider embedding the accommodation, service, and support needs of local boat dwellers into, for example, Community and Homelessness Strategies, Local Plans and planning and reporting obligations.

Other recommendations

- For relevant agencies to work together to ensure a consistent approach to the enforcement of rules regarding how long boat dwellers can reside on temporary moorings in the local authority area.
- There needs to be better sharing of information between agencies which deal with the accommodation, service and support needs of the local boat dwelling community.

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Glossary

Bargee traveller: people whose main or only home is a boat without year-round access to a permanent mooring.

Boat dweller: defined by the National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA) and adopted by this BDAA as:

“Someone who lives aboard a vessel (which may or may not be capable of navigation), that the vessel is used as the main or only residence and where that vessel is either (i) moored in one location for more than 28 days in a year (but may occasionally or periodically leave its mooring); or (ii) has no permanent mooring and navigates in accordance with the statutes appropriate to the navigation such as inter alia s.17(3)(c)(ii) of the British Waterways Act 1995 or s.79 of the Thames Conservancy Act 1932”.

Boat Dweller Accommodation Assessment (BDAA): a document which assesses the accommodation needs of boat dwellers.

Canal & River Trust (CRT): replaced British Waterways in July 2012. It is a registered charity whose main aim is to protect over 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales.

Constant cruiser: a boat dweller whose permanent residence is a boat but has no permanent mooring i.e. they constantly cruise. They may temporarily use transit moorings but such stays are usually limited to between 24 hours and 14 days.

DCLG Draft Guidance on Housing Needs (Caravans and Houseboats) (March 2016): provides advice on how to consider the needs of people residing in caravans or houseboats where they differ from those of the settled community.

Environment Agency: an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. It is responsible for the management of the River Thames and other river channels that join their main courses.

Houseboat: commonly defined by the HMRC VAT Notice 701/20, December 2013 as being a floating decked structure which:

- is designed or adapted for use solely as a place of permanent habitation
- does not have the means of, and which is not capable of being readily adapted for, self-propulsion” (HMRC VAT Notice 701/20, December 2013).

Housing and Planning Act 2016: requires Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to consider the needs of people residing on places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored.

Leisure cruiser: someone who cruises the waterways for recreational purposes and does not permanently reside on a boat.

Mooring: a place beside a canal or river used to moor boats. Some moorings have facilities such as electricity hook up points or space for storage. They can be used for temporary (transit) mooring or permanent mooring. 'Authorised' moorings have planning permission whereas 'unauthorised' do not.

National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA): a volunteer organisation formed in 2009 that campaigns and provides advice for itinerant boat dwellers on Britain's inland and coastal waterways.

Riparian: a person who owns land on the bank of a natural watercourse or body of water.

Transit mooring: a mooring used for a short period of time – usually between 24 hours and 14 days. Transit moorings are managed by a range of private and public organisations including the Environment Agency (EA) and Canal and River Trust (CRT).