

AINA CASE STUDY

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Managing rubbish on the River Cam



The Conservators of the River Cam work closely with partners to help keep their waterway clean and navigable

Tourism in Cambridge is highly dependent on the visual appeal of the River Cam, particularly along the College Backs where famous historic buildings line the waterside. The Conservators of the River Cam maintain eight miles of waterway and have a duty to maintain the navigation free of obstruction whilst also looking after four miles of towpath.

Annual agreements are made with Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council whereby the Conservators' staff clear rubbish, with reimbursement helping to subsidise their running costs of approximately £15,000 per annum. The Conservators have invested in their own litter clearing equipment (quad bike and trailer for the towpath, litter pickers, etc.), and a fleet of workboats (purpose-built barge with lifting arm and weed harvester with grab) are used to clear the channel. The work is labour-intensive but machinery has improved both efficiency and safety.

Rubbish along the College Backs is temporarily stored in a covered barge, which is periodically towed to a depot six miles downstream for offloading into a skip provided by the City Council. Green waste is chipped on site, burnt (under licence) at the depot or composted, and there is potential for some recycling.

Water levels along the College Backs are occasionally lowered, and the Conservators take the opportunity to identify objects to be removed. Their also staff undertake periodic rubbish clearance upstream of the city centre. Debris removal from booms in front of two sluices and the removal of large items such as tree branches are recharged to the Environment Agency (or costs split with the relevant local authority). The work is carried out under the terms of an annually agreed Memorandum of Understanding.

Volunteer efforts augment routine rubbish clearance and provide valuable PR opportunities, e.g., the River Cam Clean-Up is an annual event organised by residential boaters, and the City Council assists through the provision of rubbish bags and disposal trucks. It is anticipated that local population growth (an estimated 40% by 2020) will lead to increased volumes of rubbish and ways are continually sought to increase funding for future work. The Environment Agency continues to categorise water quality in Cambridge as 'good' and this may, in part, result from the regular clearance of rubbish from the River Cam.