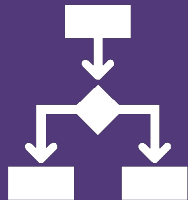


# Boater Community Survey

## Health & Wellbeing Board

Thursday May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2024

**Kate Blackburn Director of Public Health**  
Vicki Lofts, Public Health Specialist,  
Kiersty Rose, Senior Business Insight Analyst



# Boater Survey: Background

Boaters are a seldom heard community



Wanted to build a better understanding



Around **500** boats on the K&A Canal in Wiltshire



Canal and River Trust reported **2,000** individual boat sightings in 2022-23

  
We wanted to find out more



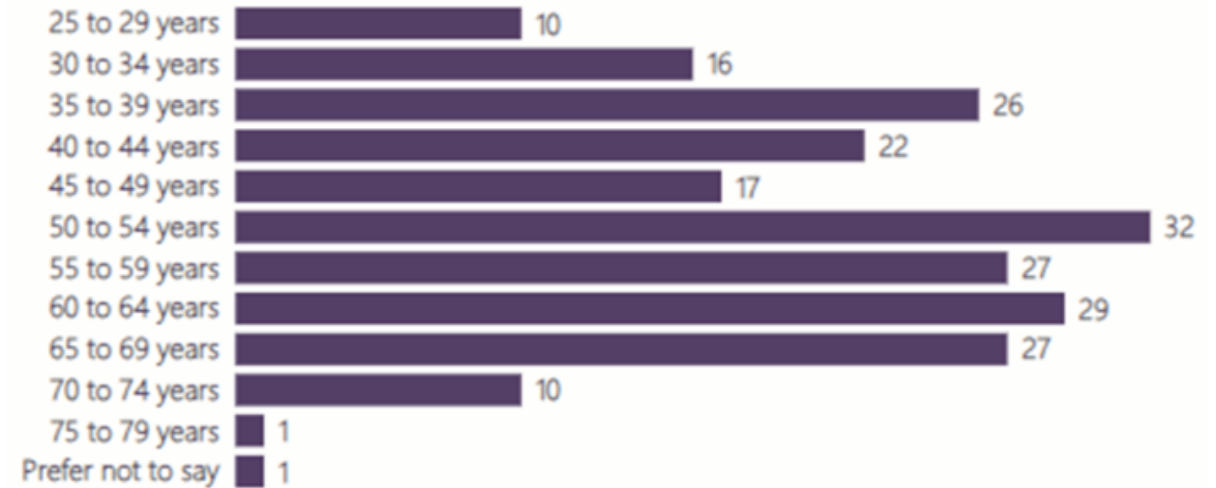
## The Walk

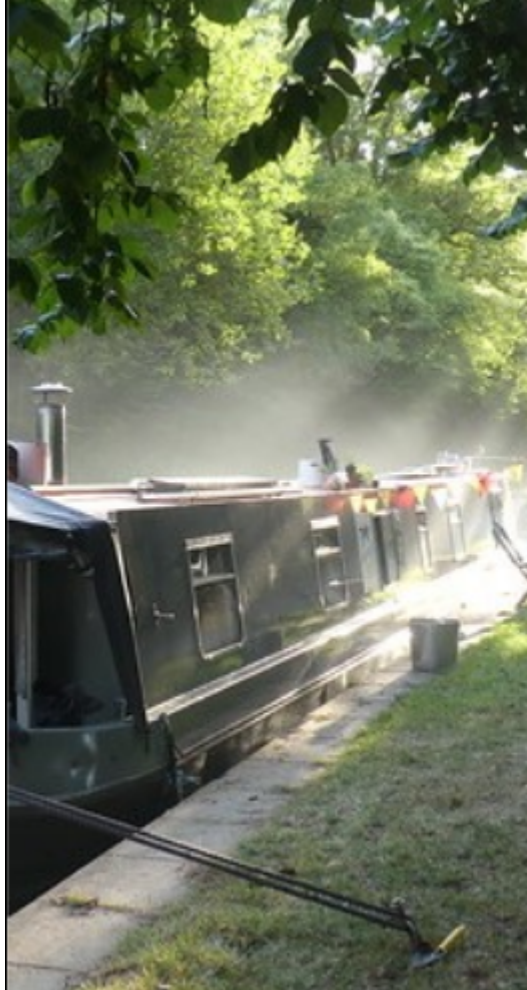
- 40 council and partner staff volunteered
- Weather was kind
- Walkers provided summaries of their conversations, highlighting:
  - The joys of the life on the water and;
  - As well as some challenges
- As a weekday, many boaters were at work
- Walkers feedback on **infrastructure** and **facilities**



