

CONSERVATORS OF THE RIVER CAM

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CONSERVATORS HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1 (THE HEIDELBERG ROOM) AT THE GUILDHALL, CAMBRIDGE ON THURSDAY 13 APRIL 2006 AT 9.30am

Present: Professor M D I Chisholm (in the chair)

Conservators: Mr J Adams, Mr R C Hardingham, Mr R Ingersent, Dr R Laws, City Cllr I Nimmo-Smith, Mr L J Pryce-Jones, Mr L Phillips, County Cllr P Sales, and Dr R D Walker.

Observers: Mr D Bradley, Mr R T Bryant, Mr W Key and Cllr H Smith.

In Attendance: Mr R B Bamford and Mr J R Wakefield (from Archer and Archer - the Clerks), Mr G Facer (Engineer and Control Officer) and Mr C Sparkes (River Foreman).

And of the general public (who signed the attendance record): Mr A C G Brown, Mr C Convine, Mr C Darbyshire, Mr J Leader and Mr D Mercer.

Action Required

By

1. No apologies for absence had been received, but Dr Chancellor telephoned later to say that he had been called to Scotland, unexpectedly.
2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th January 2006: These were approved, with a minor typing correction and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.
3. Matters Arising from those minutes as reported (not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda):
 - 11.12 The stone ball on top of one gable end at the Clayhithe House had been repaired and the invoice was with insurers. Further deterioration of the roof had been reported by the workmen so that an expensive repair schedule may have to be considered.
 - 11.16 Mr W Key drew attention to the fact that the CRA did not require all boats participating in events to be registered with a six digit alpha numeric code. This was noted; but it was accepted that where rowing clubs required a change in their identification the Conservators were right to charge a fee of £20.
 - 11.21 The County have not responded on the lease for the Halingway surface. The Clerks conveyancers continue to press them without much response.

Mr Ingersent arrived

4. Chairman's Report:

- 4.1 The Council's announcement that they were withdrawing temporarily the 48 hour moorings to accommodate 6 additional mooring licensees.

The Chairman reported on the City Council's Press Release issued the previous evening (copies of which were tabled). Conservators were surprised and disappointed that the Council had not sought to consult with them before taking the decision.

Cllr Nimmo-Smith confirmed that the arrangement was only temporary. He was hopeful that there would be a sufficient turnover to allow the 48 hour to be re-installed quickly. Dr Laws stated how the lack of temporary moorings for visitors and residents was extremely serious.

Mr Adams warned of the backlash from boating organisations which might object to the sums paid under the Interchange Agreement as several hundred boats visited Cambridge every year. Cllr Sales was concerned that displaced people would moor at Riverside and try to access their boats over the parapet which was dangerous as the County Council had no intention to improve mooring facilities there. Dr Laws drew attention to the upgrading of boat sizes once a licence had been obtained.

Mr Phillips indicate the possibility of mooring on Stourbridge Common and in spaces between the boats (under 70' in length) on the approved sites. Mr Darbyshire drew attention to the need to dredge the shallows. Mr Hardingham drew attention to the interests of the CMBC where for 95 years members had come up to the City and could not do so, now. He indicated that positive action might be taken. The Chairman indicated how the problem reinforced the need for off-river mooring.

- 4.2 Future Administration: The Chairman reported that the selection committee had received 27 applications for the post of River Manager all of a very high calibre, that three people were to be interviewed on Wednesday next and a fourth early in May when he returned from overseas. Another had withdrawn through family reasons. The Committee had also approved the appointment of Mr J R Wakefield as deputy manager.

5. Hon Engineer and Control Officer's Report:

The Conservators noted his report on:-

- 5.1 Bridges Over the River Formal notices and various consultations had been made regarding Coe Fen/Sheeps Green Bridge, the proposed Riverside Bridge, and the A14 bridge. In the case of the former two,

nothing so far put forward would affect navigation. The A14 Bridge parapet requires strengthening to meet current standards and Atkins had made a preliminary enquiry concerning navigational requirements. Nothing further was known at present on how the work might affect navigation, if at all. Dr Walker suggested that when dealing with the A14 Bridge the County should be asked to fix some form of guttering to eliminate the damage caused to the surface of the Halingway beneath.

