



Democratic Services

Location: Phase II
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**To: COUNCILLOR JONATHAN BIANCO
CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES
& PROPERTY**

c.c. All Members of the Residents Services Select Committee
c.c. Dan Kennedy – Corporate Director Residents Services
c.c. Richard Mortimer – Residents Services

Date: 13 March 2026

Non-Key Decision request

Form D

**DISPOSAL OF NARROW BOATS (PISCES & HILLINGDON STAR)
TO HILLINGDON NARROW BOATS CHARITY**

Dear Cabinet Members,

Attached is a report requesting that a decision be made by you as an individual Cabinet Member. Democratic Services confirm that this is not a key decision, as such, the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 notice period does not apply.

You should take a decision **on or after Monday 23 March 2026** in order to meet Constitutional requirements about publication of decisions that are to be made. You may wish to discuss the report with the Corporate Director before it is made. Please indicate your decision on the duplicate memo supplied and return it to me when you have made your decision. I will then arrange for the formal notice of decision to be published.

Ryan Dell
Democratic Services

Title of Report: Disposal of Narrow Boats (Pisces & Hillingdon Star) to Hillingdon Narrow Boats Charity

Decision made:

Reasons for your decision: (e.g. as stated in report)

Alternatives considered and rejected: (e.g. as stated in report)

Signed Date.....

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property

DISPOSAL OF NARROW BOATS (PISCES & HILLINGDON STAR) TO HILLINGDON NARROW BOATS CHARITY

Cabinet Member & Portfolio	Councillor Jonathan Bianco – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property
Responsible Officer	Daniel Kennedy – Residents Services
Report Author & Directorate	Richard Mortimer – Residents Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>In 1991, the Council established an independent entity called Hillingdon Narrow Boats Association (now a registered charity) as part of its approach towards sustaining the long-term provision of community-based boating and leisure activities for local people including the more vulnerable. The Association were given the use of two narrow boats (Pisces & Hillingdon Star) with responsibility for their operation and maintenance. Their ownership was retained by the Council. The boats are now redundant, past their normal life expectancy and require substantial works to make them compliant with statutory requirements and useable for community trips. Further history about the Association and their objectives has been provided by them at Appendix 1.</p> <p>For the Association to justify the costs for these works, they require ownership to be transferred to them. Otherwise, the works are not viable, and the boats will need to be removed from the water and scrapped which is likely to cost the Council more than selling them at nil value. It will also result in the loss of a well-used social amenity for local Hillingdon residents.</p> <p>A sale at nil value had previously been put forward but was paused due to internal restructuring and a change in leadership within the Association. They now wish to proceed with the proposed transfer which will enable them to restore both boats and put them back into use.</p>
Putting our Residents First Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: Enjoy access to green spaces, leisure activities, culture and arts</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Thriving, Healthy Households</p>
Financial Cost	Approval of the sale of the two narrow boats will result in nil costs. However, if they are not removed and need to be scrapped, then the Council will most likely incur costs for their removal and disposal.

Select Committee	Residents' Services Select Committee
Ward	N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property:

- 1) Approves the transfer at nil value which allows the charity supported by its volunteers to invest in renovation works to extend the longevity and usefulness of the two boats; and
- 2) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Residents Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property, to make any further necessary decisions with regards to the sale of these boats.

Reasons for recommendations

Disposal of these narrow boats is recommended for the following reasons –

1. The boats have not been in use for approximately two years and need significant investment to become compliant for use on public waterways.
2. The longer these boats are left, the more they will deteriorate meaning the costs of renovation and making compliant will only increase.
3. Selling the boats to the Association whose aims and objectives were established by the Council to provide a broad cross section of residents with access to boat trips/leisure activities and learnings could be viewed as providing a greater community benefit than a potential (albeit modest) capital receipt.
4. From a valuation perspective, Harefield Marine Agents have indicated that the costs of repairing the boats would be greater than their finished value. However, for a DIY (do-it-yourself) project, they could have a nominal value although the costs of removal from the water, paying storage and sales fee costs is likely to result in a much lower net figure. Given the nominal potential receipt compared to the Association's volunteers restoring them, the social value of putting them back into community use could be considered as being much greater.

