

Lots Road Neighbourhood Forum

www.lotsroadforum.org

Cllr Elizabeth Campbell
Leader of the Council
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC)
Town Hall
Hornton Street
London W8 7NX

2nd November 2023

Dear Cllr Campbell,

Re: PLIGHT OF THE BOATOWNERS AT CHELSEA REACH AND THE FUTURE OF OLD FERRY WHARF

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of the Lots Road Neighbourhood Forum (LRNF), designated by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for the purposes of Neighbourhood Planning under section 61F and 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended. For the avoidance of doubt, Old Ferry Wharf and the boatowners at Chelsea Reach fall within the Lots Road Neighbourhood Forum Area.

I hope you are already aware of the very sorry plight of the houseboat owners moored at Chelsea Reach, a community with a long and valued history within the Chelsea area. I am attaching a recent briefing note provided by the Chelsea Reach Boatowners Association Committee, which sets out the problems they are facing and the impact this will have on the wider community.

Without rehearsing the arguments here, I am writing to express the grave concerns of the Lots Road Neighbourhood Forum and its constituent bodies for the situation faced by individual boatowners and the consequences their demise will have on the Neighbourhood Forum Area. To rectify this situation, we request that RBKC take the following steps:

- To use all legal, financial and political avenues at your disposal to compel the Chelsea Yacht and Boat Company to end the eviction of boatowners from Chelsea Reach and to respect the terms of the binding arbitration and the November 2022 Determination.
- To return to the exercise of full planning control on the moorings so that the historic appearance of the houseboats can be maintained and to avoid excessively large boats joining the moorings endangering the foreshore and causing nuisance to existing houseboats.
- To use such Planning Controls to ensure that the visual appearance and setting of the historic Chelsea houseboats is not harmed by the introduction of large and tall houseboats, with the use of unsympathetic materials in their construction.
- To use such Planning Controls to ensure that the views both to and from the Thames, the Thames Conservation Area, the surrounding Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings are not harmed by the introduction of excessively large and tall boats.
- To enter urgently into discussion with the CBRA, the Forum and other local organisations on the future of Old Ferry Wharf and Chelsea Reach, so that a long-term

solution can be planned for the period following the expiry of the Chelsea Yacht and Boat Company's current lease extension.

The Forum and its membership stand ready to work with RBKC to secure a brighter future for the boatowners and the broader community of which they are valued members.

I am copying this letter to our Ward Councillors and Cllr Cem Kemahli and Cllr Sof McVeigh.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Jacques
Chair, Lots Road Neighbourhood Forum

SORRY PLIGHT OF HOUSEBOATS

The news is not good for Chelsea Houseboats. Our Community, unique history and the very character of Chelsea Reach is being destroyed and forever. Chelsea Yacht and Boat Company for some time have not been issuing licences (at one time 31 boats were without a licence) despite a November 2022 binding arbitration, called a Determination, that set licence figures for 11 houseboats. The owners of CYBC, the Moffats who are Cheyne Walk residents, regardless of this Determination, seek 10 year unrenovable licences at 10 times the Determination licence cost. (Typically £400,000 -- £600,000).

Our objective is to halt the ruinous damage happening to the community and the obliteration of views of our precious and distinctive riverside.

Passers-by may have noticed the Moffats are now introducing huge, converted ex rubbish hulls (it is understood they have bought 17) because as the Channel 5 programme (Thursdays at 9pm about Kensington and Chelsea) showed, a half houseboat flat rental is £100,000 a year and they can make much more money renting out boats as two flats. Three of these huge houseboats are already berthed. More are in production as seen in photographs of their boatyard at Paglesham taken on 1st October and subsequently. How are they to fit in at Chelsea Reach? By removing existing unlicensed houseboats and their owners. Almost one third of the 60 boats at Chelsea Reach have now left or are facing eviction. Seven boats received eviction orders just last week and no doubt the rest will follow as their licences run out. The very British and rather eccentric charm of the houseboat community, which goes back to just after the war, lies in the quirky individual nature of the houseboats and their owners, reflecting the history of this area which has long been a Chelsea landmark. Notable past residents leave an interesting history trail, lost once their boats are gone.

Eviction of a houseboat is not the same as eviction from a flat by a landlord (sometimes justified for adverse reasons, but not the case here, as the evictees only crime is not meeting the licence demands – see above – and CYBC unilaterally imposed increases in mooring fees). Evictions by the Moffats means finding and moving to a new mooring which is problematic because there are very few moorings available, hazardous by tug, costly and really upsetting, breaking up a home environment and losing neighbours. The many houseboats built on WW2 ex-landing craft cannot be relocated to other rivers by sea, so scrappage is a realistic threat. Matters used to be carried out with verbal agreements ensuring licences could be renewed. No longer. Licence renewal also retained substantial equity should a sale be necessary; a boat with a mooring licence being worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. The Moffats by not renewing licences remove that equity, which for those retired or in straitened circumstances means they may need to seek Council accommodation and social support. Mooring fees according to pre-Moffat issued licences can only be increased by agreement or through adjudication; neither have happened but 9 boats without licences have been bullied into acceptance of the CYBC mooring rates.

But perhaps the more pressing question for those not houseboat owners on this mooring with the ever-present threat of eviction is, as Chelsea residents, as members of the public who have enjoyed the previous somewhat bohemian aspect of the moored houseboats on Chelsea Reach, do you want a line of identical leviathans just for the wealthy rental market at Chelsea Reach? At the bottom of this article is a mock up of how Chelsea Reach may look when all the huge new houseboats have arrived.

The Council Planning Dept has controlled the look of the houseboats moored at Chelsea Reach for the last 40 years and thus Chelsea Reach has retained its individual character, much loved by Chelsea

residents and demonstrated by a petition signed by well over 10,000 residents to retain the status quo. However, they stopped applying planning controls shortly after the Moffats bought the boatyard and took over the River Works Licence (RWL) issued by the Port of London Authority (PLA). We on the houseboats, along with the Chelsea Society and Cheyne Walk Trust, are trying to get the Council to reinstate that control as part of the Thames Conservation Area Management Plan. The PLA hands are tied by the terms of the RWL, despite the PLA Chairman at a public meeting on 4 May 2023 stating that the PLA in future are to consider the welfare of houseboat owners.

A recent Mail on Sunday article on the situation can be here: [Our dream waterfront life is under threat | Daily Mail Online](#) .

Chelsea Boats - View from Battersea Bridge



Original Boats - Pre New Barges



New Barges Current



New Barges Predicted