- 5.2 Baitsbite Office & Clayhithe Workshop Planning approval had been received for the conversion of Baitsbite Lockhouse into an office for the River Manager and deputy, the only condition being that the existing door should be retained and that the proposed door into the plant room should match. The scheme specification would be worked-up and tenders sought. A decision on the Clayhithe mess room application had also been received.

Matters for which a decision of the Conservators was sought

- 5.3 Maintenance of Baits Bite Lock Regrettably the Environment Agency was unable to carry out the future regular mechanical and electrical maintenance of the lock. Marriott Engineering and Graham Cooper electrical, both of whom were very familiar with the workings of the lock having undertaken various works previously, had been approached, to see if they would be able to undertake this regular maintenance.

Marriott's would be happy to carry out mechanical servicing on a twice yearly basis and provide emergency cover. Coopers had agreed also, subject to the specification. The intention here being that a safety / maintenance inspection would be carried out on an annual basis, and that emergency cover would again be provided.

The Conservators authorised the officers, in conjunction with the Chairman, to agree the costings for this work, once priced specifications were to hand.

Engineer

- 5.4 Mooring Policy - Midsummer Common

Conservators were reminded of the current mooring restrictions for Midsummer Common and the deferment of their implementation pending the City's mooring proposals for this length of river bank. The relevant part of the Conservancy mooring policy of July 2004 as amended in September 2004 was noted.

The City Council's mooring policy which became effective on 1 April 2006 stated:

'the existing area on Midsummer Common where mooring is prohibited be extended westwards by 50m and eastwards by 120m and that residential mooring is permitted on the remainder of the Common's riverbank'.

The above meant that a length of some 375m of river bank from opposite the Goldie boathouse downstream to our mooring prohibition, opposite Eights Marina, lies within the city's permitted mooring length, but lies within the Conservancy's seasonal prohibition.

Conservators recalled that at the time of implementation of the July 04 policy review it was recommended that mooring be permitted all the year round along this length but that craft be restricted to 2.15m in width. Conservators had decided on a seasonal complete ban.

The city's extension of the Conservators' prohibited length downstream of the Fort St George by 120m, plus a width restriction on the 375m section would produce a satisfactory solution to mooring along this length, and will not cause navigational problems.

It was agreed that section 4) of the July 2004 Mooring Policy be reviewed with immediate effect to read :

"4) VICTORIA BRIDGE TO EIGHTS MARINA

Prohibit mooring along the right bank for a length of 80 metres downstream of the Fort St George Footbridge.

Downstream of the above, mooring be restricted to 2.15m width of vessel".

- 5.5** Conservancy Signs / Notice boards It was noted that virtually all of the conservancy signs and notice boards along the river were in disrepair or had been covered in graffiti and were in need of replacement or re-painting. Also, additional signage was required at Jesus Lock telling of the prohibition of navigation along the backs during the summer etc.

Conservators considered that telephone contact details should be provided. Because of the pending change in management arrangements, new notices should be prepared for placing immediately the new arrangements come into operation. To this end, a BT telephone line and number for Baitsbite should be organised, along with a broadband connection.

Concern was expressed at the plethora of signs; but it was agreed that we could not share with the City.

- 5.6** Towpath - Grass cutting The Engineer had looked into the possibility of engaging external contractors for this work, and explored further the various equipment options if we were to carry on in-house.

Both equipment suppliers and their agents recommended that the only safe option was to use a mini tractor tracking along the hardened towpath surface with a side flail attachment with sufficient reach (3m) and power to cut down to the water's edge. The mini tractor having balloon tyres so as not to damage the towpath surface; but, weighted as

appropriate, to counteract the overturning moment of the flail attachment. A new flail, taking the existing one in part exchange, would cost in the region of £7000 and the mini tractor about £15000, with a secondhand one costing in the region of £10000.

