



# Uber Boat by Thames Clipper All Day Service

CIL Funding Request Proposal to LBBB – November 2023





## November 2023

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Uber Boat by Thames Clipper (UBTC) services have now operated a peak weekday (06:30am-11:00am and 5:15pm-11:45pm) and all-day weekend service (08:10am – midnight) at Barking Riverside since April 2022; successfully carrying over 100,000 passengers in the first year of service. Despite this, following the pandemic and lockdowns, work patterns have fundamentally changed and therefore the peak only service in the week is less able to meet the demands of residents, workers and visitors.
- 1.2. BRL have therefore approached UBTC to see if they are willing to also start operating an all-day service in the week, providing an improved service for residents of the borough, boost visitor numbers and improve local business trading conditions. Unfortunately, it is too early in the development of Barking Riverside for an all-day service to be commercially viable over the next 2-3 years without a subsidy.
- 1.3. UBTC are in the process of procuring three new boats by February 2024 (next generation Hybrid versions). They would be willing to change their current plans (to only enhance their West London routes) and start servicing Barking Riverside hourly during the off-peak in the week if BRL made a financial contribution.
- 1.4. BRL is not able to fully fund this option at the current time and is seeking funding partners to secure the all-day weekday service, including London Borough of Barking & Dagenham (LBBD), GLA and other riverside developers. BRL hope that securing these additional boats will contribute to achieving many of the council's manifesto pledges for the borough's residents and businesses, as well as the delivery of BRL's Thames Futures objectives for Thames Ward residents.
- 1.5. The cost of the contribution being asked for by UBTC is £1.026m. Of that, BRL would like to apply for up to £450,000 (44%) CIL contributions from LBBD, payable in two or three instalments. This commitment from the council would allow detailed negotiations to be entered into with UBTC and other potential funders, giving a genuine chance of an all-day service operating to and from Barking Riverside by Spring 2024.

## 2. Background / Current Position

- 2.1. In 2022 LBBD contributed £600,000 (CIL contribution) towards BRL's £7m investment in the pier and pontoon project at Barking Riverside, enabling the commencement of the UBTC services.
- 2.2. This resulted in a 15-year operational agreement between BRL and UBTC for UBTC to operate their services from the Barking Riverside Pier. Services run half hourly to and from Barking between 0625 and 1100 in the morning on a Monday to Friday; and then again from 1715 in the evening until 2350. At weekends they operate all day at half hourly intervals from 0800 to midnight. This frequency is in line with the service that has been in place at Woolwich for many years.
- 2.3. The introduction of the Riverbus has been a success with over 100,000 passengers boarding or alighting at Barking Riverside in the first year. BRL continues to subsidise this service for a five-year period, helping residents and visitors to enjoy the service on a peak basis during the week and all-day at weekends.
- 2.4. There has always been a vision from both parties to extend this service to an 'all day, every day' service, but only once the demand can support such a service.



