# Firefighter turns to narrowboat living to beat soaring housing costs in Burton-on-Trent



A 27-year-old firefighter from Burton-on-Trent, El Sutcliffe, has embarked on an unconventional housing journey, opting to convert a renovated narrowboat into her new home. This choice was primarily driven by the desire for affordability amidst the soaring costs of traditional housing in her area.

After selling a home she shared with a former partner, Sutcliffe found herself with just £15,000. Faced with the reality of purchasing a small flat in a less than desirable area, she began exploring alternative housing options. In May 2024, she purchased a 49ft narrowboat for £15,750, which had been previously submerged and required extensive renovations.

Sutcliffe's renovation project has demanded both creativity and hard work. The narrowboat initially lacked fundamental elements such as flooring. Nevertheless, she was determined to transform the vessel, budgeting an additional £10,000 for the interior overhaul. As of now, the narrowboat features a cosy log burner, a fully equipped kitchen, complete with a fridge, sink, and gas cooker.

Reflecting on her decision, Sutcliffe stated, “It just seemed like a no-brainer and I don’t have any regrets. I think the housing market is all a bit mad. I could never afford to live where I do if I didn’t live on a boat.” She appreciates the flexibility that living on water affords her, especially in terms of potential job relocations, saying, "With the boat, I can up and move it, and I can access a lot of the waterways here in the UK."

Currently, she is close to completing her renovation, with plans to install a bathroom that includes a toilet, shower, and sink. Although she has been quoted £12,500 for professionally stripping the exterior paintwork, she intends to tackle that project herself, demonstrating her commitment to the boat.

“I can’t see myself getting rid of it – it would absolutely break my heart because we’ve built it from the ground up,” Sutcliffe shared. Despite the emotional and physical challenges of the renovation process, she has expressed her love for the nearly finished project.

Once the renovations are complete, she estimates that her monthly costs for mooring and maintaining the boat will be around £550, although this figure does not include unforeseen repair expenses. She acknowledges that maintaining a narrowboat can be costly, involving tasks such as hull maintenance, engine servicing, and repainting.

Sutcliffe has found social connections within the boating community, stating, “I'm moored in a stunning spot, I’ve got amazing neighbours, and the boating community is fantastic.” However, she notes that living in a confined space, which totals less than 20 square metres, presents its own difficulties, particularly with storage. “I had to get rid of a lot of clothes but I seem to have settled into it really well,” she remarked.

To document her transformation journey, Sutcliffe has turned to TikTok. She aims to present a realistic perspective of life on a narrowboat, countering the often idealised portrayals prevalent on social media. “People will comment ‘oh my god, this is my dream lifestyle’... it’s like that about 10 per cent of the time and I think that needs to be spoken about more,” she explained. Sutcliffe believes that in an era where many are seeking affordable living alternatives, it is crucial for prospective narrowboat dwellers to make informed decisions about the lifestyle.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-boaters-say-water-dwelling-is-becoming-unaffordable-2025-04-16/> - This article discusses how rising costs, including increased license fees and reduced government funding, are making living on boats unaffordable for many in the UK, corroborating the claim about the soaring costs of traditional housing in the area.
* <https://www.insuremy.co.uk/guides/the-cost-of-living-on-a-narrowboat-in-2024> - This guide provides detailed information on the costs associated with living on a narrowboat, including initial purchase, renovation, and ongoing maintenance expenses, supporting the narrative of Sutcliffe's renovation project and budgeting.
* <https://www.boatsandoutboards.co.uk/resources/living-on-a-narrowboat/> - This resource outlines the costs and challenges of narrowboat ownership, including renovation expenses and maintenance costs, aligning with Sutcliffe's experience of purchasing a previously submerged narrowboat requiring extensive renovations.
* <https://www.boatsforsale.co.uk/knowledge-base/on-the-water/living-on-a-canal-boat.html> - This article highlights the advantages of living on a canal boat, such as a cheaper lifestyle and the freedom to move, which resonates with Sutcliffe's appreciation for the flexibility that living on water affords her.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/property/high-prices-eco-zones-and-congestion-why-canal-boat-living-isnt-used/> - This piece discusses the challenges of canal boat living, including rising costs and environmental regulations, which may relate to Sutcliffe's plans to install a bathroom and her commitment to the boat despite the challenges.
* <https://www.metro.co.uk/2024/08/16/bought-a-mouldy-boat-online-saves-us-10-000-a-year-rent-21435392/> - This article tells the story of a couple who purchased and renovated a narrowboat to save on rent, mirroring Sutcliffe's decision to convert a renovated narrowboat into her new home.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/narrowboat-renovations-cost-el-sutcliffe-b2745041.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data