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Cambridge News

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Back in 1998 a rapid influx of houseboat started cluttering Riverside through a legal loophole as the City Council did not acknowledge it was responsible for mooring until recently. I would therefore like to thank the City Council for the consultation held last Friday in this regard.

The meeting was interesting but also disappointing. A very vocal group of houseboat dwellers behaved unpleasantly with repeated interruptions at others they did not agree with to the extent that one of the speakers were not allowed to finish a prepared presentation. Is that how the tiny minority of people who lives on the River Cam thinks democracy in action should work?

Over the years houseboat dwellers on the Cam have invoked a Cinderella status for their cause. Housing is prohibitively expensive in Cambridge and consequently less affluent people should be permitted to live along Riverside they argue. Never mind that thousands of other people in Cambridge cannot afford to live close to the centre. Moreover, their presence grossly subverts the principle of equality before the law. For instance, had a caravan of travellers settled on Jesus Green it would take less than a day before it would be moved on.

During the meeting myths were promoted such as there have always been houseboats on Riverside and that it is the rowing and the gentrification of Cambridge that is the real problem along Riverside. However, unlike the houseboats on Riverside competitive rowing has been a feature of Cambridge since the middle of the nineteenth century. Living in Kings Hedges I can certify that gentrification is only a good thing.

Why should people be allowed to live in what in places looks like a shanty town with the excuse that no housing is affordable? Surely if you are organised enough to live on a boat then you are also resourceful enough to find accommodation in a house. In other words, to live on a boat is a life-style choice rather than a necessity out of poverty.

Cambridge is rich enough to also host houseboat dwellers. But the chaos on Riverside is not helping their cause. Acknowledging that they do cause genuine nuisance to residents on Riverside, recognising that they do pose significant navigational obstructions for other vessels on the river and showing interest in solving these issues would be a positive step forward in building mutual trust and respect.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Oeffner