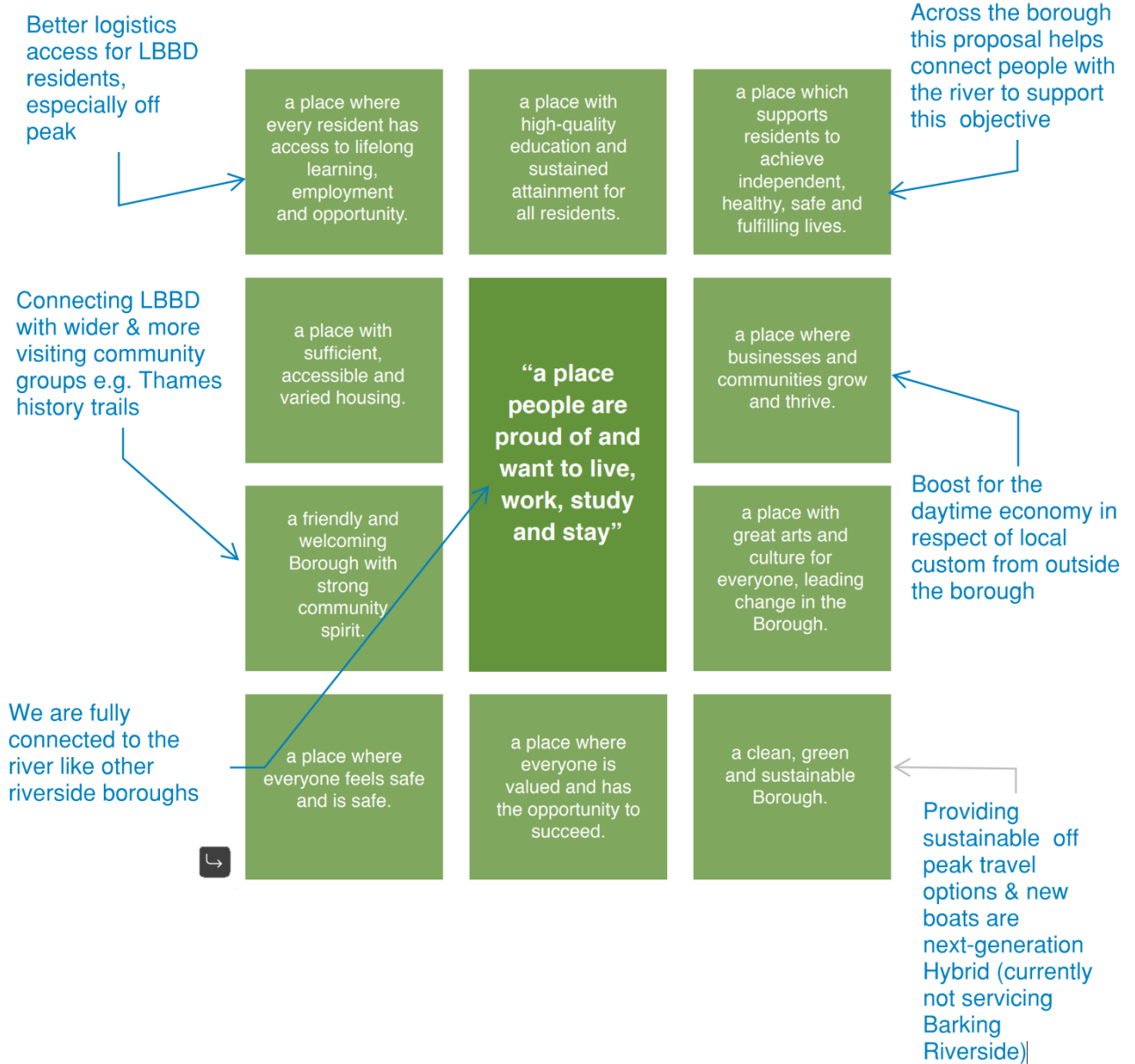
- 2.5. This amenity also helps the visibility and promotion of the Barking Riverside development and access to the borough for potential new residents, complimenting the London Overground station, bus and cycling facilities to create a genuine transport hub; ahead of the maturity of the development. Plot developers are also offering season tickets on UBTC services to potential home purchasers.



- 2.6. Despite this success, there are very clear signs that only offering a peak service during the week results in:
- A lack of demand for weekday services (nearly half - 47% - of 2023 embarkations from Barking happen at weekends, where there is an all-day service);
  - A lack of confidence in the reliability of the service (e.g. "if the last boat doesn't show up in the morning I'll be stuck / first in the evening I'll be late");
  - Families regularly walking around the Barking Riverside development, who have arrived from within the borough to take the boat, to discover it does not operate off-peak, and;
  - Local businesses (e.g. street food traders) around the pier / station struggling to get any business outside of peak time.
- 2.7. BRL approached UBTC to in early 2023 to see if the future intended off-peak service extension in the week could be accelerated. UBTC has considered this, but are adamant that, while they are happy with the way that the service is progressing, it is too early to extend the service without some additional financial support.
- 2.8. UBTC have requested an amount equivalent to 57,000 extra boarding passengers a year for three years, equating to a contribution of £1.026m.
- 2.9. This amount of investment is not possible for BRL to fully cover (on top of the £7m project to open the service and an ongoing operational subsidy, along with, presently, the circa £1m refurbishment works programme to the jetty, replacing worn out concrete beams). Therefore, through a combination of further negotiation with UBTC and exploring part-funding partners, we are seeing if a solution can be found.

### 3. The Positive Impacts of Delivering an All-day Service

- 3.1. From a strategic perspective, investing in an off-peak weekday timetable positively contributes to LBBD's manifesto (2017-2037), illustrated in Figure 1 below, by providing better connected, healthier and more sustainable access and opportunity for the Borough's residents and businesses. It also provides an improved experience for visitors and better promotion of the borough to potential visitors.