Four grass cutting contractors who work for either the Highway Authority or the EA had been approached. Two of these, including City Services, were not interested, citing health and safety issues. Of the other two, one did not have the equipment required. The remaining Contractor, Country Grounds Maintenance Ltd of West Dereham which carries out various contracts for the EA, did have exactly the equipment described above and believed it to be ideal for the situation, albeit there were some reservations about roll bar clearance under some of the trees - which could be attended to.

They were unable to estimate how long each cut would take given the various restrictions and varying widths of bank etc, but did provide a guesstimate of £967.50 + VAT. Alternatively, their day rate for machinery plus operator was £225 + VAT (£264.38) per day.

The River Crew believed that with the right equipment it should be possible to cut it all in three, possibly four days (i.e. between £793 and £1057). Previously on average we have cut three times per annum.

Engineer

Given the high capital outlay for the specialised equipment needed, **It was agreed that Country Grounds Maintenance be engaged to carry out the first cut on a day work basis, and that in the light of this experience - results, cost etc, - that a decision on the future cutting be made at the July meeting.**

- 5.7 Tree Cutting/Pollarding: Town and Country Tree surgery were engaged and have pollarded 44 large willows within the allocated budget. Our own workforce had pollarded a further 40. A survey of all the trees along the towpath showed that there are 209 trees remaining which require the initial reduction/pollard, and then all would have been attended to and brought into the rolling 8 year pollarding programme.

With the exception of 54 large trees (17 ash, 4 oak, 33 willows) which would require attention at, say, 10 yearly intervals by external contractors, all of the other trees within this rolling programme had been pollarded to such a size that they could be dealt with by our own workforce. However out of the 209 trees remaining, the vast majority of which are along the Horningsea stretch, 101 are too large for us to tackle. As these were not quite so big as those tackled this last year by Town and Country, for a similar annual budget to this year of £12k + VAT, the Engineer expected that they could be dealt with over the next two years and that the workforce would deal with the other 108 within the same period.

Sources of grant aid would be investigated, but even if this was not forthcoming **the Conservators approved expenditure of £12k + VAT on external tree work for both 06/07 and 07/08.** However, requests were made to remove the dead and the deceased trees.

- 5.8** Mazda Truck: This had been purchased new in 1998 (S registered) and to date had been very reliable, being regularly serviced.

However just recently it had developed a starting fault when left overnight or for anything but a short length of time. The fuel pump and filters etc had been changed but to no avail and the garage advised that it was one of those problems which it can only tackle on a 'replace a part and see basis'. Given that the vehicle is eight years old this could be the start of it becoming problematical. The part exchange value of the vehicle varied between £1300 and £2000 when set against the cost of a new truck, the balance being around £16000 depending on manufacturer.

Conservators felt that it was essential that they had before them a complete financial breakdown of how a purchase such as this could be funded and in view of the next item on the agenda felt that the boat was more important than the vehicle, which was confirmed by the River Foreman, so that this was left for a future meeting.

- 5.9** Workboat: conservators noted the extensive report on which the Engineer expanded. After considerable discussion **it was agreed that the Engineer should proceed with the purchase of this boat at £33,000 + VAT after a vote was taken** (seven 'for' and two 'against').

During the discussion it was confirmed that the boat would have a life of at least 20 years (like the weed harvester) and should be depreciated over that period after discussion with the accountants. The clerks were asked to verify the position of the weed-harvester with the accountants as that was thought to be depreciated over the same period.

Clerks

(Mr Key left the meeting.)

6. Finance Report:

- 6.1** Income and Expenditure: Conservators noted the "cash basis" statement which was tabled at the meeting. It was accepted that there would be changes once the accountants take the books in hand: but this gave some idea of the position for the year to 31.3.06. This showed a gross operating surplus for the year, even after taking into account depreciation (which might have to be recalculated to take account of the purchases). It became an overall loss when the actual capital expenditure was taken into account.

6.2 Capital Position:

- 6.2.1 It was noted that the capital cash held as to £290,000 was at Barclays on London Treasurer's Deposit Account on a monthly/two monthly basis (depending on the rate of interest on offer) currently 3.545% to 15.05.2006 and as to £250,000 on a Cambridge Building Society Hallmark Account yielding 3.45%. It was only recently that the London Treasurers' rate had overtaken the Hallmark account rate, in consequence the Clerks had not considered changing over (a notice period was required to withdraw from this account and rates were constantly changing); but were asked to keep an eye on this difference.

