



“They pollute the environment!”

Some common boater myths scuppered

“They pollute the environment”

No-one, house-dweller or boater, gets their energy without environmental cost. The difference with boaters is that we are self-sufficient, therefore we are very frugal with electricity. We know exactly how much we are using. Try running your entire house off two car batteries.

This applies to water and heating too. Boaters with stoves usually use smokeless coal (even though it is not a legal requirement), and because we have a tiny space to heat, we use nowhere near as much as a house would.

Many boaters make extra electricity using wind generators or solar panels, making their boats greener and cleaner than the newest houses built today.

“They discharge effluent into the river”

Most boats have toilets: either a chemical toilet or a traditional loo with a holding tank. Both are emptied safely using the facilities at Jesus Green pump-out station. We do not tip buckets of sewage overboard!

Washing up water usually goes into the river, which is why most boaters use biodegradable detergent. Compare this with some roads in Cambridge where the drains flush straight into the Cam (eg. Riverside), contaminating it with oil, detergent from washed cars and any toxic substance which happens to be there.

In fact most boaters fish rubbish out of the river, and off the commons. However, if you see a boater litter the river or a common we would encourage you to take the name of the boat and notify the authorities.

“They are layabouts who live off the dole”

Layabouts? Have you ever had to untie a boat's frozen ropes with numb hands in the middle of February, then stand for an hour in the biting wind before work, just so you can get water?

Most boaters are professionals who work in Cambridge. We are engineers, plumbers, designers, nurses, researchers, teachers, University employees... some of us can even write our own names!

Many of us have low-paid jobs, which makes living on a boat a more affordable and environmentally-friendly option than driving miles to work every day. Remember: Cambridge needs people who cannot afford to live in Cambridge.

“They don't pay their way”

At the moment moored boats in Cambridge aren't liable for council tax. However, we pay a river licence. For a 60ft boat this is currently £450 per year. The council tax for a Band C property in Cambridge is £995 per year – just over twice as much. The resident of a Band C house in Cambridge will have very much more than twice the living space of a 60ft boat, as well as other privileges, such as an address!

That being said, most boaters would be prepared to pay a reasonable additional sum for a permanent, secure mooring in Cambridge. But the river should not become a playground only for wealthy individuals who already own a home.

“Their engines are noisy”

The engines of most boats make less noise than the average lawnmower. And they are used about as often. Most boaters use their engines to charge batteries, and running engines isn't something we want to do every day. Would you complain about a neighbour who used a lawnmower?

“The boats are ugly”

The vast majority of boaters look after their homes, as any homeowner does. Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but we think that a line of canal boats looks more beautiful than any housing estate in the city. The vast majority of riverside walkers agrees with us.

Moreover, boats make up one of the last vestiges of a sense of community and real diversity in Britain (compare and contrast the hundreds of 'luxury apartments' going up in Cambridge, whose style is uniform and whose occupants rarely exchange words).

Boats augment, rather than denigrate, the river environment. They are a key ingredient in the industrial history of Britain; no wonder tourists like them so much. And their presence improves safety for those walking along the towpath at night.

The river is a living environment and a fantastic asset for everyone, including boat-dwellers. It would be a shame if it merely became a duck pond or a rowing lake.

Any other questions...

...feel free to talk to a boater on the towpath – you'll find that we're more approachable than swans!