

Public Questions – Full Council, 20 July 2023.

## Chair of Teversham Parish Council

**Q1:** There are a number of developments in progress or proposed (Hartree, Cambridge East, Spingstead and Marleigh etc.) which cross City/ SouthCambs areas. I am concerned about investment property being left empty on some of these sites.

Why are these being marketed to international buyers as an investment before local residents, given that one of the main reasons for building them is to satisfy the local need for housing?

Is there anything the Council can do to ensure local sales marketing is conducted in advance or at least in tandem with any international marketing?

## Member of the public (MOP)

**Q2:** I quote from the Council's statement : ".....this Council calls on everyone to engage with the River Cam and its associated chalk streams and tributaries with respect, accepting our stewardship of this vital natural resource, and asks all residents and organisations of Cambridge to act as guardians of the river and be mindful of the impact of our own actions and those of others that threaten its health and survival."

Please consider the enormous adverse impact a Designated Bathing Area at Lammass Land would have on the highly sensitive environment of this stretch of river. Three nature reserves meet here (Paradise, Sheep's Green and Coe Fen) and protected wildlife have their home. Snob's brook, which is where Cam Valley Forum proposes swimming lessons, houses water voles - it is illegal to disturb them. At least 12 species of fish have been found here and in the river Cam and the Rush stream. Vicar's Brook is a pure chalk stream which enters the Cam just above the proposed area. Otters have returned in the last few years. Paradise is home to huge numbers of species, including 64 bird species. Ancient willows, where Charles Darwin collected beetles, house numerous invertebrate species. Already, thoughtless picnickers can be seen using

fallen wood for fires. Attracting more people from across the county to come and swim here would be irresponsible and contrary to the Council's Biodiversity Emergency Policy. I personally think this would be an environmental disaster.

Given the expressed concern of many local residents and of the Friends of the Cam, together with the highly doubtful benefits of a DBA, should the council not be considering the overriding adverse ecological impact of a DBA at Lammas Land and not supporting the CVF in this venture?

(MOP)

**Q3:** A recent newsletter from Coleridge Labour states that the Fanshawe Road Flats Redevelopment will provide between 84 - 86 "much needed new homes" (note, not 93, as initially stated) and, at a minimum, 44 of these homes are designated for council rents replacing the 22 council homes that are currently being emptied of local residents. We need to be clear what is meant by council homes. Council homes do not mean council rents. The Coleridge Labour newsletter states that the number of homes available for council rents hinges on a Homes England grant so this could mean "60% of market rent or a mix of social rent (below 50% of market rent) and affordable rent (80% of market rent)".

How then can the Labour Council ensure that the brand new estate - after the old one, recently retrofitted at the taxpayer's expense and next to a public park and allotments, has been demolished and rebuilt, in the process permanently destroying local biodiversity, including pipistrelle bats and their habitats - will definitely provide even 22 homes for individuals on the same income as those forced to leave? How can the council claim that this project is about providing the people of Cambridge with "much needed" affordable homes and not chiefly a way of generating revenue from lucrative land close to the train station?

Cambridge Friends of the Earth

**Q4:** We are told that the creation of a Designated Bathing Area (DBA) will create a legal requirement for monitoring, the results of which will

apparently allow the authorities to 'apply pressure' to Anglian Water to take action to reduce or eliminate sewage discharges to the river Cam. Can we ask exactly how Anglian Water will be compelled to reduce sewage discharges to the river, given that they have ignored their obligations (agreed at Privatisation) for over 30 years and are now some £6.6 billion in debt and presumably lack the financial resources to upgrade their outdated infrastructure.?

Furthermore, won't the creation of a DBA before sewage discharges into the river have ceased, by its very name, encourage people to swim in contaminated water, regardless of the fact that a DBA only defines 'use' and associated infrastructure, such as the availability of toilets and parking? Would it be fair to say that people's health is being put at risk to create the impression of a clean, healthy river?