Clerks

- 6.2.2 The balance of the capital was tied up in tangible assets as would be shown in the balance sheet on the accounts when they were produced by the accountants.

- 6.3 At 31st March the Clerks had collected £20,760 for the year 2006/07 in registration fees, some £2000 more than in the previous year at this time.

- 6.4 Mileage Allowance: At the April 2005 meeting in view of the fact that JNC rates were reported as having increased to just above 50p per mile for cars of 1400cc the Conservators agreed that 50p per mile should be paid where appropriate for the year 2005/06. It was agreed that because the Inland Revenue fixed a limit of 40p per mile, charging tax as a benefit in kind on any excess, staff could change to this lower figure if they wished.

- 6.5 Inland Revenue Enquiry Insurance: **The Conservators approved the payment of £130 premium to cover the auditors' expenses following any Revenue enquiry.**

Clerks

7. Clerks' Report

- 7.1 The City Local Plan /South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework: Councillor Nimmo-Smith added to the Clerks' report by informing the meeting that the draft report of the planning inspector included approval of the Conservators' proposals for their field to be used for off-river mooring

- 7.2 Baitsbite Cottages: The tenancy agreement with Mr & Mrs Clark, in cottage number 2, has been renewed for a further year, as from 08.04.06. Re-decorating of the cottage, following the problems with the cistern overflowing, has been completed and the tenants had expressed their satisfaction with the finished job. A claim for the re-decorating had been lodged with the insurers. The insurers' cheque in respect of the initial claim had been received (£1502.45). A further problem had now arisen on the flue for the boiler which was being investigated.

- 7.3 Cambridge (Sports) Rowing Lake: Following a re-submission of the planning application by the organisers, SCDC had written to the Clerks seeking the Conservators' views. The Clerks responded, indicating that the Conservators had no formal objection to the proposed Sports Lakes but would require the developers to enter into the necessary formal agreement in accordance with the Conservators' statutes prior to doing any work on the River. It was also indicated to the SCDC that a full specification of the proposed bridge would need to be approved by engineers appointed by the Conservators. Conservators noted that being a back-water of the Cam the Sports Lakes would come under their jurisdiction.

Clerks

- 7.4 Computer: Councillor Nimmo-Smith had agreed to be approached by the suppliers of the computer equipment regarding the requirements for the new e-mail connection, needed when the administration leaves the Ely office. This was to be in place as near as possible to coincide with the Conservators moving their administration to Baitsbite.

- 7.5 SLA with the Environment Agency: as reported at the meeting on 22.9.05 (item 9.14) a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), replacing the SLA, had been presented by the EA. It had been approved by the officers. The Chairman had approved it and signed it.

Clerks

- 7.6.1 Farm business tenancy - Mr D Smart: This agreement runs to 09/05/11. The rent was due for review 09/05/06. In view of current rental values, no action had been taken to increase this rent - partly because of the cost which would outweigh a year's rent, let alone the increase! This was something with which **the Conservators concurred on the basis that notice could be given in any year after the review date.**

- 7.6.2 4.69 acres Fen Road Chesterton: This land remained vacant. An update has been sought from Carter Jonas, who were also dealing with the trespassing by a horse owner. The Clerks were asked to seek advice on the securing of this field.

Clerks

- 7.6.3 1.74 acres Fen Road Chesterton: The Clerks were in negotiation with Mrs Barton on this field, which she uses rather more as a barrier between her and her neighbours than for grazing. Rent increases in line with inflation were being sought but it seemed clear that rather less may be available. **The Conservators gave their officers authority to settle at a reasonable figure and authority for the agreement to be signed by Mr Bamford.**

Clerks

- 7.7 Insurance: The Conservators' officers had met with the agent on 03/02/06 and again on 31/3/06 in order to discuss insurance requirements for 2006/7. It was clear that the premium level would rise; but within the budgeted figure. The main reason for the increase was the increase in values of everything, from salaries through the properties. It was understood that the premium for any new boat worth

