

Green altered motion incorporating Liberal Democrat and Labour amendments to Agenda Item 10b: Proposed by Councillor Toye-Scott, Seconded by Councillor Nicmanis

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~~1 — Introduction (not part of active motion)~~

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~~The Green Group proposes the following motion to address resident concerns over the state of our rivers and chalk stream—~~

~~We regard the river as an integral part of the life of our city. Threats to our rivers are threats to us all.~~

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~~The purpose of this motion is to:~~

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- ~~• state our city's aspirations for our river and chalk streams ("the declaration of the Rights of the River Cam")~~

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- ~~• petition the organisations responsible for our river to improve their performance to help save our river and its tributaries.~~

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- ~~• recognise the limits placed by the critically depleted state of our river on future growth in buildings and infrastructure.~~

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- ~~• publicise the immediacy of the water crisis, creating awareness of the need to reduce water use.~~

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Active Motion

1 Declaration of the Rights of the River Cam

This council declares that the River Cam and its tributaries should have the following rights arising from their existence in nature:

- The right to flow and be free from over-abstraction
- The right to perform essential functions of flooding, moving sediment, recharging groundwater and sustaining biodiversity
- The right to be free from pollution
- The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers
- The right to native biodiversity
- The right to restoration
- The right to maintain connections with other streams and rivers

~~This council undertakes to assess the impact of all its decisions on the health of the river and ensure that all its decisions support these rights.~~

~~This Council calls on all residents and organisations to act as guardians of the River Cam and engage with the river in a relationship of respect and stewardship.~~

This Council recognises the River Cam and its tributaries as vital environmental, ecological, recreational and cultural assets and so will continue to have regard to the impact of its decisions on the health of the river, consistent with its statutory duties, powers and responsibilities.

Cambridge City Council is a significant riverbank landowner and undertakes riverbank management, biodiversity enhancement, sustainable drainage, flood resilience, public access management, river infrastructure projects and partnership working to improve the River Cam.

2 Responsibility

This Council notes that ~~the responsible bodies are:~~ responsibility for the health of the River Cam is shared between:

- the Environment Agency – general oversight, including preventing environmental damage to water and associated biodiversity
- Cambridge Water – ensuring adequate water supply
- Anglian Water – management and treatment of sewage
- the Conservators of the River Cam - the statutory navigation authority for the river, responsible for the locks, weirs and sluices that hold up the water level of the Cam
- Natural England
- the University of Cambridge and its Colleges
- riverbank landowners including the City Council
- and local communities.

The Council proposes to write to all three of these bodies to share its concerns over the state of the river and call upon them for their assistance.

~~The Council further notes that there are other bodies and institutions whose actions have significant impacts on the health of the river, and particularly highlights the importance of:~~

~~• The University of Cambridge and its associated colleges, through the maintenance of their assets and the management of their activities~~

~~The Cambridge Development Corporation~~

~~The Council proposes to write to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and the Chief Executive and Chair of the Cambridge Development Corporation to share its concerns over the state of the river and call upon them for their assistance.~~

The Council further notes that the Cambridge Development Corporation – through its influence over the scale, location and water efficiency of new development, ~~there are other bodies and institutions whose actions~~ will have significant impacts on the health of the river, and ~~particularly highlights the importance of:~~

~~— The University of Cambridge and its associated colleges, through the maintenance of their assets and the management of their activities—
The Cambridge Development Corporation—~~

So ~~the Council proposes to write to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and the Chief Executive and Chair of the Cambridge Development Corporation to share its concerns over the state of the river and call upon them for their assistance.~~

3. Interaction with the Council's own actions and the growth of the city

~~The Council proposes to set up a small cross-party group to draw up a plan for the actions that it can specifically undertake to contribute to protection of the river. This will include:~~

- ~~— considering the impact of future growth in buildings and infrastructure in the city on the depleted state of our river—~~
- ~~— recognising the limits that may be necessary to respect the rights of the river—~~
- ~~— reporting back to full Council preferably prior to updating the Local Plan.~~

requests an officer report to be presented to one of the council's overview and scrutiny committees to review current Council activity, partnership arrangements, opportunities for improvement and alignment with the Biodiversity Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy and Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

The group **Officers** will consult with the various environmental organisations currently actively involved in working for the improved health of the river. For the avoidance of doubt, it is intended that this group will supplement rather than displace the work of existing scrutiny committees.

Council notes the extensive evidence prepared to support the Greater Cambridge Local Plan on water scarcity, abstraction reduction and sustainable growth. These matters have been considered throughout the

Local Plan process and will be reported to scrutiny committee and to Full Council as part of the Submission Local Plan. All future development should continue to be informed by evidence demonstrating sustainable water supplies, reduced abstraction, water efficiency and environmental capacity.

~~The Council proposes to initiate a publicity campaign to create wide awareness of the current water crisis and the urgent need to address both the increasing over-abstraction of water and the decreasing quality of water.~~ supports continued collaboration through the Cambridge Water Scarcity Group, Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project, Water Resources East, the Environment Agency, Cambridge Water, Anglian Water and the Conservators of the River Cam and will work to promote all communication campaigns regarding water quality and scarcity using the council's media channels and press releases.

