

Conservators of the River Cam

The Conservators of the Cam was set up by statute over 300 years ago and its activities and membership are governed by acts of parliament. It is the *Navigation* authority for the River Cam, and its bylaws are mostly to do with keeping the navigation open for craft, originally coming up for trade at the wharves in Cambridge. It owns the Halingway, which is the towing path beside the Cam between Cambridge and Clayhithe. It was financed for many years by a penny rate levied on Cambridge city taxpayers, but this no longer happens. Its investment opportunities are few, because although does not make a profit, it is not regarded as a charity, and it can only invest in cash or properties. Most of its income is from licence fees on craft which are based on the Cam - motor boats, rowing craft and punts, and balancing the burden on these different users is an ongoing challenge. It also owns some properties, which generate rents, as well as its own administration building at Baits Bite Lock (the former lock-keepers office) and the house and workshop at Clayhithe where the River Foreman is based.

The Conservators themselves are City and County councillors and representatives of the Environment Agency, local punt operators and Cambridge University, and those other representatives of groups and individuals with an interest are invited to attend as Observers. It is in this category that the nominee from South Cambs District Council falls.

The issues that have involved work with SCDC have been around replacing the willows along the Cam, many of which are coming to the end of their lives and proving dangerous;

- litter collection along the Halingway, for which SCDC gives an annual stipend;
- pollution from houseboats and passing craft, which can involve Environmental Health;
- maintenance of the ditches beside the Cam, which for years were not dug out, leaving some areas waterlogged. There is also a problem with the culvert where the A14 crosses the Cam, and we are liaising with the Highways Agency and hoping to get that cleaned out.

The headline-grabbing issues are often things which the statutes give the Conservators no power to change:

- they have no power to move wildlife off the river (Mr Asbo), though they have a general assumed duty of care to rowers,
- they have no power to limit the number of registrations of punts on the middle Cam, though they have a general assumed duty of care to punters.

This is a brief overview, which I hope will help members understand the headlines when they appear.

Hazel Smith