

New arrangements at visitor moorings on the non-tidal River Thames

During a 12-month trial starting on Wednesday 16 November 2016, Thames Visitor Moorings (TVM), a private company run 'by boaters for boaters', will take over responsibility for managing usage and collecting fees at 21 of the 22 visitor mooring sites currently operated by the Environment Agency.

The change will bring significant benefits for boaters and the Environment Agency alike.

Boaters will be able to register their arrival (a condition of use) online or by phone at any time of day, and pay any fees using a debit or credit card, or through Paypal. At present, they must register their arrival with the duty lock keeper, who can also take cash payments for any fees due. This can cause problems however if the lock keeper is off-duty, working off-site, busy with other duties, or if the boater doesn't have any cash to hand.

For the Environment Agency, the new arrangements are expected to boost the income it receives from its visitor moorings and improve its ability to monitor usage and take enforcement action if necessary.

Nick McKie-Smith, the Environment Agency's Waterways Operations Enforcement Manager for the non-tidal River Thames said:

I've got high expectations of this pilot. We're using a first rate provider who really understands the needs of boaters, and ourselves.

I'm confident the new arrangements will hugely improve the customer experience and compliance at our visitor moorings, and increase our revenue. It's good news for boaters, and for us.

The Environment Agency and others provide short-stay visitor moorings to facilitate touring on the Thames. Generally, they allow boaters to stay for up to 3 days for a nominal charge to enjoy the facilities and attractions of the local area, before moving on to another location and freeing up the space for someone else to use.

Unfortunately, some boaters stay considerably longer than the maximum allowed, preventing their fellow boaters from using the moorings for their intended purpose.

The Environment Agency introduced new 'car park' style terms and conditions at its visitor mooring sites in 2013 and this has vastly improved compliance. These additional new arrangements will improve the management of these sites even further.

Rex Walden is the owner/operator of Thames Visitor Moorings. A residential boater and former chair of the Residential Boat Owners' Association (RBOA), Rex is also a member of the Thames Navigation Users Forum (TNUF), a group representing boaters' interests in regular discussions with the Environment Agency.

Rex said:

I use visitor moorings most of the year. I share the challenges and frustrations of boaters but also understand those of the Environment Agency and the wider riverside community. TVM is born out of my experience. It is genuinely 'by boaters for boaters' and is intended to make life easier for all of those who use the river and the organisations who manage it.

I hope our activity will help support the development of new visitor moorings being established and an increase in the number of boats using the river.

The Environment Agency is the navigation authority for the non-tidal Thames, 135 miles of navigable waterway from Cricklade in Wiltshire, near the river's source, to Teddington in southeast London.

Clear signage at the mooring sites sets out the conditions of their use. The only change to the existing conditions under the pilot scheme is that users must register their arrival with Thames Visitor Moorings, online or by phone, rather than with the local lock keeper. All other existing conditions and charges remain the same. At most sites, mooring for up to one day is free, all or part of a second or third day is £5 for each day, the daily rate from then on is £100.

By mooring at any one of the sites, boaters are entering into a contractual agreement to abide by these conditions, which are enforceable under civil proceedings. Any enforcement action will be carried out by NSL Ltd, under existing arrangements, but under the pilot, Thames Visitor Moorings will assist Environment Agency staff to carry out spot checks to identify any non-compliance, details of which will be passed by the Environment Agency to NSL Ltd for them to act on.

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