Alternative options considered/ risk management

Alternative options which have been considered include -

- 1) **Open Market Disposal** – whilst this may result in a nominal receipt if the right DIY buyer could be found, it will result in the loss of community use which has been available since 1991 and would impact the longer-term sustainability of the charity. There are also on costs such as sales fees, storage and security that would erode this sum over time if a sale were to be sought.
- 2) **Scrappage** – this is likely to come at a cost to the Council and would involve their removal from the water, transport, and disposal charges. It is also, the least sustainable option considering the charity would be able to renovate both boats and extend their useful life.
- 3) **Refurbish Directly & Sell** – restoring Pisces is likely to cost in the order of £25-30,000 and Hillingdon Star is estimated at £15,000. As the cost of the works would exceed the value of the renovated boats, this option is not viable.

- 4) **Do Nothing** – this is not a viable option as the boats are unlicensed and should be removed from the public waterways if left to deteriorate. Removal costs and storage costs would further increase cost liability to the Council.

Risk Management

1. Any transfer of large assets at nil value will be open to scrutiny. Therefore, valuations have been sought to confirm their current market value.
2. Hillingdon Narrow Boats Association is a charity set up by the Council with its aims and objectives being to provide leisure boat experiences to residents and those vulnerable and/or deprived in our community. Therefore, it could be argued that these wider benefits outweigh the potential capital receipt that may be derived.
3. As the boats are not land assets, they are not subject to S123 Local Government Act 1972 best value requirements.

Democratic compliance/ previous authority

Hillingdon's Constitution delegates authority to the Corporate Director for sales below £10,000. However, the Corporate Director is able to refer such decisions under delegated authority to the Cabinet Member, such as where they are in the public interest.

Select Committee comments

Not at this stage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Further supporting information relating to the Hillingdon Narrow Boats Association is set out in **Appendix 1**, prepared by the Association, that sets out their history, aims, and objectives.

Financial Implications

The report seeks approval to transfer ownership of the two narrowboats (Pisces and Hillingdon Star) to Hillingdon Narrow Boats Association at nil consideration. Officers have confirmed, following discussion with the Chief Accountant, that the vessels are not currently recorded as individual assets on the Council's fixed asset register. Historically they were treated as plant and machinery assets and have exceeded their useful economic life. On review, it has been confirmed that they hold no residual carrying value for accounting purposes. As a result, there is no loss on disposal arising from the proposed transfer at nil value, no impact on the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), and no impact on borrowing or Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).

The proposed disposal at nil value results in no capital receipt and no disposal costs to the Council, subject to legal completion. If the transfer does not proceed, the Council would incur costs associated with removal of the vessels from the water, transportation, storage, and scrapping or disposal. These costs are expected to exceed any modest net receipt achievable via open market disposal, particularly once sales fees, storage, and security costs are taken into account. In addition, the longer the boats remain unused and unlicensed, the greater the risk of deterioration and associated liability.

Independent advice suggests that restoration costs exceed the post-restoration market value of the vessels. Open market disposal could potentially generate up to £5,000 per vessel in a DIY

sale scenario; however, after associated costs, the net financial benefit to the Council would likely be minimal. The proposed transfer enables the charity to assume responsibility for restoration costs and future liabilities, thereby removing financial exposure from the Council while preserving community benefit. Although the transaction is at nil value, it does not fall within Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 best consideration requirements, as the vessels are not land assets.

Upon transfer, all future maintenance, compliance, licensing, and restoration costs will fall to the charity rather than the Council. This removes ongoing financial liability from the Council's balance sheet and revenue budgets.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users, and communities

Disposing of the two boats to Hillingdon Narrow Boats Association will provide them with an opportunity to use their voluntary labour and own capital to invest in getting these boats into operational use again. This not only allows the Association to offer a wider fleet but also have a greater impact in the community by being able to offer increased user capacity and participation for residents.

Consultation & Engagement carried out (or required)

Consultation has taken place with the Association.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting the recommendations to approve the transfer of the narrow boats Pisces and Hillingdon Star to Hillingdon Narrow Boats Association at net value.