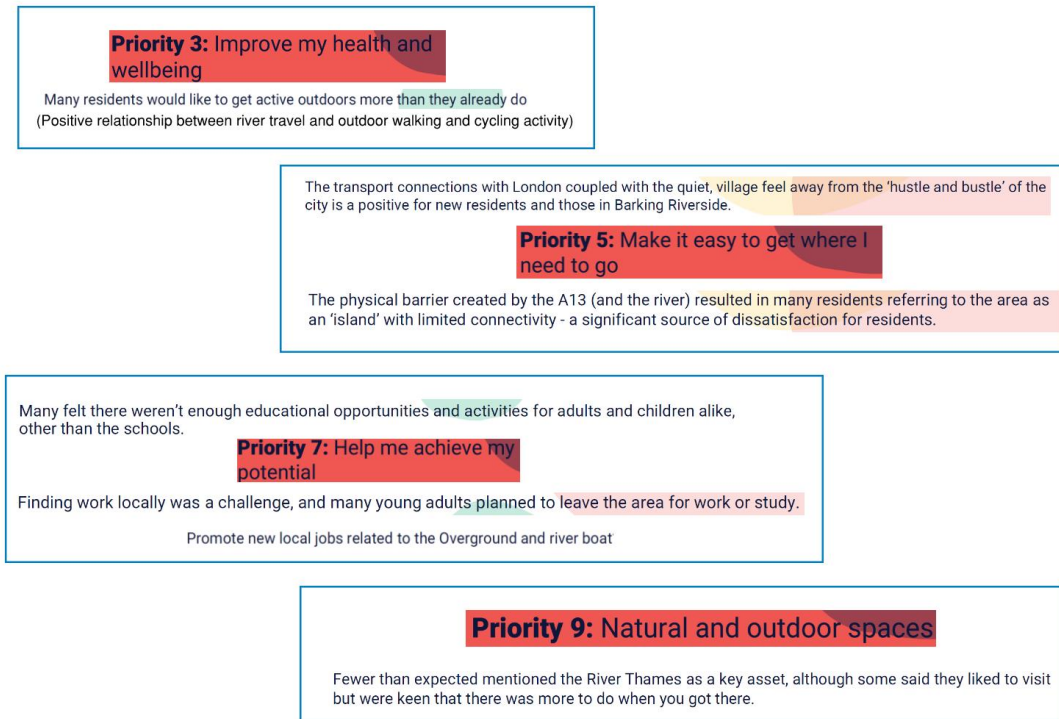


**Fig. 1 – LBBB Manifesto; “by 2037 Barking and Dagenham will be.....”**

- 3.2. The positive outcomes generated by an all-day service also link directly to BRL’s Thames Futures project, designed to understand what residents really want for the future of Thames Ward.
- 3.3. The following extracts (shown in Figure 2) from the Thames Futures 2022 Report clearly link to a positive contribution - across nine Priority Areas that are important to local residents - that could be made via further investment in UBTC. Linked to this, these



themes also support priority areas for Barking Riverside’s Health Strategy (2018 and Draft 2023 versions):



**Fig. 2 – Thames Futures (2022) Report**

3.4. From a practical perspective, the commencement of an all-day weekday service would have the following near-term effects:

**Schools** – The clipper service has supported local schools (in only a term and a half since April 2023 we have given away 250 UBTC tickets) and we want to continue and grow this. One key barrier is the timing of the weekday service with Schools utilising the boat unable to get a return service and be back by home time (first boat back does not arrive until 1715) An all-day serviced would significantly increase the ability for schools to use the service especially for trips to Woolwich and Greenwich that are easier to get to by boat than other transport links.

**Borough Resident Explorers** – particularly during the school holiday periods ( there are families and potential leisure trip users from around the borough who arrive at the Pier (usually early afternoon), in the expectation of going on the boat to visit other parts of London. Instead they are told that there is no boat until 1715 and, invariably, they leave disappointed.

**Day-trippers to Barking** – will be able to arrive by boat in the morning, visit, explore, and use and support local businesses, with the certainty that there will be a return service (boats cease in the morning at the moment before 11am).

**Part-time work and education opportunities to / from Woolwich and Greenwich** – an all-day service will encourage more residents (of LBBB and LB Greenwich) to seek opportunities that are currently prohibitive from a travel perspective, only being able to travel one way by boat.