## The Survey

- 68 questions across multiple topics
- **218 responses** - around 10% of estimated population
- Most completed online | 8 returned posted | 20 returned to collection points
- Respondents were typically '**older**' than the wider Gypsy, Roma Traveller community
- **89%** lived on their boats all year round
- $\frac{1}{4}$  have lived on boats for >10yrs





## 62.6%

of respondents mentioned the **benefits** of the **environment** and **community** as reasons for living on a boat

## 37.3%

mentioned **cost**

When asked what they liked about living on a boat, respondents portrayed a **desire** for a life integrated with **nature** and **community**, emphasising values like **freedom**, **peace**, and the **beauty** of a simpler more **affordable** lifestyle. The themes revolve around the appreciation of **natural** surroundings, community **bonds**, and a **tranquil** living environment.

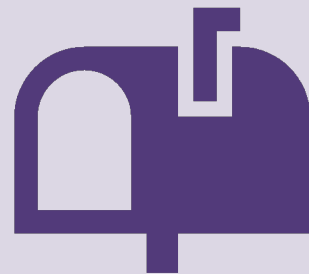
**Challenges** faced in boater life emphasised issues with facility **access**, mooring difficulties, **maintenance**, **cost** concerns and the particular hardship faced during **winter**.

The themes reflect the practical and logistical obstacles in maintaining a boating lifestyle.



## Access to services

**16%** of respondents did not have a way of collecting their post



**63%** said accessing dentistry was either *difficult or very difficult*

**40%** found it *difficult or very difficult* to access mental wellbeing support



Almost **40%** of respondents said accessing clean drinking water *difficult or very difficult*





## General Health

**28.9%** rated their health as fair  
**13.3%** rated as bad or very bad



### Reasons for not registering:

- Moving in and out of the area
- No fixed address
- De-registered for moving onto a boat
- Lack of ID
- Not choosing to



### Health Screening and Invitation Barriers

- Access to postal services
- Recent closure of Post Restante in Bradford on Avon – left many without address

## Health Behaviours

**26.6%** reported smoking

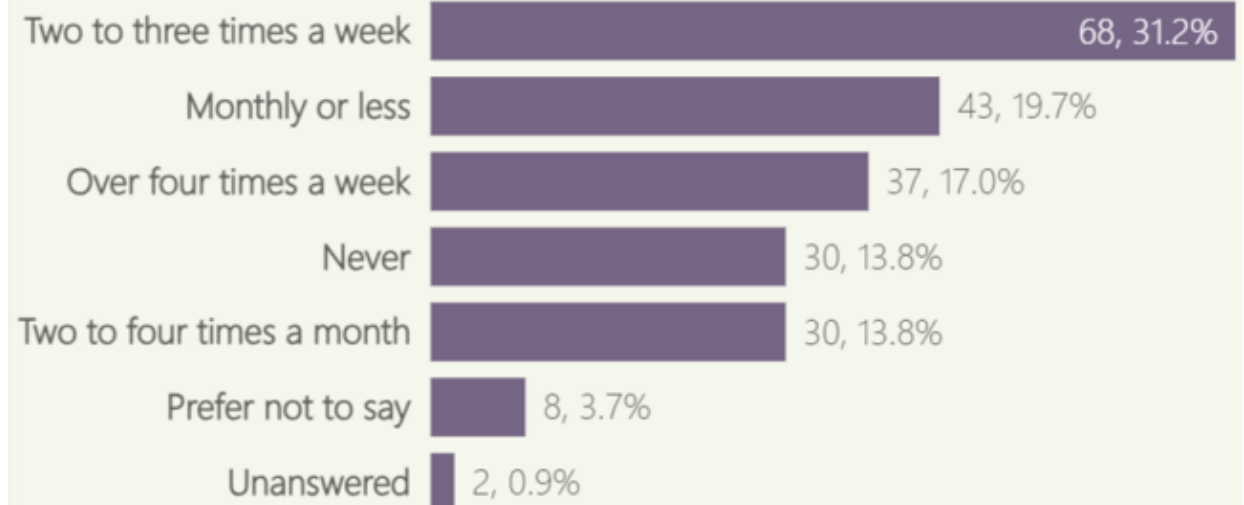
**8.7%** of respondents reported vaping

**13.8%** reported using substances

- most common - cannabis



### How often do you consume a drink containing alcohol?







## Wellbeing

Boaters were asked about their emotional wellbeing and how safe and supported they feel.



