



Cambridge Liberal Democrats

201 Chesterton Road Cambridge CB4 1AH

1 May 2007

Dear Dr Convey and Dr Oeffner,

I am replying on behalf of Cambridge Liberal Democrats to the letter you sent to us the week before last.

I will try to respond to the majority of the points but think that an opportunity should be found to talk through any remaining matters.

The river is a complicated environment in which to be conducting rowing and other activities.

Residential boats: I would disagree with aspects of the way you describe the growth in residential boats and the decision of the City Council to establish a moorings policy which permits permanent residential mooring. Be that as it may, the City Council recognises that the residential boaters are a legitimate constituency along with several others, both fluvial and terrestrial, whose needs and views should be taken into account when making decisions as a riparian land owner, as a promoter of healthy activity, and as managers of the parks and commons. This imposes a need to balance a number of legitimate but conflicting interests that bring many issues of managing the river and its environs into the political arena. For this reason the Council has spent a great deal of time and effort trying to ensure that the various communities can co-exist in their use of the River.

Governance, decision-making and liaison: The City Council recognises that the division of powers and responsibilities between three local authorities, the Conservators of the River Cam, the Environment Agency and scores of riparian land owners sometimes makes it difficult to achieve effective joined up action on issues. It poses the risks of buck-passing. And it also generates confusions over who to contact about what.

By the same token, to the outsider the rowing boat clubs can appear a confusion of organisations with which to interface and communicate, particularly when this is overlaid with the University of Cambridge's structures, and all the autonomous Colleges of the University. (I'm not sure what you mean about 'the political manner in which the University interacts'. The University is not currently a player in any of the discussions relating to the river, as far as I am aware.) I think there are parallel issues of effective communication.

For instance I'm not sure how much of what is said in the various meetings and forums gets passed on.

Residents Associations: Residents Associations, 'vociferous' or sweetly reasonable, are part of the fabric of civil society. Cambridge Liberal Democrats recognise that they can be a useful though not necessarily definitive channel for issues and information. I am a bit sad at the beleaguered and cynical tone of your letter at this point. I'm clear that it is not the responsibility to mediate between rowers and landlubbers. I'm not clear if CUCBC tried to talk matters at issue through with the said residents associations. Perhaps there might be a role for the City Council in convening a round table meeting to improve dialogue?

There have been a number of areas of progress since last autumn.

November Moorings Review: I accept there were flaws in the original list of invitees to the Moorings Review meeting, but these were flagged up and acted on. For instance invitations were sent out subsequently to CRA and CUCBC. There were attempts to get an angling representative but these brought no response.

Meeting with Rowing Organisations: Senior Liberal Democrat councillors and City Council officers took part in a meeting on 26 January with various representatives of the rowing interest. These were Eastern Region Rowing Council of the Amateur Rowing Association, Cambridge University Combined Boat Clubs/Rob Roy Boat Club, Eastern RRA and Cambridgeshire Rowing Association). (Peter, you were one of the invitees to represent CUCBC though you were not able in the event to attend.)

One person who was present at the meeting wrote afterwards to say

Thank you again for your time, and that of your colleagues and council officers, yesterday and for what I thought was a very constructive meeting.

I think the measures now put in place will go a long way to reducing the concerns that the requirements of circa 70 houseboaters are being put before that of the nearly 4,000 rowers who train on the Cam.

Regular Meetings: One of the focal topics of this meeting was how to ensure better communication with the rowing organisations and clubs. One of the outcomes was to institute regular meetings between the Rowers and the Council's Active Communities team. These are being planned in a way which is most relevant to the annual cycle of rowing events.

Moorings Policy: The Moorings Policy is still evolving. Some of the elements of the recent review have only just been implemented. Of particular relevance to the width of navigation is the assignment of

mooring space to wide beam boats. As I understand it these are now confined to locations above Victoria Bridge and the downstream section of Stourbridge Common. The relocation of boats to comply with this has only recently been finalised. Council officers have recently been confirming the results together with the Conservator's River Bailiff. The situation with rowing through the Stourbridge Common straits from Riverside to the Green Dragon Bridge will clearly need to be reviewed and I will suggest that Active Communities and the River Manager liaise about this.

We recognise that mooring on the Riverside Railings is an unresolved problem area and we will continue to pursue this with the County Council. There are a range of proposals that might potentially be taken forward.

More generally the detailed implementation of the Moorings Policy is under constant scrutiny and there are periodic opportunities for review. I understand there is to be a meeting with various interested groups in mid-May.

Conclusion.

I was a bit disappointed at some of the tone of the letter as I had hoped we had gone beyond the megaphone stage in maintaining a dialogue with the Cambridge rowing community. I trust that this detailed response will show that I am keen to look at the substance rather than the surface of what you have to say.

I am aware that you have raised more points of detail than I have addressed in this reply. I would be open to meet to talk through matters on an agreed agenda. I hope this detailed response will reassure you that as far as Cambridge Liberal Democrats are concerned the City Council recognises the contribution that rowing makes to the vibrancy of and range of opportunities in the area. We will continue to support rowing development directly through various grant aided schemes, and value the partnership work that is being done to effect this.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Nimmo-Smith

Leader of Cambridge City Council Liberal Democrats