

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 17 APRIL 2003 AT 9.30am

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

Conservators: Mr J Adams, Mr L Anderson: City Councillor B Bradnack, Mr C Darbyshire, Mr R C Hardingham, Ms B Morgan, City Cllr I Nimmo-Smith, Mr R E Wakeford and Dr R D Walker.

Observer: Councillor W H Saberton.

In Attendance: Mr R B Bamford (from Archer and Archer - the Clerks), Mr A Wingfield (Assistant Hon Engineer and Control Officer).

And of the general public: Messrs A C G Brown, J O Jenner (CRA), J Leader, R Moseley and J E Rolls.

Action Required

By

- 1.1 The Clerks reported that Mr John Adams had been appointed by the Environment Agency as a Conservator in place of Mr Keith Stonell. The Chairman welcomed Mr Adams to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from Dr P Convey, Mr W Key as an observer and Mr C Sparkes, River Foreman.
2. Minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2003 were approved and the Chairman authorised to sign them after amending 'bows' to 'boughs' at 8.1.2.
3. Matters Arising from those minutes:

5.1.8 The Halingway Easement: Difficulties were being encountered by the solicitors for the proposed grantees, whose title was far from satisfactory. At present an offer to grant a licence, rather than an easement was being considered by them but the Clerks had sought a payment of £10,000 commuted sum to cover future repairs to the pipe over the years in addition to the consideration for the grant. The dangerous alternative was that their sewage might find its way into the river, direct, which was to be avoided at all costs.

Clerks

7.3 CamToo: Mr Moseley, the promoter, had met the Conservators and latterly the Chairman and Clerk and the proposals all seemed possible and, given that the additional costs for the Conservators would have to be funded within the development cost, it appeared that there was no reason to object, rather to encourage the scheme which would ease navigation problems on the river.

7.4 Tipper truck and Grant for Purchase: A grant of £4,000 had been offered with a request that the Conservators look into converting any vehicle to LPG. This would add £1,500 to the costs. The Council's officer agreed, in consequence, that this was uneconomic so that we could treat that condition as covered. The staff were currently looking for a suitable vehicle.

8.1.5.1 to 3. The chairman asked what had happened with regard to the three items at Clayhithe House. The Hon Asst. Engineer confirmed that none of the work had yet been carried out, but the gutterings would be dealt with shortly.

8.1.5.5 Redundant Building at Clayhithe: The prospective tenant for this building had withdrawn his interest.

8.1.6/14 Fishing Interests/Congestion on the River: Meetings had taken place and some compromises had been agreed, which was confirmed by Mr L Anderson

16. Standardisation of Lighting: The Clerks had obtained copies of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea which covered the requirements for lighting on rivers such as the Cam and were referred to in the Byelaws. The Clerks would be consulting with boat users over the summer period to make sure that any misunderstandings are minimised.

Clerks

4. Chairman's Report:

The Chairman had been invited and spoken to the Granta Probus Club on 18.2.03 which had gone down satisfactorily. The Chairman's paper, on the history of the River, had been accepted for publication, in September, by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, after a few small alterations suggested by the referees.

5. Business Plan 2003/08:

Copies of the latest draft of the Business Plan dated 14.4.03 were tabled together with copies of correspondence. The Clerks apologised for their failure to produce it before the meeting. They went on to say, that in view of the fact that no-one would have had the opportunity of reading it or the accompanying correspondence, it seemed more appropriate to refer the matter to a committee, who could discuss the format and content in detail, prior to it being presented for final approval/further amendment at the July meeting so that it could be seen to set out the full views of all the Conservators. This was agreed.

Cllr I Nimmo Smith questioned whether the Mission Statement referring to 'seeking to manage the river in a manner sensitive to environmental issues' was satisfactory as it stood. A general discussion followed from which it became clear that Conservators wished to see the phrase amplified in the final version.

Clerks

Dr R Walker, Mr J Adams, Cllr B Bradnack and the Chairman were formally appointed to this committee.

6. Hon Engineer and Control Officer's Report:

Matters for Report:

6.1.1 The Backs and Navigation: The Engineer had consulted with all punt operators about the safety measures and the problems with collisions where bridges, trees and silt banks appear.

6.1.2 Silt and Tree Management: Silt disposal may be the long term solution but in the meantime the Engineer has instructed the River Foreman to programme some dispersal of shoals using the Bailiff's punt. In addition, with the necessary permissions, overhanging trees should be cropped back to 1.2m above water level as soon as physically possible and the Engineer had written to the riparian College Bursars asking for this to be undertaken as a matter of course.

6.1.3 Bridge Works: Where there was more than one arch, the provision of directions for the preferred opening were being considered and the Engineer was in the process of putting together a package of options for submission to the riparian College Bursars to consider, together with the punt operators.

