**Ecology Case Study: Ham Wharf**

*Ecology Building Society was delighted to lend the funding for a project providing fair, equitable and sustainable living for 22 people across 17 residential moorings on the River Brent, Brentford, West London.*

Traditionally a working-class town Brentford had historically been a longstanding meeting point for narrowboaters on their journey to the capital from the North delivering and picking up goods. A small group of boaters settled on the stretch opposite Syon Park in the early 1980s, which they coined Ham Wharf. At that time the land above the towpath was about to be developed into flats, and the existing residents negotiated with the developers to legitimise their situation. Fast forward to 1994 and a group got together and took over the management of Ham Wharf by forming a limited company.

Over the next 20 years however, the majority of the original investors sold up and moved off the wharf retaining their shares and voting rights. This created a great deal of inequality with dividends to shareholders taking away from much needed works, and decisions being made by people that didn’t live there. Once again, the residents felt the need to take action and put forward an offer in December 2021 to purchase 100% of the shares in the limited company representing the assets.

Following lengthy negotiations, a price was finally agreed in April 2022. The group knew they needed to act. The next hurdle was funding.

Sarah King, Ham Wharf Mooring Co-operative Member and group spokesperson, takes up the story:
“We knew we needed to partner with someone who truly understood the journey we’d been on and the importance of completing the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that would provide so much security for our residents.

“Ecology were clearly the experts and we felt we were in it together throughout the whole process. Where challenges were presented, these were discussed openly and constructively. Ecology were always looking at potential solutions to help us move forward. I can’t imagine another lender would have been so supportive.”

With the funding now complete and the land in the hands of the boaters, the residents are more able than ever to give back to their community.

“It’s like a dark cloud has been lifted from us all,” says Sarah. “It’s such a relief and our collective mental health and well-being has improved. We’ve already set up sub-groups within the residency to help maintain the ecology of the local area and the habitats of the canal. We’re even helping to raise a family of kingfishers together.

“We’re incredibly proud of our community, which could have been lost without Ecology’s help. Everyone is now able to give their best and give back to the local area. And we’re providing advice and support to other groups in the UK that want to start a mooring co-operative.

“On behalf of everyone on the moorings, I wanted to say a big thank you to Ecology. You were so easy to work with and so incredibly supportive that we couldn’t have done it without you. We’re so very grateful.”