

Eastern Region Rowing Council



Policy Document Rowing Priorities in the Cambridge Sub-Region

Summary

The river Cam in Cambridge is used by up to 5,000 people during a year, ranging from once a year (usually visitors competing in races) to over 200 times a year, (probably residents training for racing at the highest level). About half, over 2,500, are university students who may train several times a week during term time.

Restrictions on when people can train due to academic requirements, and increase in participation, ('town', or non student, rowing has grown by an average of 5% per annum over the last 30 years), have resulted in the demand for water space exceeding capacity, so that for some participants they are unable to get the quality of training / recreation / competition they are looking for. (The Cam is used for competitive activities on 50 days a year, already over 30% of these turn away participants due to capacity constraints).

The Amateur Rowing Association, the sport's national governing body, has adopted The **camToo** Project, a proposal to build a new mile of river that will duplicate the most intensively used section, as the sub regional priority for the sport. The **camToo** Project will increase the river's capacity to meet demand now and in the future. This Policy Document describes the position.

Background

Rowing in England is managed by the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA). Until recently it has been primarily a competitive sport, most rowers train to race, there is little pure 'recreational' or 'touring' rowing, although the latter has substantial growth potential.

In order to race, rowers must be members of the ARA, and also of an approved club, most events are run under ARA rules and policed by approved ARA Umpires and Safety Officers. Each region in turn has an elected co-ordinating council, in the East the ARA is represented through the Eastern Region Rowing Council (ERRC).

Rowing is a year round sport, there are competitive events at, at least one venue, somewhere in the UK every weekend.

Between September and April these tend to be 'Head' races in which crews race a specified distance, usually greater than 2,000 metres, and the fastest wins.

During the Summer months they will be 'Regattas' involving side by side racing, mainly two abreast due to the width of waters available; but 4 abreast at Peterborough and Northampton, and 6 or 8 abreast on the 'national' courses at Holme Pierrepont (Nottingham), Eton-Dorney (Windsor), London Docklands, Reading, and Strathclyde near Glasgow.

Only Eton-Dorney and Strathclyde are approved by rowing's international body, FISA, and hence can host regattas such as the annual World Cup (held at Eton-Dorney in 2006), and Olympics (the 2012 Olympic rowing will also be at Eton-Dorney). All these courses offer racing over the international distance of 2,000 metres, whereas the longest regatta course in the region is just over 1,000 metres.

Eastern Region

In rowing terms the Cambridge sub-region is at the heart of the Eastern Region, which, because rivers do not follow county boundaries, includes clubs from the East Midlands (Northampton), South East (Milton Keynes), and London (Lea), as well as clubs within the government's East of England region

Most of the rowing in the sub-region takes place in Cambridge where there are approximately 4,000 rowers, over 2,500 (15%) from the university student population of 16,000, rowing for 32 college clubs and over 1,000 (1%) from the 'town' population of 100,000, rowing for about a dozen 'town' clubs. However rowing clubs have been in existence at St Neots, Huntingdon, and St Ives, for well over 100 years, whilst a rowing club was recently

established in Ely. Kings School, Ely also have a rowing club. These clubs add at least another 500 to the numbers of active rowers in the area. There are two strong centres just outside the sub-region at Bedford and Peterborough.

In the region there are events on 4 weekends out of 5. Whilst there is a recognised calendar, (approved by the ARA), all events are free market – the organisers, usually a rowing club, do not know who, and how many entries there will be, until the time for entries has closed.

Cambridge

In Cambridge probably over 90% of the 4,000 rowers never race anywhere than on the Cam and less than 5% actively participate in 'Open' events – those run under ARA rules. This means many Cambridge rowers never become members of the ARA, they only race in events organised by the two 'umbrella' organisations; the Cambridge University Combined Boat Clubs (CUCBC) is responsible for co-ordinating and policing college rowing, the Cambridgeshire Rowing Association (CRA) is responsible for co-ordinating 'town' rowing. It is estimated a further 1,000 rowers from off the Cam visit Cambridge up to a dozen times a year to compete in some of the events.

As mentioned above circa 15% of the student population rows, however this is probably a lower percentage than 20 years ago; whilst the total numbers have grown, the CUCBC has had to introduce restrictions on the amount of rowing due to the constraints on the river. Town rowing, however, has grown by 200% over the last 30 years.

