

Councillor Tong: The Failure of Jesus Lock Island and Baits Bite Lock Island

Councillor Smart Amendment

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~~The River Cam faces an existential threat.~~

~~The islands of the two locks that maintain a steady water level, Jesus Lock and Baits Bite Lock, are both at risk of failing due to the disrepair. Meanwhile, in their June update, titled An Organisation in Crisis [1], the Conservators of the River Cam announced that they were in dire financial straits.~~

~~While the urgent work needed to Baits Bite Lock Island has been approved, the Conservators of the River Cam have said that a much-needed rebuild of both lock islands would be impossible given the cost, even without factoring in the fact that Jesus Lock island also requires stabilisation in the short term.~~

~~While the damage caused to both the local environment and tourism would be a problem in itself, the harm that this would cause to the local community would be most devastating. A representative of Cam Valley Forum has acknowledged² that if the water level of the river lowered, local residents could be exposed to centuries of waste that has laid buried, posing a significant health risk.~~

~~Urgent action must be taken, yet the Conservators of the River Cam do not have the funds to do so, stating that they believe ‘unless specifically instructed by state or court, the necessary funding required by the Conservancy to ensure long-term survival will not be made available.’~~

~~The council resolves to;~~

~~Write to Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, explaining the need for the Conservators of the River Cam to receive funding for these essential repairs.~~

~~To also request that responsibility for overseeing the River Cam is transferred to any future unitary authority comprising Cambridge.~~

~~1 https://www.camconservancy.org/files/ugd/79067b_d61c6956e9bf47a3a48ba6a30f54696a.pdf~~

The Conservators of the River Cam and their work to maintain river navigation on the Cam

This Council notes

In terms of the management of the River Cam from the Mill Pool in Cambridge to Bottisham Lock near Waterbeach, The Conservators of the River Cam is the statutory and responsible body for river navigation and as such is the organisation responsible for Baits Bite Lock in South Cambridgeshire and at Jesus Green Lock in Cambridge City.

Both Jesus Green and Bait's Bite locks are affected by structural degradation. Enabling works will soon begin at Bait's Bite. A further condition survey of Jesus Green Lock is due in August 2025 to assess the cost of remediation.

The Conservators of the River Cam was constituted under Acts of Parliament in 1702, 1851 and 1922. Any longer-term reform would likely require new legislation to replace or update the existing statutory framework.

Navigation between the locks is clearly restricted at the current time. The Conservators of the River Cam are working to rectify this situation with support from both Cambridge City Council and other stakeholders.

Cambridge City Council has offered assistance to The Conservators of the River Cam including two senior officers, and funding together with South Cambridgeshire District Council to support the development of a business plan for The Conservators of the River Cam to maintain the locks.

The Conservators of the River Cam is working with other stakeholders including the University of Cambridge, riparian Colleges, and the County Council, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Environment Agency.

This Council believes

The River Cam is central to Cambridge's identity, economy, and public life. From punting to rowing and leisure walks, and much more besides, the River Cam plays a unique and essential role in the city's daily rhythm and visitor experience.

This Council resolves

1. To continue to work in partnership with The Conservators of the River Cam, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, the University of Cambridge, and riparian Colleges, and other stakeholders to support the development and application of a viable business plan relating to the maintenance of the locks at Baits Bite Lock in South Cambridgeshire and at Jesus Green Lock in Cambridge City.

a) Support The Conservators of the River Cam in the delivery of urgent stabilisation works at Baits Bite Lock.

b) Assist with the funding and review of the structural condition survey of Jesus Lock.

c) Strengthen the governance, leadership and operational capability of the Conservators to meet their statutory responsibilities.

d) Support the co-development of a sustainable funding model and a detailed asset management plan.

2. To take into account that while this is a pressing local issue, it reflects a broader national challenge in managing ageing navigation infrastructure. Similar investment needs exist in other places nationwide, for example on the Aire and Calder Navigation, on the River Thames, and across the Canal and River Trust's inland waterways network.

3. To work with the Conservators of the River Cam and other stakeholders and in coordination with local and regional partners, develop a shared and costed case for reform and future investment in the assets, and to engage with national government when appropriate.