**Guidance on how to complete the Cam Conservator’s River Cam Registration Fee Consultation for 2022/2023**

You can find the document on the Cam Conservator’s Website, you just need to download it, complete it and send it in.

Here are my observations and comments which you may like to take into consideration when you make your submission. They are based on the Consultation document send out by Camcon and the discussion we had at the Delegate’s meeting on Wednesday 29th September.

You need to take into account the Minutes of the above Delegate’s meeting which contain the comments made by the attendees and choose which ones you feel are most relevant to your Club’s situation.

Jo will also send you a copy of extracts from the Camcon document with some observations which have been printed in red.

The following are what I consider to be the main issues that need to be addressed:

1) The document clearly states *“The purpose of this new structure is not to generate additional income for the Conservancy, but to make the fees more balanced across private unpowered* *categories”* It is quite clear from the figures that this is not the case and Camcom are proposing an increase of £19,620 this being income from rowing boats in 20/21 (£51383 in 20/21 and £71,003 in 21/22). Followed by further increases for each of the following years.

2) The fees are being increased in 21/22 by an average of 38.2%. If we take an VIII, this is a proposed increase from £82 to £131 (59.8%). There is no explanation as to how Camcon have calculated/arrived at this and needs to be challenged. There is also the argument that could be made that the starting point, that is, what we are currently paying, is also too high, and if compared with the fees charged by the Environment Agency, it certainly is much higher. Camcon will argue that the section of the River Cam under their jurisdiction is a much higher cost river to manage.

If you refer to the spreadsheet Jo sent out you will see that the average fee per metre, taking into account all rowing boats registered with Camcon, gives a fee of £5.70. If Camcon were to apply this now then an VIII would pay £96 rather than the £82 we pay at present. A sculling boat would pay £45 rather than £55.

The big question is why have Camcon decided to charge an average fee of £7.80 per metre for 21/22, where did this number come from?

You could base a fee on the number of people in a boat; not sure I can get my head around that one!

3) The document makes a claim *“We are consulting our licenced customers and other interested parties on proposals for: The introduction of a revised, fairer charging structure for unpowered* *private vessels”* We need to challenge the whole question of fairness. It seems to me that the rowers are being targeted as we are being hit with the highest increases.

4) The document proposes fee increases for the next three years, that is, from 22/23 to 24/25 with increases of 5% and 7.5%. We need to challenge this as it is impossible to know what inflation will be for these years and to set it now is unacceptable. Camcon quote in their document that *“the* *latest published annual consumer price index is 2.4%”.* We know that currently it is running at around 3.2% but certainly not at 5 to 7.5%. It is worth noting that for many years in the past Camcon have consistently increased licence fess in excess of inflation and often by at least 3% above inflation.

At the very least increases should be in line with inflation. We can also question the level of fees that we pay now and are being asked to pay in future given the current bank balance of the Conservancy which stands at around £1.9M (this needs to be confirmed and therefore is my best guess) Why do they need additional income? They should be running the Conservancy as break-even not trying to make a profit each year. Camcon will argue that they need to make a profit and increase their cash reserves in case there is a need for major repairs to the locks and also to maintain their assets, in particular, the weed clearing vessel.

5) Here is a question we need to ask: The Conservancy has always said that they are responsible for the Navigation of the River Cam, therefore, which jobs have not been done in the last 12 to 18 months that have adversely affected the navigation of the River. I have no knowledge of any adverse navigation issues that have impeded, sailing, canoeing, rowing or motorised vessels on the River Cam. This suggests that the work they have done over this period of time, with the staff they have, has been adequate for navigation purposes. Therefore, why do the Conservators need additional income from the rowers?

6)The Consultation document states: “with some restructuring plans already in progress” we have no knowledge of what these are and could be important/relevant to our replies to the questionnaire.

7)The Consultation document states: The details behind this financial review will be published in due course” I assume this relates to the five year plan the Conservators are going to issue, which has taken three and a half years to produce the last one ended on 31st March 2018, and this will be key to how we respond to the questionnaire.

**Here are some comment on completing the actual questionnaire.**

a) Q1 to Q5 should not give any difficulties with Clubs as they are fairly general and relate specifically to your Club

b) Q6 my answer would be NO

c) Q7 see above

d) Q8 my take on this question is so that Camcon can argue that the increase is such a small part of your Club’s overall costs that your Club can easily afford the increases proposed. My answer would be not to tick any of the boxes unless the increase is a significant part of your costs.

e) Q9 This can only be completed by your Club as it is Club specific, however, there could be a good argument for the impact on junior rowing v increased costs incurred by your Club if these increased are imposed.

f) Q10 There is no Q10?

g) Q11 my answer would be NO

h) Q12 I am not sure there is a single fairer charging structure than length. Clearly there are other structures available as for example with the Environment Agency who are proposing to base their future fees on the square metres of each vessel. There is always the tricky one of the amount of time a boat is using the River Cam and clearly a rowing boat has a much much lower usage than a motor boat or house boat. The difficulty I am having with using length is that there seems to be a different price per metre for each category of boat, so, how do Camcon decide what fee per metre to apply?

i) Q13 this is the big one, this is what the questionnaire is all about and hopefully with the Delegate’s Minutes and my comments you will be able to put together a good argument for not implementing the Camcon proposals.

If you want to discuss any of the above or have an exchange of emails please do so. My email address is: jwmartin4156@gmail.com or you can contact me on 0775 157 4041

In an earlier discussion I had with the River Manager soon after he was appointed I remember him saying that he hoped to run the Conservancy so that at some time in the future licence fees could be reduced. I am still waiting!

Good luck, we will need it, and let’s hope that the Conservators see reason and understand our points of view and do not impose the fee increases.

John Martin

1st October 2021