**11.5%** of boaters rated their emotional wellbeing as either 'bad' or 'very bad'.

**60%**

of boaters feel lonely or isolated 'some of the time' or 'all of the time'.



## Facilities

### Top 3 most important access needs



**85.8%**

Of respondents feel that safety and security is important



**85.2%**

feel that ease of access and condition of the canal bank is important



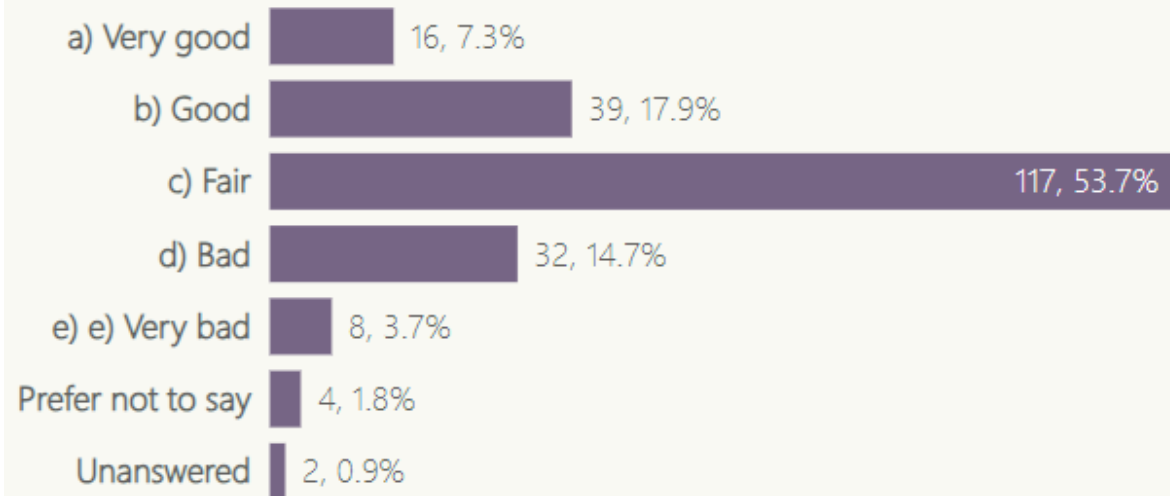
**72.2%**

view services such as sewerage and rubbish as important

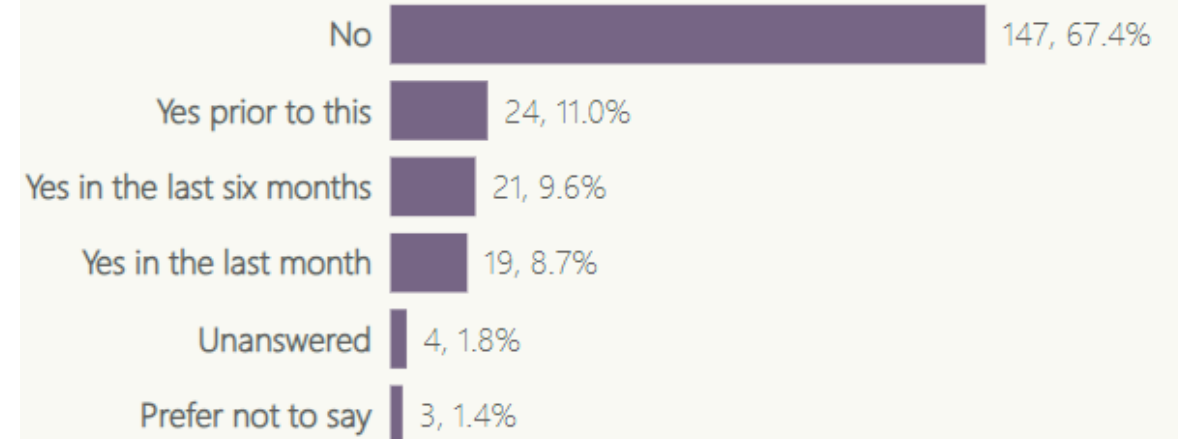
**37%** said that accessing clean drinking water was difficult or very difficult

## Finances

How would you rate your finances?