Surely no part of the river can be considered 'clean' until all of the river is?

### Friends of the River Cam

**Q5:** Bearing in mind that:

**The preamble to the motion** from the Labour Group appears to support the notion that rivers have rights. Yet a river rights perspective on pollution requires us to work actively to free all parts of all rivers in the UK from all sources of pollution.

**The campaigns against sewage pollution** have led to media and political pressure on government and political parties for water companies to be run according to a different business model that does not include fines for continued regular illegal sewage dumping.

**The water companies already know**, and DeFRA and the EA should know, where and when sewage is illegally dumped in rivers. So the DBA (designated bathing area) policy allows a slowing of effective regulation and a commitment to put the necessary infrastructure in place.

**The DBA efforts on the Wharfe in Ilkley Yorkshire** have already shown that they do not bring rapid improvements in water quality as was hoped.

**Water companies have said** that any new infrastructure will be paid for by an increase in bills rather than reductions in dividends and executive pay so any infrastructure money that benefits the Cam will be paid for in bills across the region.

**The Labour Group must be scrupulously careful** about a potential conflict of interest as a co-beneficiary in the shifting of Anglian Water's sewage works from a brownfield to a greenfield site to release land for development.

**Why then, is the Labour Group pushing a DBA policy** that will reduce pressure on water companies at a time when national campaigns have been having an effect; a policy supported by a regulation averse DeFRA and a many times fined illegal sewage dumping Anglian Water whose directors should be facing custodial sentences according to a former chair of the Environment Agency?

(MOP)

**Q6: On the basis that the** water companies show no respect for their legal obligations (to the point of the Environmental Agency stating that water company CEOs should be in jail for their legal infringements and that water companies routinely pay fines rather than make the necessary infrastructural improvements)....

**Knowing that** bathing area designation requires only partial river water testing (between May and September; once weekly; discounting exceptional events; and testing only for **e-coli and intestinal enterococci** - nitrates, phosphates, microplastics, viruses and antibiotic resistant bacteria are NOT required to be monitored)...

**Knowing that** DB status was designed for open sea bathing waters, and not rivers, and that river water (and the pollution it carries) flows continuously from source to sea...

**Bearing in mind that** the motion is internally contradictory in that it both specifies an ‘environmental destination’ anticipating upwards of 100 people swimming in a narrow river with a nature rich bank, and subsequent protection as a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); and that the infrastructure to support such numbers swimming (toilets, waste management and necessary access; catering outlets expected) cannot be consistent with such levels of nature protection...

**...how, then, can the City Council be confident at the outset - and therefore without a risk to bathers’ health - that a level of ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ water quality along the River Cam can be achieved, and without detriment to the river and surrounding environment?**

Federation of Cambridge Residents’ Associations

**Q7:** The inspirational town planner Jan Gehl advocates that to build communities that work well, the evidence needs to be shown and environmental capacity issues need to be addressed. So one should count all the punts, rowers, swimmers and canoes using the river just as highway planners have long tallied up road users.

Where is the evidence that this has been done in the proposal for the DBA?

How many punts, swimmers, canoeists can this small stretch of the Cam safely take as a “riverscape” visitor destination?

What kind of health and safety analysis has there been?

Chair of the Friends of Sheep’s Green Learner Pool and, Chair of the Friends of Sheep’s Green and Lammas Land

**Q8:** We are speaking as the Chair of the Friends of Sheep’s Green Learner Pool, and the Chair of the Friends of Sheep’s Green and Lammas Land, and our joint question relates to item 8e on the Agenda, ‘Stop dumping sewage in our River and Chalk Streams’.

While we support all the other actions recommended to reduce threats to the Cam and its tributaries, we do not agree that a Designated Bathing Area in the area proposed by Cam Valley Forum would benefit the river or Cambridge residents.

