



THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS BOAT CLUB

PROPOSED WESTBERE LAKE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Joe Phillips (JP) and Jon Williamson (JW) have done a great job in keeping this idea moving over the last few years. JP finds himself increasingly busy with work matters and asked to hand over the project dossier, so I (NP) have picked up the paperwork and will attempt to summarise the situation, opportunities and options here. I've assembled things as short numbered paragraphs for ease of reference and comment by others. Disclaimer – I'm sure I've got some of this wrong, not being onsite or fully familiar with the politics etc. Forgive me, but at least it's a start!

Nigel Press. 12.viii.2017.

BACKGROUND

1. The lease for KSCBC to use Westbere was set up by Richard Hooper with Tim Brett of Brett Group (BG). Tim's son Bill Brett (LN 79-84) is now head of BG and his brother James (LN 84-89, VIII 88-9) is a shareholder. James is a planning consultant and friend of JP. The lease is thought to run to 2030, carries a low rent and states that KSCBC should be the main beneficiary of the activity.
2. The lake lies approximately E-W. See appended Google Earth image. The land surrounding the lake to the north, west and south is owned by BG. The land to the east is in other hands and has been left as a nature reserve; a land registry search would reveal the owner.
3. The lake is environmentally very sensitive, being sandwiched between the Stodmarsh 'National Nature Reserve' a 'Special Protection Area' and various 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest'. Anything other than very minor development would require consultation with the Environment Agency and Natural England.
4. The lake presently has a maximum rowable length of about 1,250m., but this is only achieved by weaving around various obstacles.
5. It has long been considered that there might be a possibility to extend the lake in some way to create a longer course, ideally 2000m. The advantages of this for training crews and generally encouraging rowing and racing in the region are obvious. About 750m. to the east is another lake, but this is in fact a tidal lagoon, so without enclosing the lagoon or making Westbere tidal, both highly problematic from the point of environmental approval, the water to the east is probably not useful.
6. Careful examination of the maps and Google Earth opens up some possibilities for extending the lake to the west, but achieving a clear run of 2000m would be extremely tight unless it were possible to cut into the land to the east. There already exists a short cut into the land to the east, the so called 'Boot Lagoon' which is 137m long to the east, 28m wide (12.5m. width per lane is acceptable) and includes more turning space, but is separated from the main lake by a maintenance vehicle and footpath causeway, so a bridge would be needed.
7. The scrubland to the west that would need to be excavated is thought to be at least partially 'landfill', and so there would be no economic benefit from extraction and potentially there could be environmental issues in excavating and disposal of spoil.

ACTIVITY SINCE 2012

8. After a rather quiet period, KSCBC is on the up following the appointment of JW and the enactment of his 5-year plan. Crews have again raced at Henley, had successes at regattas home and abroad and club members are racing in national trials and achieving junior selection.
9. Fast-forward to 2016 and KSCBC yet again have Olympic medallists; Tom Ransley's Gold in M8 and Fran Houghton's Silver in W8, so both male and female (has any other school achieved this?), which is of enormous prestige to both KSC and the City. This makes 2017 a very auspicious moment to raise interest in rowing at Westbere.
10. Since 2012 JP and JW have been working to develop the case for improving Westbere; this has involved meetings with relevant officials from KSC and BG as well as other possible interested stakeholders and



supporters. JP has gathered some outline cost advice from construction and environmental consultants recommended by BG.

11. **KSC.** Are broadly in support of the concept of improving Westbere, albeit with some reservations (eg. security), but they are considered highly unlikely to make anything other than a minor investment at present as they have already decided their 'Major Projects for 2016-2020'. Whilst the school does support sports, the primary emphasis is more academic. In the early planning of the Malthouse project, there was some talk of a rowing tank, but that has likely been subsumed by the new International College. We should assume that KSC will be pre-occupied with their major projects for the time being.
12. **Brett Group.** Positive meetings have been held, and in principle BG are amenable to further development of the Westbere facility, albeit within environmental restrictions and not to compromise their future use of the site. They did express some interest in investing in the site, but eventually conceded that they could not see a viable revenue stream. There is the possibility one day of re-use of some of their facilities and areas in other ways. There is certainly no shortage of hard-standing.
13. **Sturry Plan.** There is a substantial Master Plan afoot for Sturry comprising 1,100 homes north of the railway and up to Broadoak, including the construction of a by-pass and new bridge over the railway. This is part of Canterbury City's long term plan for 16,000 new homes, so Westbere surrounds might get approval too. The new Sturry houses are proposed on land partly owned by JKS. This plan is scheduled to be submitted later in 2017. 1,100, or indeed 16,000 homes will certainly need more recreational facilities.
14. **Canterbury City Council.** CCC are known to be interested in developing the Stour both within the city and beyond as a recreational and tourist amenity. At the time of writing there is activity with a RIB to trim the river banks on the Fordwich reach, and JP is in touch with a local entrepreneur who is developing canoeing tours and activities. CCC might well be interested to see rowing activity at Westbere further developed. JP has a list of some contacts.
15. **Other potential users.** University of Kent at Canterbury (UKC) has a fairly active rowing club, and for some years have used the old KSC facilities at Pluck's Gutter, near Sandwich. They seem to be moving their focus to Westbere, and JW sees this as a welcome development which he has nurtured. However, he has also pointed out that it can put a strain on the relatively limited space/resources presently at Westbere. In Canterbury there are at least two other major schools that might have an interest. There is also a second university, Canterbury Christ Church University, not to mention the possibility of a new local rowing club open to all – there are known to be experienced rowers in the area interested in picking up again.