**Professional Visits to Site** -

There are a number of opportunities to bring professional groups and investors to Barking Riverside and the boat is a key mode of transport that should be used. However these trips are inevitably in the week and only last a few hours, making travel by boat often unviable.

#### 4. The Request for Joint Funding

- 4.1. In 2021, LBBB committed to £600k of CIL funding to help make the £7m UBTC service operational at the pier at Barking Riverside in 2022. Since then, nearly 170,000 customers have boarded or alighted services using the pier.
- 4.2. UBTC are in the process of procuring three new hybrid boats (by February 2024 – see Figure 4) to increase the frequency of service in West London (current growth are for river traffic). However, they have said they are willing to revisit these plans and use the deployment of the new boats to create a timetable change in April 2024, positively affecting Barking Riverside. A extended service, offering an hourly service to/from central London would be introduced between 11am and 5pm Monday -Friday (currently not served).

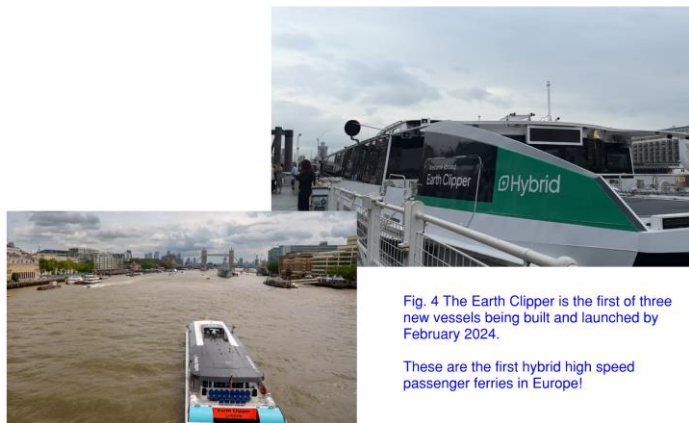
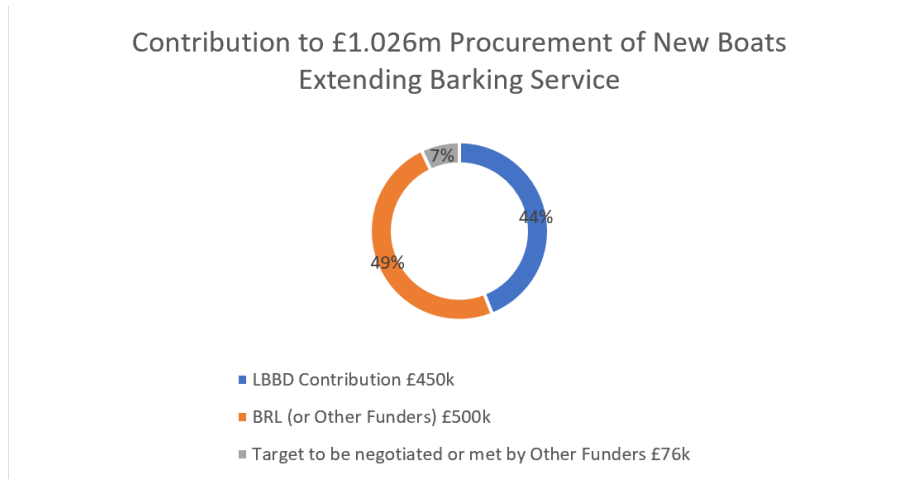


Fig. 4 The Earth Clipper is the first of three new vessels being built and launched by February 2024.

These are the first hybrid high speed passenger ferries in Europe!



4.3. To consider delivering the timetable changes to Barking Riverside earlier than forecast, they have requested a contribution of £1.026m. Figure 3 shows how it is proposed that this level of contribution could be met.



**Fig. 3 – Proposed Breakdown of Funding**

4.4. This CIL request from BRL to LBBD is £450,000, ideally payable as one lump sum in 2024 (but could be in two or three annual instalments if this is not possible), towards this contribution. BRL are in the process of engaging with other third-party funders to help contribute towards its payment for the remainder.

4.5. BRL will continue to try negotiating the full contribution amount with UBTC, or a slightly different deal that reduces contributions if demand picks up more than expected. However, UBTC have also made it clear that an eastern extension is not part of their existing short-term plans at all; their motivation to negotiate will be limited.

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