The level of pollution in the river is very high, and there is no evidence that monitoring it as part of a DBA would reduce pollution or put the necessary pressure on the water companies to do so, especially as Anglia Water already undertake weekly water quality tests. Promoting the river as a bathing area without addressing the real issue of why water treatment companies are permitted to discharge sewage into our river – which they should not do whether people swim in the river or not – puts people, and especially children, at risk from swimming in poor quality water. We have heard from multiple sources that there was a mass outbreak of illness following a recent ‘Cam Slow Swim’ event. This is very worrying.

Councillor Thornburrow suggests that the designation of a water bathing site by Defra would impose a legal obligation on Anglia Water to reduce sewage pollution until the level of ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ is reached. However, this legal obligation, as far as we can see, is not mentioned by Defra on what to expect if a site is designated <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bathing-waters-apply-to-designate-or-de-designate/designate-a-bathing-water-guidance-on-how-to-apply>. The only stipulations concern the frequency of water monitoring and the signs required to be displayed during the bathing season. It does not say that any water company is legally obliged as a result of the DBA to improve the water quality.

The Council already has a wonderful paddling pool by the playground at Lammas Land which is enjoyed by hundreds of Cambridge children every summer. It is approaching its 100th birthday, and is in desperate need of having money spent to renovate it to ensure its continued longevity. Likewise, Sheep’s Green Learner pool, built in 1977 for children to learn to swim, is still enjoyed by many today. However, it too is in desperate need for the Council to spend money on it, by reinstating the heating system that was removed previously, and installing showers so that it can once again be used by local schools for swimming lessons.

A DBA would require the Council to spend money on facilities that would still not make it safe for people, especially children, to swim in the river. We would therefore like to ask the Council to consider allocating the funding for the DBA towards much-needed improvements to the Lammas Land paddling pool and Sheep's Green Learner pool, facilities that already exist and enable Cambridge children to learn to swim and enjoy playing in the water safely. Investing now in this life-saving infrastructure would mean that once the River Cam is eventually clean enough to swim in, the children of Cambridge would be better equipped to swim safely once again in the river.

(MOP)

**Q9:** I am aware that there are many people who strongly support a dba because they are convinced it will deliver a healthier river.

The reason I am worried and have NOT joined in supporting a DBA at Sheep's Green, is because the criteria that need to be met are totally unsuitable for our river. These criteria demand access, public toilets, changing facilities, parking, lifeguards, first aid service, kiosks and shops. I have recently read DEFRA have raised the bar to 100 swimmers per day in peak season.

To meet these criteria, Sheep's Green will need to be transformed from a magical mediaeval meadow into a major honey pot destination, and potentially become a Bournemouth on Cam. Is this what the council want at Sheep's Green?

By voting for this motion, is the council committing to delivering the infrastructure that the criteria demand? What size car park that must support 100 swimmers per day? How will access change? How many kiosks/shops? How will life guards and first aid be funded? All this must be in place for Sheep's Green to qualify for dba status.

Cam Valley Forum

**Q10:** Cam Valley Forum wants to apply for designated bathing water status for Sheep's Green, because this is the most powerful way we have

to improve the water quality in the Cam, for the benefit of swimmers, punters, kayakers, our rowing crews, other river users and our wonderful natural habitats.

It is important to note that designation is about protecting the health of existing “bathers” not attracting new ones. The experience of other inland river groups, such as at Ilkely in Yorkshire is that designation results in no change in visitor numbers, not least because it highlights the “poor” water quality (as we currently have in the Cam)

This “poor” classification then creates statutory obligations under the Bathing Water regulations 2013 that should accelerate the much needed improvements in Haslingfield sewage works. This is why councils and community groups across the country are applying. 11 inland river sites have already achieved designation, including Oxford, Ilkely, and 4 in London. 100s of coastal sites have of course, had designated bathing water status for years.

Do you agree with Cam Valley Forum, that the environmental and health benefits of designation make a powerful case for the city council to support our application?