Furthermore, it is noted that the narrow boats are not recorded on the Council's fixed asset register, have fully exceeded their useful economic life and hold no residual value. The disposal at nil value will result in no loss on disposal and no impact on the Council's capital financing requirement, borrowing, or minimum revenue provision. While independent estimates suggest a gross sale value of £5k per narrow boat may be achievable in a DIY market scenario, associated sales, storage, and disposal costs would reduce the sale receipt to a minimum or result in no financial gain.

Additionally, it is noted the Council would face capital costs should it to retain these narrowboats, costs estimated to be up to £30k for Pisces and £15k for Hillingdon Star to make them compliant and operational. The proposed transfer ensures that all future maintenance, licensing, compliance, and capital investment will be fully met by the Hillingdon Narrow Boat Association, removing any direct financial impact to the Council, while safeguarding the continued community use.

Legal

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with a general power of competence, enabling it to do anything that an individual may lawfully do, unless expressly restricted by

legislation. This includes the ability to dispose of assets or chattels where the Council considers such action to be for the benefit of the authority, its area, or persons residing or present within that area. The power may be exercised for a commercial purpose, for a charge, or without charge.

In this context, the Council is legally empowered to approve the transfer of the two narrowboats to the charity at nil value where it is satisfied that the transfer will deliver community benefit. A nil-value transfer will enable the charity—supported by its volunteers—to focus its resources on essential renovation works, thereby extending the operational lifespan of the vessels and supporting their continued community use. Ongoing operation of the boats by a local charity provides clear social value and avoids potential future costs to the Council, including storage, removal or scrapping.

The transfer should be documented through an appropriate legal agreement.

Legal Services confirm that there are no legal impediments to proceeding with the proposed recommendations. The Council's legal team will continue to advise on and support the preparation of any subsequent agreements required.

Comments from other relevant service areas

Internal engagement with Fleet Management, Capital Programme Works Services, Finance and Legal has been undertaken which has informed aspects of this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

APPENDIX 1 - Hillingdon Narrowboats Association (Pisces & Hillingdon Star)



HILLINGDON NARROWBOATS
— ASSOCIATION —
Affordable boating for the community

Narrowboats PISCES and STAR

Following the recent request from officers as to reasons why HNA is currently the custodian of the Council's narrowboats and why a transfer of ownership was requested, please consider this note, which also further addresses the agreement to transfer.

We know Pisces and Hillingdon Star (to give it its full name) were purchased and operated directly by Hillingdon Council, under the banner of 'Hillingdon Narrowboats,' pursuant to the Council's duty to provide such services to its residents. We believe it was a joint venture between the Youth Services and Education services. This operated from above Cowley Lock, beside a council facility.

As part of rationalisation at the Council, it was decided that 'Hillingdon Narrowboats', as it was, should continue as a charity Hillingdon Narrowboats Association, to take over the running of the boats for community purposes, drafting articles of Association accordingly, which the Council established as a company limited by guarantee and HNA was later registered as a charity.

The Council drew up the incorporation documents etc. (<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/02615065>). The date of incorporation was 28 May 1991. The original registered office was West Drayton Youth Centre, Harmondsworth Road. The signatures witnessed by Paul Levy of the Council at the Hillingdon Council offices in Uxbridge on 12 March 1991.

Pisces and Star passed into the control of the charity, but the ownership remained with the council. The day to day running and maintenance has been met by HNA, though serious repairs have sometimes received a grant from the council to partly cover costs involved.

In the earliest available accounts at Companies House (without payment of a fee) for period ending 30 June 1994 it reads: 'Certain operational staff are provided by arrangement with the London Borough of Hillingdon' and 'The Accounts received reflect, in grants received, the expected grant allowed by [LBH], which has been applied to the servicing of employment contracts for the project manager and bookings manager.'

At some point late last century the mooring at Cowley was required for use by 'Land and Water' as a base for the new gravel boats, which were taking about 98 tons, per trip, from Denham to West Drayton cement factory.

It meant that Hillingdon Narrowboats (Association) needed to find another base. The Council approached developers who were building and converting at Royal Quays and the 'Longroom' by Coppermill Lock. Around the end of last century, the developers, as part of the grant of planning permission, were required to construct The Boathouse and wharf and make provision for

moorings for HNA. HNA has operated from there from then on with Pisces and Hillingdon Star and our other boats.