6.1.4 Number of Punts: the Conservators noted that they may have to consider restricting the number of punts on the river, if the congestion continued; but felt that market forces would resolve the problem in the long term.

6.2.1 Halingway and Towpath: The Hon Engineer had met with Patrick Joyce, an officer of the County Council on 4th April and had come forward with several ideas for the meeting of the committee to consider. It was agreed that that committee would meet as soon as possible with the County's representative to try to resolve the problem.

Hon Engineer

6.3 SUSTRANS: Details of the signing required on the SUSTRANS bridge had been forwarded to the County Bridges Officer for attention. There would be red and white stripes at either end.

6.4 Trees: His report on trees indicated 25 urgent/dangerous trees which must be addressed, now; plus reduction works to an additional 14 willows and 2 ash trees to reduce the size of the canopy. In addition, in years 2004 to 2006, the number of trees identified for specialist or tree surgeon works was 97. These would be programmed in these years at 30 to 25 per annum. The chairman drew attention to the surprising number of trees, at 192, being a quarter of all the trees. The Engineer was instructed to provide a list of all the trees pollarded in each year, at the April Meeting, so that Conservators could see how the river gang were maintaining their programme. Dangerous trees would have to be dealt with immediately but grant should be applied for, at the same time.

The Hon Engineer indicated that it might be necessary to close sections of the towpath for the duration of these works or to consider partial closure during the working day for safety reasons. In addition, the timing of the works would become critical to avoid conflict with river users.

Hon Engineer Grant aid would be sought from Entrust who managed recycling grants. A discussion on the correct source of grants ensued when the Engineer undertook to contact Dickersons in the first instance. The problem of storage of the wood would also need to be considered.

6.5 Bishop's Mill Sluice:

6.5.1 Automation: The Hon Engineer had set up a meeting with representatives of the Environment Agency and the City with regard to progressing towards automation of this sluice. Manual adjustments of the weir to regulate upper river levels represent the vast majority of reasons why the river gang were called out to attend at Bishop's Mill. The absence of these call-outs might reduce the pay receipts by the individual staff members; but at least would allow them, probably, to have more uninterrupted nights of sleep. The Conservators showed concern that the staff had been approached on this so that they understood that they may lose the call-out pay. The Engineer undertook to speak to them about this. The automation would not save any money for the conservators but would take out a considerable nuisance factor. Conservators pressed the Engineer to set out to the City the need for the cost element of the SLA to rise considerably if the automation and safety requirements were not carried out.

Hon Engineer

6.5.2 The Service Level Agreement with the City Council: The terms of the above agreement had been agreed for the new financial year.

6.5.3 Safety Improvements: There may have to be safety improvements at Bishop's Mill which the City will have to take care of. However if our staff are required at this site, we shall have to insist that these safety requirements are put in place.

6.6 Tipper Truck: The Hon Engineer reported that the river gang had found it difficult to find a sound secondhand tipper despite their original hopes. They were continuing to look.

6.7 Georgina - Possible Dredging: Georgina had had three recent grounding incidents with resultant damage, including two sheared prop shafts and the loss of one propeller. The groundings were all in the area close to Jesus Lock weir where this boat turns on a regular basis. The River Foreman had arranged the removal of as many of the obstructions as possible, including a petrified log some 30cms in diameter. The crew would need to attend now to remove another crop of bicycles, ie. trolleys and scaffold poles, which had been dumped the previous night.

The Hon Engineer was instructed to continue to examine the bed levels with the help of copies of the Environment Agency's Navigation Survey of the river and to consult further with the agency about the possibility of using their new methods of checking a greater width of the river-bed. At the same time the River Crew should consider trying to arrange the lowering of this stretch of the river (in winter to avoid fish losses) as a more practical method of removal of obstructions. It was accepted that the bed level of the river had risen to some extent, bringing the obstructions nearer the surface when they were lying on the bed.

- 6.8 Clayhithe: The Hon Engineer reported on details required by South Cambridgeshire District Council's Building Control Department for extensions to the workshop and the same Council's Planning Department concerning the lining of the chimney of the main house.
- 6.9 Properties: The Hon Engineer indicated that Clayhithe House should be painted externally, this year.
- 6.10 Baitsbite Lock: Mandall Engineering would return to site to attend to the leaks on the new lock doors. The lock would be closed from 12th to 16th May.
- 6.11 Fishing: The Hon Engineer reported receipt of the EA Fisheries Report which was available for inspection.
7. Finance Report:
- 7.1 Income and Expenditure: A cash basis statement had been produced by the Clerks. It was accepted that this would be varied by the accountants. It showed a gross operating surplus of £25,782 for the year; but after taking into account depreciation and R&R commitments it becomes a net operating loss of £21,972 which improved on the budget figure by £13,500.
- 7.1.2 Depreciation: The Clerks reported on discussions with the accountants and the auditors and recommended to Conservators to make the following changes to take effect in the year to 31st March 2003. This was approved unanimously on the proposition of Mr R Hardingham, seconded by Cllr I Nimmo Smith so that depreciation would be:-
Freehold property 2.5%
Locks 3%
Plant 10%
Vehicles 25%
On the basis that these figures represented the probable life of the property being depreciated.