The Council will actively publicise the Environment Agency's recommendations to take early action (e.g, water companies to reduce leakage as a priority, and initiate actions required under their drought plans), and encourage the public to do all it can to use water wisely.

4 What the River Cam needs

This Council believes that the aspirations set out in Section 1 must be matched by action.

4.1 Water in the river

This Council notes that Cambridge Water introduced a temporary hosepipe ban on 9 July 2026, enforceable from 17 July - the first in over thirty years; that the Environment Agency declared the Cam and Ely Ouse catchment to be in prolonged dry weather on 22 June 2026; and that new supply for the Cambridge area is not expected from the Grafham Water transfer until 2032, or from the Fens Reservoir until the mid-2030s.

This Council further notes that the emerging Local Plan phases new development against the arrival of that infrastructure, but that no equivalent plan exists to improve water efficiency in the years before it arrives. This Council therefore resolves to:

- request a report to the relevant committee on water efficiency within the Council's own estate and its council housing retrofit programme, so that homes retrofitted for carbon are also retrofitted for water;
- support Cambridge Water's programme to reduce leakage and demand, and press for the Grafham Water transfer to be brought forward wherever possible;
- work with Cambridgeshire County Council on over-abstraction and on the restoration of the chalk streams of the Cam catchment.

4.2 Sewage out of the river

This Council notes that consent for the relocation of the Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant was granted in April 2025 but the funding for the escalation costs for it was withdrawn in August 2025, with no funded alternative brought forward by the government since; and that the emerging Local Plan, and the scrutiny committees of both councils, identify wastewater treatment capacity as the principal unresolved risk to the health of the river. No local plan, however carefully prepared, can build a treatment works with a withdrawn cheque. This Council therefore resolves to:

- call on Anglian Water to resolve the uncertainty it has created, and to fund a treatment solution for Greater Cambridge;
- press Anglian Water for a published timetable for the upgrade of the Haslingfield Water Recycling Centre, and for the reduction of storm overflow discharges into the Cam and its tributaries;
- use the water quality data from the Designated Bathing Area at Sheep's Green to demand action.

4.3 Locks that work

This Council notes that Baits Bite Lock and Jesus Green Lock were closed in June 2024 because of the risk of structural failure; that Baits Bite has since been stabilised following a £500,000 grant led by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, which met around one third of the cost, with the Conservators meeting the rest from their own reserves; that Jesus Green Lock remains at risk and full reconstruction is estimated at over £5 million per lock; and that the Conservators, funded principally through navigation charges, have stated that they do not have the money. Comparable navigations elsewhere in England receive government funding for their infrastructure. The River Cam receives none. This Council therefore resolves to:

- write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs seeking a sustainable, long-term funding settlement for the Conservators of the River Cam, and asking the Government to set out how navigation infrastructure of national significance is to be funded where it sits outside the Environment Agency and Canal & River Trust estates;
- write to the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to welcome the funding secured for Baits Bite Lock and to seek his support in securing the future of Jesus Green Lock;
- request a report on this Council's powers under the legislation governing the Conservators to contribute to their funding, and on the

liability arrangements preventing the recruitment of new
Conservators;

~~End of Active Motion~~

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~~Background Notes (not part of active motion):~~

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~~1. In late 2025 the Environment Agency announced (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drought-prospects-for-spring-2026/executive-summary-and-acknowledgements-drought-prospects-for-spring-2026>) that, unless we have average rainfall or more this winter, there will again be drought this year, with the area including Cambridge highlighted as being particularly vulnerable.~~

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~~2. On 22 June 2026, the Environment Agency announced that the Cam and Ely Ouse catchment has been declared in an area of Prolonged Dry Weather, after East Anglia received only 37% of the long-term average rainfall over the past three months.~~

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~~3. On Midsummer's Day in 2021, Friends of the River Cam made the first public declaration in the UK of the rights of the River at Jesus Green, linked to the Universal Declaration of River Rights: <https://www.rightsofrivers.org>~~

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~~4. The declaration is repeated on Midsummer's Day each year and is repeated in the text of this motion.~~

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~~5. The declaration of rights is supported by many of our local environmental and community groups including CPRE, FeCRA, Cambridge Friends of the Earth, Save Honey Hill, Keep Waterbeach Rural, Friends of Logan's Meadow, Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldhams Brooks, and many others.~~

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~~6. In 2023 Lewes District Council passed a Rights of Rivers Motion to protect the River Ouse in East Sussex. Momentum has been growing globally to extend legal rights to nature and in some cases specifically to rivers.~~

~~<https://democracy.leweseastbourne.gov.uk/documents/s27490/Motion%20-%20Rights%20of%20the%20River.pdf>~~

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~~Councillors Toye-Scott and Nicmanis wish to thank the Friends of the River Cam and representatives from a number of local environmental groups for their help in putting this motion together. Any errors or omissions are of course our own.~~