RESPONSE BY THE CAM VALLEY FORUM TO CAM CONSERVATORS' 2027-2028 FEE REVIEW CONSULTATION – NOVEMBER 2026

Response to Q7: Are there alternative approaches the CotRC should consider?

The Cam Valley Forum (CVF) supports in principle the need for the Conservators of the River Cam (CotRC) to raise fees. CVF does not hold a view on the adequacy or appropriateness of the fee increase proposed.

However, any increase would only go so far. While it may maintain CotRC's ability to continue, operationally, as a going concern, it does not address the increasingly urgent requirements for the CotRC to be placed on a sound financial footing to meet its obligations and liabilities.

It is unrealistic to expect annual fee income alone to be sufficient to meet the cost of maintaining – let alone undertaking a backlog of repair – the aging infrastructure that supports the Cam. If the Jesus Green and Bait's Bite locks were to fail, the water level in the river would reduce dramatically. Punting and rowing would be impossible, the foundations of college walls would be exposed, and the iconic views of the Backs would no longer attract tourists that benefit Cambridge's businesses.

It seems to CVF that there is a lack of clarity in understanding the historic legislative framework governing the extent of CotRC's legal power, obligations and liabilities. The uncertainty places the CotRC on the back foot in its dealing with other stakeholders and when considering its options. Any rebuffs when help is sought are too readily accepted.

The Cam Valley Forum strongly encourages the CotRC to take the following steps:

- Obtain expert advice from legal counsel to unravel the legislation, interpret the relevant Acts of Parliament and provide unequivocal advice on the CotRC's position. The cost of such advice should be seen as a necessary investment to give confidence to current and future conservators.

- In light of such advice, produce a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses the financial black hole.

- The strategic plan should set out the way in which CotRC expects the city's two universities, the colleges and their alumni; other riparian owners; the businesses that comprise the globally renowned "Cambridge Cluster;" the residents of Cambridge; and the many thousands of visitors (all of whom benefit directly and indirectly from the river flowing through our city) to contribute to its financial upkeep and to its ecological health, recognising that some bodies will have much greater resources available to assist.

- Request the financial consultant to look particularly carefully at options for raising funds for capital expenditure (such as the major repair work required on the locks) from organisations that have the potential to provide major

donors. These would include College and University alumni for whom rowing and the river was a particular passion and might include philanthropists and major donors. It would be worthwhile looking at the potential for developing a major fundraising appeal targeted at such individuals as well as some of the major companies and businesses that benefit from their Cambridge location.

- The financial plan for on-going operational costs should be relatively straight forward to draw up, once the legal background to the CotRC has been clarified, and should be developed with appropriate consultation with all those currently involved in using and managing the river.

Note:

The Cam Valley Forum is a voluntary group, established in 2021. We work with our extensive network of partners to protect and improve the River Cam and its tributaries for the benefit of the community and the environment. The Cam Valley Forum is a charity registered with HMRC. www.camvalleyforum.uk

CAM VALLEY FORUM
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