

BBCA PRESS RELEASE

A member of our community came across the new fees proposal by chance on the Council Meeting Calendar on Wednesday evening and shared amongst the community via our Harbourside Neighbourhood WhatsApp Group.

We knew the fees were under review and had expected an increase but not at these extreme levels with such short notice with further increases the following year. This has been done without any consultation or assessment on how this will impact the entire harbour community including businesses, boat owners, boat dwellers and boat club community hubs.

BBCA, The Cabot Cruising Club and The Bristol Cruising Club have held emergency meetings for everyone to have the chance to voice their concerns. They have been well attended with many new and familiar faces. It was clear there was a lot of shock, dismay and passion from everyone below deck.

Contentious issue at hand

Regarding the Bristol City Council (BCC) Cabinet meeting to be held on 24th January 2023 (4pm), the Harbour Office (HO) has submitted a proposed increased fee schedule for harbour users. Within the HO submission there is an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) which assesses the impact of BCC implementing the increased fees & charges, concluding that there will be no impact to health, education, or standard of living etc to harbour users as a result of the changes.

The EIA contains the following statement “*The increase in fees will enable the service to facilitate the use of all within the Harbour including those with protected characteristics*”

History of Main issue

On the 3rd September 2019 a Capital Investment Programme proposal was submitted with the following statement: “*The Floating Harbour requires investment to improve its outdated facilities and to ensure that they are not only fit for purpose but also welcoming and accessible to all.*”¹ The Cabinet then approved a £885K budget for the installation of new pontoons and the upgrading of facilities. Whereas we have seen the pontoons project been taken forward in 2022²; we have not seen any evidence of facilities improvements brought forward with the awarded budget in 2019. Importantly, back then increases in mooring fees were linked to improvement in facilities and Harbour environment.

Surprisingly, for the cabinet meeting on the 24th Jan 2023 we find an already submitted fee schedule increase, to be applicable from April 2023 that contains very significant increases, which the Cabinet is being asked to approve³. On point 10 and 11 of the HO proposal reads “*The Harbour Authority will be undergoing a series of engagement opportunities with user groups to notify them of the proposed changes. 11. Explanation notes will be advertised both*

¹<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s40741/CABINET%20REPORT%20Harbour%20Infrastructure%20Improvements%20and%20Technologies%20Capital%20Investment%20FINAL%20220819.pdf>

² <https://thebristolmayor.com/2022/10/15/bristols-floating-harbour/>

³<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s79910/CABINET%20REPORT%20Increase%20of%20Fees%20and%20Charges.%20Docks%20and%20Harbours%20FINAL.pdf>

virtually and within the hard copies of the fees and charges to explain each of the proposed charges.

The first Bristol Harbour Recreational Leisure Users Group (BHRUG) meeting since 2019 convened on 9 Jan 2023. BBCA attended this meeting where increasing fees was raised by the HO & consultation with users was assured. Our understanding was that this would be prior to any implementation and would commence in the next BHRUG meeting scheduled for April 2023. No indication was given or implied that the proposal was readily available, or was being imminently submitted for approval & rubber stamping by Cabinet. It was not discussed that submission of the fees would be prior to the next BHRUG meeting, just assurance given by the Authority that the engagement process is starting in April.

Upon learning of the above proposal BBCA contacted all available harbour users & stakeholders (leisure users, ferry companies, scout hut users, clubs, etc) to enquire if they had been informed of the increased fee proposal, of those available they all confirmed that they had not and felt that they have also been denied the opportunity to review and advise on the impact.

As far as BBCA has been able to ascertain, the EIA which has been attached to the Cabinet proposal, has been completed with no investigation, stakeholder engagement nor the smallest attempt at consultation.

Furthermore there has been no scrutinization of the process; the following requirements to any proposal were NOT attached: details of consultation carried out - internal and external; summary of any engagement with scrutiny; risk assessment; eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal; financial Advice; legal advice, nor exempt Information. (see footnote 3 above)

What numbers are we talking about?

See Footnote ⁴

Fees and Charges by Category	Current Charges	Proposed Charges	New / Existing	% Increase
Non-Pontoon Mooring	(117.3 - 148.5)	150.00	New	1 - 27.8 %
Pontoon mooring	(156.20 - 247.1)	250.00	Existing	1 - 60 %
Residential Mooring (annual) *	Unclear	325.00	New	Potentially 177%

⁴<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s78708/Appendix%20A%20-%20Schedule%20of%20Fees%20and%20Charges%2023-24.pdf>

Winter Mooring (Oct-March)	158.1	175.00	Existing	10.7%
Commercial Annual Operating	503.3	1,000.00	Existing	98.7 %
Tug Annual licence	280.8	2,500.00	Existing	790%

People affected by the increase

Of course, boat owners (~ > 500) and navigation harbour users (~ > 500) are immediately, directly and significantly impacted; however, the increase in fees will be transferred to the Harbour visitors, which by the same petition indicate “*Over a 4-day period, the Harbour Festival attracts over 300,000 visitors*”

BBCA conducted a survey in 2022, the results of which have been shared with councillors and the Mayor's office. Survey data indicates there are at least 57 boats being used as homes providing accommodation for 105 people; this includes not just adults but children, elderly, keyworkers and those working in harbour related businesses.

Other points to consider

The Harbour aims to run at cost neutral but has continued to run at loss. Preventing the use of winter moorings over recent years would have contributed to this due to lack of revenue. Winter moorings previously provided a safe haven for boaters from up river who were at risk from flooding during the winter months.

New facilities and essential maintenance of the current ones, showers, toilets, pump out stations, etc; are yet to be experienced by the boating community; some moorings do not have electric or water. Increasing the fees at this stage would be like renting a 1* hotel at 5* hotel prices.

What is Bristol Boaters Community Association asking for:

1. **Stopping the approval of the current proposal** as it has the potential to drive people into homelessness and significantly affect the standard of living of a whole community. A longstanding community that shares the spirit of Bristol Harbour.
2. **An Accommodation Needs Assessment to be carried out.** Bristol City Council as the local housing authority have a legal duty under section 124 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to carry out an Accommodation Needs Assessment of the local boat dwelling community, this includes the duty to consider the provision for the mooring of houseboats; and attached services.

3. **Consultation** with all stakeholders, that have already been identified by the Harbour Review process which is wide, meaningful, transparent, and recorded.

4. **Clarity and justification of costings** of any fee increase proposal. More information needs to be provided to explain the options available regarding each boat/user/group, for example the new Residential Annual Licences (how many are planned?, how will they be allocated? Where did £325 / meter come from, how was this calculated?). Some financial forecasting on how the fee increases applied to 'X' number of boats will generate 'X' amount of income. This projected income over 'X' amount of years the Council proposes to improve XYZ. Currently price increases are unclear.

5. **Evidence and information** that the proposed increases have been based upon need to be accessible and understood.

6. We would like to ensure that the boat owning community and direct users of the harbour will not be the **fundamental sole sustainers of the Harbour Finances**. The source of financial sustainability of the Harbour Finances has to be wider reaching, commiserate with the beneficiaries, and not fundamentally driven by licensees.

What are we doing so far:

Mobilising as a community

Spreading the word ensuring all affected know about the proposals

Communicating with local councillors

Submitting questions and statements to the 24th January Cabinet meeting

Gearing support by social media :

<https://chnge.it/RQDttLTf> via @UKChange

#BristolHarbourCrisis