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

16. **Environmental Issues.** The environmental & ecological obstacles to a *major* development at Westbere would be huge. That is not to say a development would not be possible. JP contacted Dominic Woodfield of Bioscan who works with BG, knows Westbere and was involved with Caversham. Without going into detail he stressed the size of the task. He also commented that professional fees for a project such as Caversham or Dorney would be in the region of £150,000.
17. **Costs.** Assuming that environmental and planning obstacles could be overcome, JP has a ballpark figure for the engineering and construction works from Gavin Mackenzie of Modus for £8m plus a further £2m for infrastructure. This is very much back of a fag packet and should be taken so, but it is an indication. Again this is for a potential 2000m. course.
18. **2000m (or near) option.** This is not impossible, but is going to be very difficult to achieve. My guess is we are looking at a 5-10 year time span, starting with a considerable period of building the need and justification to the authorities, part of which would be increased KSC support and the inclusion of a far wider group of users. Even if a donor came along with the money, wide public support would likely be needed to overcome planning, ecological and environmental issues and local people, fishermen and sailors would be needed to be onside.
19. **Other Westbere Options.** JW has quite a lot of interest from groups wanting to come for training camps, even with only 1200m feasible and no lanes. There might be a 'soft' option involving only minor adjustment and trimming to the lake, dredging the ends off islands, and perhaps a very short new cut that would give two or more lanes over a longer distance up to 1500m (if the cut in the land to the east is



included) or, more easily, four well marked lanes over 1000 metres (possible if only the island is removed). It is known that clubs go from London to Teeside for training camps since they have 6 buoyed lanes over 800m. Adjustments of this nature might be planning and environmentally feasible, could be relatively low cost and greatly improve the facility for KSCBC use. They would also be attractive for visitors, perhaps generating revenue and stimulate new use by UKC and others. All such activity would be important in building the case for a future more ambitious development.

20. **WHAT WOULD BEST HELP KSCBC?** I asked JW what new initiative would best help further develop rowing at KSCBC. It is understood that it will always be difficult to compete with schools having facilities such as Eton with Dorney or an ethos that encourages sport on the same level as academic achievement in contrast to KSC. However that does not mean that KSCBC will not be successful as JW and predecessors have shown, and also that KSCBC rowers will be able to compete in national trials and seek places in GB Juniors. With this in mind, JW has replied that in addition to longer training water and more interaction with other rowers, a proper permanent boat club base in the Precincts; a training room with a dozen ergos and video facilities etc. would be a major boost for the Boat Club (see footnote below).
21. **OTHER THINGS THAT WOULD HELP DEVELOP ROWING.** Apart from improving the lake and a Precincts facility, JW mentioned two other areas that stand out and may be partly interlinked; the club would benefit from more interaction with other rowers, and improving the facilities at Westbere. Coping with 80 pupils can be a challenge. If UKC become more active there will be pressure on racking and additional boat sheds and other dry-side facilities will be needed. If there was a plan to raise the profile of rowing on the lake and encourage users from outside – a probably necessary step in achieving a major extension in length – more racking would be needed. There is scope for external racking, but it would require considerable tree felling to remove slime generating leaves. There is wasted space in the pitched roof of the existing boat shed – possibly a free-standing mezzanine could be inserted to accommodate a bank of ergos, freeing up other space. If more rowers were using the space it would probably be necessary to do some landscaping and lay more tarmac.

PROPOSED ACTIONS – PURELY MY OWN THOUGHTS AT THIS STAGE (N.P.)

1. Compile our feedback on this document., and set up a group to carry plans forwards.
2. Get clear what our primary objective is; to encourage rowing at KSBC, encourage rowing in general, establish a 2000m. course or some combination of these.
3. Start moving forward with some proposed plans, including limited dredging, buoying the course and the feasibility of expanding the site for others. Find out who owns the land to the east. Start with a meeting with Brett Group to ‘test the water’ and get some advice, then follow up with meetings at Canterbury City Council and elsewhere.
4. Help JW develop a strategy to bring in and accommodate other rowers.
5. Use the amended Pilgrim’s constitution to realise our untapped potential to raise funding.
6. Don’t lose sight of a possible ultimate objective of establishing a 2000m. course.
7. Investigate how we can support JW, primarily I suspect politically, but possibly also financially, in getting his Precincts facility. Don’t lose sight of the possibility of a rowing tank.

I would like to receive approval from CPBC to continue these discussions, together with any other members who have the time or inclination as appropriate.

N.P. 12.viii.17

FOOTNOTE – PRECINCTS BOAT CLUB CENTRE. The school have provided part use of a room beneath the Shirley Hall, but this is shared as a class room, so is only available out of teaching hours and not during exam time. What is needed is a home for KSCBC where students can ergo at any time, e.g. between revision stints, or just go to chill out. Furthermore at present there is no visible presence of rowing to show visitors or prospective parents – here would be a place for crew photos, pics of our Olympians and general identity of KSCBC. With all the development planned, surely it is possible to find a new basement area suitable for this? It seems this would be more useful than a rowing tank, at least in the short term, and possibly more achievable.



Westbere Lakes



2000 and 1000 metre distances,
separated by width of four lanes

Google earth

600 m