It appears that HBC gave grants to HNA annually until about 2012.

At some point in or about 2007 discussions started in relation to the transfer of ownership of Pisces & Star, but in essence purchase was never a realistic option, and neither was the prospect of a leasing arrangement, it seems. HBC realised that they had no interest in keeping the boats and decided to draft the documents to transfer ownership to HNA for nil consideration, leading to the email from Selina Wan, property lawyer at HBC, of 8 August 2022, which begins: "We understand that it has been agreed to transfer the boats Pisces...and Star...to Hillingdon Narrowboats Association." and attaching the relevant documentation presumably drafted by her in accordance with her instructions.

HNA now wishes to execute the agreement based on the draft documents from August 2022.

We have continued to maintain the boats within our limited means - recently Star has been fitted with a new engine, obviously the most important element in a boat, and is currently being refitted, so is out of use.

HNA continues to provide a service to Hillingdon residents, consistent with the Council's general obligations. Those involved now are all volunteers – we cannot afford staff, currently, but we are actively seeking funding, and our accounts are slowly on the rise.

The 'History' page of our website <https://hna.org.uk/history/> records:

'Hillingdon Council acquired 'Pisces,' a former working boat, for use by their Youth Service as a camping boat during the 1960's. The Youth Service also acquired an adventure base in North Wales and a sailing base in Harefield. Throughout the borough there were several other community facilities, workshops, theatres youth clubs etc. all of which were maintained and managed by council employees.

All the facilities enjoyed council support, and most expanded their provision. The narrowboat service commissioned the building of two 50-foot boats to meet increasing popular demand.

Pisces was upgraded by fitting a wooden cabin and providing permanent bunks and a fully equipped galley area. One of the 50ft boats 'Gemini 1' was similarly fitted out as a motorboat and the other 'Gemini 2' was left open as a camping boat to be towed as a butty.

The use of the boats was primarily aimed at the youth service but gradually extended to all community groups including local scouts and other community organisations. Adult groups began to use the boats for day trips whilst the younger groups went on residential trips.

Circuit Cruises were popular with the youth groups whereby the boat would travel far and wide throughout the country and the youngsters were transported by council vehicles to spend a week or more on different canals.

The staffing of the boat service was provided by the council and comprised a project Organiser, two boat men or general assistants, and administration was done by staff in the council's youth service. Leaders of groups were invited to be trained as steerers so that they could take out their own groups. For any group without a Hillingdon trained steerer, the council narrowboat staff would take them out.

Maintenance was carried out by council staff and local contractors and came from the youth service budget. Charges were levied for use of the boats to recoup some of the running costs, but the general council ethic was to keep the costs for the users at a minimum so that those on limited income could have the experience of using the canals.

The primary emphasis of the narrowboat service was to educate and assist in social development. To that end the project organiser was a qualified teacher, all staff were employed by the youth service. During the Mid 1980's when councils began to suffer budget cuts, the youth service facilitated the formation of groups of volunteers to continue the operation of the various centres, managed by a Youth Service organiser. For the Narrowboats, the volunteer group was primarily formed by people who had become trained as steerers. They took on the administration tasks, shared the steering for other groups, and were directed to liaise with the Project Organiser. Later they were urged to form into a registered charity and then to manage the Project Organiser, eventually taking on the complete operation of the boats.

Thus, the Hillingdon Narrowboats Association was formed and has continued to operate the narrowboat service. The 50ft boats were sold and a new 70ft was built {Hillingdon Star}. An additional 70ft boat {Spirit} equipped for wheelchair access was funded by the Stockley Park Development group which gave us three 70ft boats and made day trips for people with mobility problems easier.

The Association (HNA) became a registered charity and continues to operate the boats without {significant} funding from the council. HNA now must exist on donations and revenue from boat use.

Today, HNA have five boats: Pisces our flag ship, Star, Spirit (our wheelchair accessible boat), and Théo, all these boats are full length i.e. over 70' long and sleep up to 12 passengers. We also have Reg named after our treasurer who left us some money when he passed away, this is a day boat suitable for day trips and less experienced user.'