Possibly as much as 95% of this rowing is done in eights, outside Cambridge the figure would be much less, perhaps even under 20%. In social terms an eight is regarded as an ultimate in getting people to work together – the crews best performance will only be produced when all 9 members trust each other to deliver their best individual performances at the same time. This is a major reason why the Cambridge rowing communities (town and gown/college) are so strong.

The Cambridge University Boat Club (CUBC) is a separate organisation to the college boat clubs, and is dedicated to producing two eights to beat Oxford on the Thames in 'The' Boat Race. As such the CUBC has little interest in rowing on the Cam as their crews train at Ely, where they have their own boathouse, and always will do so, (They need uncluttered water so that they can be coached by boat and also train over long distances as their race is 4.25 miles.).

The Cambridge University Women's Boat Club train at Ely too, there is also a University Lightweight Club. Both boat crews to race equivalents from Oxford at Henley over a 2,000 metre course usually the week before The Boat Race.

The Cam is used for competitive activity 50 days a year (2007), nearly 2/3rds of these being for college crews only, and for training / recreation every day (often by over 1,000 rowers during term time). As well as Head races and side by side Regattas often run by college clubs with minimum infrastructure, the river is also used for 'Bumping' races – a form of pursuit racing which operates like a performance ladder in which the order of racing one day is based on the results of the previous race, be it the previous day, or previous year. 'Bumps', however are very much about participation, and can be regarded as rowing's equivalent to a fun run, in that they cater for all abilities.

The 'Bumps' take place over 4 - 5 consecutive days at the end of February and the beginning of June between college crews, 121 eights in the Lents (February) and 172 eights in the Mays (June). Including supporting 'bank parties', the equivalent of the team in the pits at motor racing events, the number of active participants in the events are circa 1,500 for the Lents and 2,000 for the Mays, the number of non active supporters number thousands, particularly for the Mays.

In both cases there are qualifying or 'Getting on Races' as more crews want to take part than can be accommodated by the current river in the time allowed, in 2005 over 40 eights, i.e. 360 competitors 'failed to get on' before the Mays, an indication of the existing demand exceeding capacity.

Town clubs also have their own bumps over 4 consecutive evenings in July, the 2007 number of crews, 93 eights, (1,000 participants), is the maximum that the river can handle after work before it gets too dark, any further increase in numbers will require a qualifying race. It is the inclusive nature of the town bumps in which under 14's to over 70's race in the same event as internationals, and indeed may be more successful in terms of results, that has probably contributed to the explosive growth of the Cambridge town rowing community, (up by 200% over 30 years and still growing).

The **camToo** Project

The **camToo** Project is a proposal to upgrade the existing river by dualling the mile used most intensively. The new channel will increase the instantaneous capacity of the river for quality practice, possibly doubling it. It will also increase the number of crews that can race as the new channel will enable more divisions to be run within a specified time (bumps are run in divisions usually separated by 40 - 45 minutes). The Head races are also run in divisions and so will be able to accommodate more entries, whilst side by side regattas will be able to be run continuously as the crews will be able to circulate. Indeed the new river will enable continuous three abreast racing over 1,000 metres. The new river will be a part of the existing river and therefore **free** to all who currently use the Cam – as well as rowing, this includes angling, canoeing, dragon boating, sailing, pleasure cruising (powered and un-powered), houseboats, etc. We accept that the anticipated high rowing use will reduce its attractiveness to other users.

The **camToo** Project has always been seen as being a publicly funded project, the river Cam and most of the adjoining land involved is common/public land or water. Due to the sensitivity of the site, in spite of the large numbers involved, it has always been assumed greater planning gain than improved quality of life would be needed to justify the project, although this was before announcements were made that both student and town populations are planned to grow by 30% over the next 20 years.

Indeed in a submission to a survey carried out in 2007 for the Environment Agency on the use of water for recreation and sport, Cambridgeshire Horizons, the government appointed "Local Delivery Vehicle" for the Cambridge sub region, stated that:- "It is expected that this increase (*the 130,000 increase in the population of the Cambridge Sub Region*) will increase the demand for rowing and other water sports and action is required to address current pressures before they become a significant barrier to participation".

The ARA has identified The **camToo** Project as the only way to address those pressures.

The **camToo** Project will also provide a new dedicated public transport link between Cambridge Science Park and Cambridge City Centre avoiding Milton Road and serving the proposed rail station on Chesterton Sidings. The project was commended by the then Secretary of State for Transport in his letter approving the granting of a T&WA for the Guided Bus in 2006, when he said The **camToo** Project had carried out "useful preliminary work". The public transport elements of The **camToo** project have been included in the £500 million worth of precursor congestion charging projects for which a bid was submitted by the County Council to the Transport Innovation Fund in the Autumn of 2007.