£40K would be in the region of £650 and such a figure would be beyond the budgeted figure. Fidelity cover could be provided against theft of money by staff, but at a rate of £262.50 for £50K. This cover was standard. **Conservators decided that they did not require that cover.**

Clerks

- 7.8.1 Jesus Lockkeeper's Cottage - H M O (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Registration: The Clerks had paid the registration fee of £300 for the HMO registration of the Lockkeeper's Cottage. However, the City's Principal Environmental Health Officer subsequently contacted Carter Jonas to advise that further works were necessary in order to comply with HMO registration requirements. Carter Jonas were instructed to arrange for these works to be carried out. Locks needed replacing so that they could be operated from inside, without keys, plus stronger door closers on the kitchen doors etc! A conditional registration Certificate had now been issued requiring the works to be carried out by 1st May. Carter Jonas had confirmed to the Engineer that all works had been completed.

Clerks

- 7.8.2 Jesus Lockkeeper's Cottage - changes in tenants: There had been a change of the student tenants recently. Carter Jonas had refunded the deposits to the out-going tenants after an inspection of the property had been undertaken. Carter Jonas were currently chasing the tenants for the water charges which come through to the Clerks. The tenancy agreement was due to expire in July 2006.

- 7.9 Miscellaneous Applications: Granta Punts: The annual licence for the access walkway was currently in the process of being re-negotiated, for general use at 400% of the disabled rate. In addition, with the Engineer's approval, the Clerks had prepared a consent for the decking work carried out on the bank. Also a pontoon licence had been drafted for the pontoon at the same rate per square metre as all the other pontoons on the water. The proprietor had deposited his cheque with the conservancy to cover all these expenses, which was held in a suspense account. **The Conservators unanimously agreed that Mr Bamford be approved to sign these three agreements when completed.**

A film company has been in contact with the Engineer to arrange to bring a Victorian gondola onto the navigation by St John's College for a couple of days in May. The Engineer was still in negotiation; but, once again, **the Conservators authorised Mr Bamford to sign the necessary consent when the relevant fee had been agreed.**

Clerks

- 7.10 City Council Mooring Arrangements with City Council: This had been covered in the chairman's report above.

- 7.11 Pontoons: The invoices to Scudamores and Huntingdon Marine & Leisure had been issued for 2006/7, increased from the current year on an RPI basis.

Clerks

- 7.12 Abandoned Boats: Two boats were being held at Clayhithe after having been deemed to have been abandoned. The relevant notices had been posted at the Locks; but, as yet, nobody had come forward to claim either boat. There had been some anonymous enquiries about the boats, however. These would be dealt with in the usual way if no offer is made for them.

Engineer/Clerks

- 7.13 Rubbish Clearance: The skip at Clayhithe was being emptied by the City Council periodically, for which the Council had invoiced the Conservators.

- 7.14 SCDC towpath: The annual invoice to SCDC for litter clearance was due to be issued. For 2004/05 SCDC had budgeted £3590, the Clerks had notified them that the cost of this work was £10180. This year actual costings, as at 05/03/06, amounted to £13626, which was way beyond their budget. **The Clerks were authorised to make appropriate arrangements to resolve this.**

Clerks

- 7.15 Tree Pollarding: This had been covered in the Engineer's report.

(Mr Brown left the meeting)

- 7.16 The Halingway: There had been a problem of sewerage at Grassy Corner. Cambs County Council, SCDC & The Environment Agency had each been notified in an effort to have this attended to. The EA had responded, indicating that they were looking at tankering away the fluid in the ditch. For the future, once effluent from Meadowview was of a suitable quality, the EA were looking to put a culvert under the towpath in order to discharge the treated effluent into the River (the wider environment) to prevent it turning septic. As owners of the Halingway, the Conservators would have some input into this proposal.

SCDC were also looking into their responsibilities regarding fly-tipped waste on the track: but the smell persists and nothing has appears to have been done.

8. Dates of Next Meetings:

The meetings for Thursday 6th July, Thursday 21st September 2006, 11th January 2007 were confirmed and 12th April 2006 was agreed.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 12 noon.