Have you ever been hungry but not eaten because you couldn't afford or get access to food?



### Challenges:

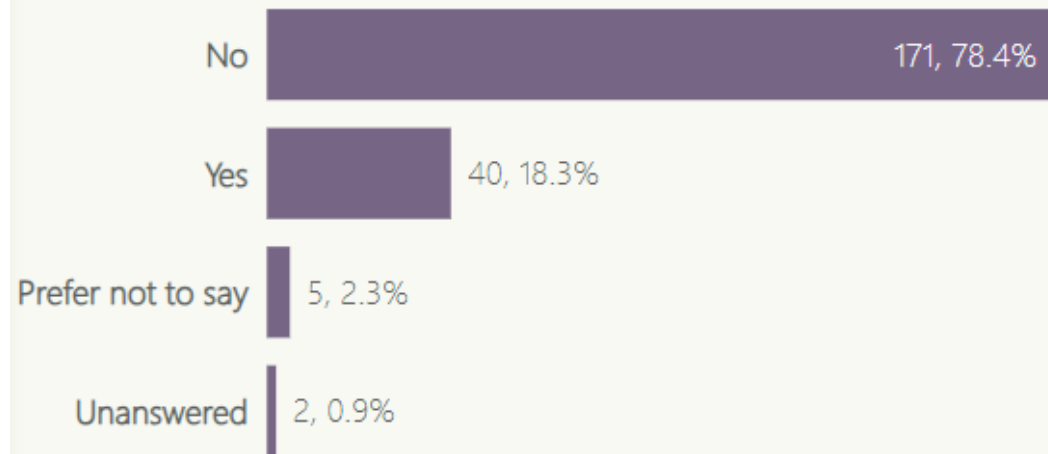
Online banking and accessing cash

Around **30%** have gone **hungry**; only **17%** used a foodbank or community fridge

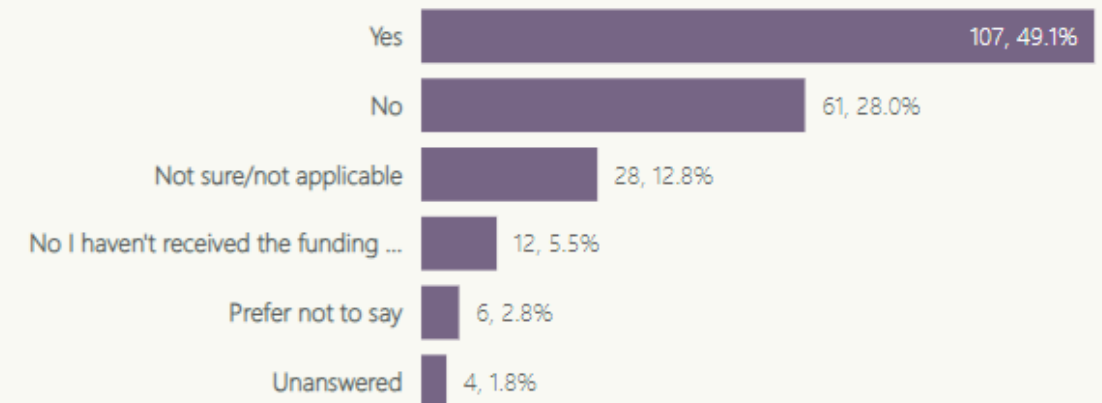
Changes to the administration of the support fund is underway

## Finances

Do you receive statutory benefits?



Have you been able to apply for and receive the alternative funding versions of the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme, and £200 Alternative Fuels Payment due to your home mooring being non-residential?



201 boaters supported by HSF4 payments in 2023/24, receiving £400, topped up by a further £200

# Boater Survey: Recommendations

## Recommendations:

Consider ways to enable Boaters to have improved access to clean water and waste collection

Explore opportunities for Boaters to access boat repair services or support

Raise awareness of stop smoking support within the Boating community

Increase engagement and awareness of support groups for communities to access; focus on male-based support

Understand the barriers to access dentistry services and explore development of pathways to increase accessibility

Work to increase access to foodbanks and break down barriers around the negative perception of using such services