The **camToo** Project is included in the Cambridge Local Plan which was adopted by the City Council in July 2006. The recognition calls for a full economic, environmental and social appraisal which we believe will be positive. More recently evidence has been accumulated that indicates the new river channel will substantially reduce the risk to life and property from floods.

A Cambridge Evening News online poll in Spring 2007 resulted in a majority vote in favour of dualling the river, whilst independent market research into the concept of the new transport link using earth from a new river found strong support on environmental grounds.

The **camToo** Project is lead by a virtual steering committee which includes Brian Hawden as Chairman of the ERRC, Bill Key, President of the CRA, and Dr Pete Convey, Chairman of the CUCBC, plus members of the ARA staff including Alan Meegan (ARA Facilities Officer). Project Manager is Richard Moseley who is also Secretary of the ERRC; the Council, following formal support from both the CUCBC and CRA, voted in 2002 to facilitate The **camToo** Project. There are also members from the business community concerned about Cambridge's notorious transport problems.

Cambridge Sports Lake and Bedford Lake

The Cambridge Sports Lake project pre-dates The **camToo** Project and was started with a donation to employ professionals to evaluate the possibility of building a 2,000 metre multilane competitive rowing course near Cambridge. At that time Cambridge had lost several Boat Races in a row and there was a view that an international training facility might help in recruiting international oarsmen to Cambridge.

The Sports Lake project has always been seen as privately funded, indeed it employs a professional fund raiser.

There is no doubt a 2,000 metre rowing lake on the outskirts of Cambridge would be an asset to the sport, hence this is supported in principle by the ERRC. It is, however, not an alternative to The **camToo** Project - indeed the latter only started when the analysis for the ARA showed that a rowing lake beyond Milton would not reduce the

demand on the existing overstretched facility - the river Cam. Indeed, if it brings more people into the sport the lake will increase the demand to train for, and compete in, the events on the existing river.

Whilst the ERRC supports the Sports Lake project in principle, several years ago they were asked to prioritise between the proposal for a 2,000 metre rowing lake on the Cambridge side of Bedford and the Sports Lake as both projects at that time were looking for Sports Lottery Funding.

The then regional committee went through a rigorous comparison of the two schemes to determine which should be supported by the National Body when / if an application was made for Lottery Funding and decided in favour of the Bedford Lake. The methodology used was audited by the ARA.

The Bedford Lake received planning permission July 2006, and is being progressed as part of the Forest of Marston Vale project. The project is being led by Renaissance Bedford, the government appointed Local Delivery Vehicle for the Bedford sub region, thereby involving all the relevant local authorities.

Northstowe

Northstowe is a new town of up to 10,000 houses planned at Oakington, about halfway between Cambridge and St Ives. Construction is scheduled to start within a couple of years.

The ERRC is also supportive of any proposal to make one of the balance lakes that will be needed for the Northstowe new town suitable for rowing. Representation was made during the first consultation phase that two 300 metre diameter lakes on the side of the main approach road be redesigned to give a 750 metre long narrower lake. This could support a 'participatory' rather than 'performance' rowing club and / or 'local' regattas - both Huntingdon and St Ives Rowing Clubs have over the last few years abandoned their regattas partially due to congestion of the river Great Ouse and have indicated interest in the possibility of using a balance lake.

The local planning authority, South Cambridgeshire District Council has agreed to keep the ERRC informed as to progress, and to invite submissions during a second consultation phase.

Priority

The view of the ERRC (and therefore the ARA) for priority of Public Funding is:-

- 1 Regional Priority - Bedford Rowing Lake
- 2 Sub-regional priority - The **camToo** Project – envisaged as part of the development of the transport infrastructure for Cambridge needed before Congestion Charging can be introduced.

It should be noted that is a strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region only. The regional priority remains the Bedford Lake, whilst not surprisingly there are competing projects for sub regional rowing water facilities elsewhere in the region, such as proposed developments at Chelmsford, Grafham Water / Hitchingbrooke Lake, Harlow, Milton Keynes, and Welwyn Garden City, that could take priority over The **camToo** Project.

Adopted by the Eastern Region Rowing Council, 30th January 2008.