7.2 Capital Position:

7.2.1 Following the replacement of the vee doors at Baitsbite and the changes to the automation of that lock the total in the capital accounts was reduced by the sum of £5,883.

7.2.2 Capital cash was held at Barclays on London Treasurers Deposit Account on a monthly/two monthly basis currently 2.775% to 3.5.03 and as to £250,000 in a Cambridge Building Account yielding 2.95%.

8. Clerks' Report:

8.1 Boat Registration: A schedule of boats registered for the past year, a total of 926, was noted. The Clerks and the River Bailiff were taking steps to chase those who are still unregistered. At this point, a discussion followed on the steps available to the staff for removing the unregistered boats. The clerks were instructed unanimously, on the proposition of Cllr B Bradnack seconded by Dr R Walker, to make immediate arrangements to amend the bye-laws to provide powers to confiscate boats and to dispose of them if not reclaimed (as the Environment Agency appeared to have such powers), in order to stamp out the prevalent problem of organised avoidance.

Clerks

8.2 Following the flooding earlier this year the crew have removed 5 or 6 sunken boats and destroyed those which were beyond repair. The cost of recovery and removal of debris was in the course of collection from the known owners.

8.3 Baitsbite Lock: As reported in the Hon Engineer's Report the lock would be closed between 12th and 16th May. Notices had been served on all the usual marinas.

8.4 Clayhithe Field: The Clerks has written to the previous grazier, Michael Gingell; but he had indicated that he was no longer interested in hiring; but referred the Clerks to a Mr David Smart who indicated that he would be happy to continue to pay £400 per annum as long as the rent was fixed for 3 years. He wanted to know immediately. He was paying £25 per acre further along the river for rather better less flooded land. Thus on the Clerks' recommendation this arrangement was agreed and the Clerks instructed to arrange formal agreement.

Clerks

8.5 Other Grazing: The 4.69 acres occupied by Mr Chapman had been agreed at 12.5% increase for the next 12 months (NB this does not flood and therefore is suitable for horses. Horses do not like flooded land.)

8.6 No 1 Baitsbite Cottages: The Clerks reported that the occupant had lost his job earlier in the year but had since obtained another. The agents had reported to the Clerks that although the February rent had lapsed it had now caught up although, as yet, it had not been received by the Clerks.

- 8.7 No 2 Baitsbite Cottages: Carter Jonas had re-let this property as reported for a 6 month assured shorthold tenancy at a marginal increase in rent, both cottages are let at £850 per month. The tenants had agreed to redecorate the bathroom and had asked to extend their lease by 12 months from June, with a rent renewal in December. This was agreed. Electrical tests had been arranged to cover the insurance requirements on both cottages. These are required on a regular basis, because the cottages are thatched.
- 8.8 Insurance: The Clerks had met the insurance broker at the end of March and despite massive increases in premium, the effects of terrorism have been excluded. The premiums will just be within the budget of £14,000.
- 8.9 The Halingway Towpath: Please see item 2 in the Hon Engineer's report above.
- 8.10 Moorings: The Clerks warned that a number of people had sought information on mooring their living accommodation on the Cam. In addition, a 14 feet wide Dutch barge had been brought onto the Conservancy Area; but was likely to be removed off the system, shortly. It was agreed that Conservators may have to agree further changes to the mooring policy if such boats cause difficulties.
- 8.11 Litter Clearance: Discussions were ongoing with the City and South Cambridgeshire District Council re litter clearance. The latter Council had agreed a small increase in fees charged to them but there were prospects that by liaison with them liability to Landfill Tax may be avoided.
- 8.12 The Clerks reported that they had received Cambridgeshire Sustainable City Newsletter dated 23rd March 2003 and British Waterways "Waterfront" Spring/Summer 2003 - Issue 6.
- 8.13 The Conservators present confirmed the details on the list of members which had been circulated.
- 8.14 The clerks reported that Carter Jonas had become an LLP; but this was not considered a problem for the Conservators.
9. Dates of Next Meetings:
- The meetings for Thursday 3rd July and Thursday 25th September 2003 and that for Thursday 15th January 2004 were confirmed and Thursday 15th April 2004 was agreed.

There was no further business and the meeting finished at 11.25am, when the Conservators went into committee to discuss staffing matters.