

Failure to move Thames houseboat lands owner in court

The owner of a large unpowered boat used as a houseboat, who failed to comply with directions to move the barge from Environment Agency owned public moorings on the non-tidal River Thames. He has been warned about the consequences of breaking the law in the future.

The Environment Agency prosecuted Stephen Crowe after his boat named Hope IV was moored to Environment Agency owned riverbanks in Surrey. The boat was moored for periods far longer than the maximum 24 hours allowed on that part of the Thames.

A court heard how it had become necessary for the Environment Agency to begin issuing formal enforcement notices in May and June of 2019. The notices directing Crowe to move his vessel from an Environment Agency short-stay mooring site on the riverbank at Walton-on Thames in Surrey.

His failure to then regularly move the large 85-foot unpowered boat led to a further formal enforcement notice being issued in July 2019. The notice directing Crowe to move from another nearby Environment Agency short-stay mooring at Desborough Island in Surrey. The Environment Agency began legal proceedings after a Harbour Master Notice of Directions was not complied with.

Colin Chiverton, environment manager for the River Thames at the Environment Agency, said:

The Environment Agency owns limited sections of riverbank across 144 miles of the non-tidal Thames. The majority of our customers do comply with our mooring conditions, but this is an important enforcement outcome for all river users and local communities.

We provide and maintain some limited purpose built short-stay public moorings, to encourage pleasure boating on the river and to enable safe mooring at designated locations. Our public moorings are valuable and available for all boat owners to use but subject to conditions of use. This is to ensure fair access for all pleasure boat owners.

Crowe was given countless chances to comply with our mooring conditions and formal directions to move his boat but failed to. We strongly advise all boat owners whether buying or bringing a boat on to the River, to give serious consideration to the size and type of vessel. Also how they are going to comply with landowner mooring requirements before committing to owning and keeping a boat on the River.

Similar to the keeping of a private or commercially owned vehicle on the public highway, to avoid enforcement action boat owners are responsible for ensuring the mooring of their boats. This is whether powered or unpowered, do not cause an obstruction to the public right of navigation or interfere with the rights of riparian landowners. The Environment Agency manages and maintains more than 600 miles of inland waterways across England, keeping them open and safe for thousands of river-lovers.

At Staines magistrates' court on 23 July, Stephen Crowe, now of London Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, pleaded guilty to an offence contrary to Section 84 Thames Conservancy Act 1932 (not complying with the directions of a Harbour Master). He told the court he had sold the boat in June 2021 and was given a Conditional Discharge for 12 months and ordered to pay £5,000 towards the Environment Agency's costs, and a victim surcharge of £22.