

Lord Chris Smith – Chairman  
25<sup>th</sup> Floor, Milbank Tower  
21-24 Millbank  
London, SW1P 4XL

25 November, 201

Reference TUGn/ 1119/ CORRESPONDENCE - Lord Smith Dec 2011

Dear Lord Smith,

I am writing on behalf of more than the 25,000 Thames Boaters, and probably in excess of another 100,000 people who are represented by the River User Groups and River Thames Society. Even these are just a small percentage of the thousands more who are aware of the River Thames and are not members of the above groups. We also aware that during the time you where the Tourism Minster you had the opportunity to see the river first hand hosted by Keith French MBE who is also a signatory to this letter. He advises me that you saw first-hand and recognised the importance of the Resident Lock Keeper on the River Thames.

**We universally oppose the intention of the Thames Waterway Management to freeze residential lock & weir keeper recruitment and offer subsequent vacant tied cottages used by resident lock keepers for rent.**

We fully understand the challenges of managing the River Thames as the EA management team face smaller budgets: however Users believe what is being suggested is not practical and is not necessarily the correct way forward. We offer a proposal which shows alternatives that find budget savings against the proposed EA suggestion and at the same time protects the river into the future.

The safe and economic management of The River Thames has to continue and this must be the key element for the success of this most important river which is the crowning glory of the Nation's Waterways and a 'Blue Chip' in the Environment Agencies assets for so many diverse reasons.

As you are aware from your time as Minster responsible for tourism the Thames is a major tourist attraction both domestically and internationally. It is a part of the South East Integrated River Management. It provides drinking water and dispersal of treated sewage. It provides clean water to maintain fisheries. It hosts sporting activity with both rowing and sailing Olympians starting their early training on the Thames. Within this eclectic mix it provides the opportunity for the many recreational activities both on and by the side of the river, too many to list individually. Management has the responsibility of managing water levels to facilitate all of these activities and most importantly damage limitation when the river reacts to weather conditions

The “Resident Lockkeepers” are an integral part of the mix that makes the Thames the iconic waterway it certainly is. They provide the eyes and ears of the Agency. They provide service to public and navigators. They manage the water levels and assist in providing the first call emergency cover whilst living in their tied cottages which were put there over the past hundred years by those who in the past were responsible for maintenance of the Thames. In emergencies and in flood conditions the resident lockkeepers are the face and ears of the Environment Agency. EA is the current caretaker of this national asset and as such has a huge responsibility to sustain the stewardship for future generations!

The Users’ proposal provides the answer which is cost neutral against EA suggestion, showing both fiscal savings and efficiencies. We have been party to discussions with EA South East River Managers and have found many areas where we are able to work sensibly and in partnership for a more sustainable River Thames into the next decade. There is only a very small area of disagreement between us and the Regional Director! After an extensive four hour meeting on 15 November his decision remained not to fill vacant lock residencies, whereas the users proposal calls for appointing existing experienced relief staff. (Recruitment to replace these relief positions would remain frozen at this time)

Using a full complement of Resident Lock Keepers, as per the Users’ proposal provides emergency cover without having to pay for additional training for extra staff who when trained will necessarily still be inexperienced. Their contiguous mobility and call out costs will be yet another expense!

We believe that what we have proposed is a most sensible solution which makes complete common sense both practically and financially. Reluctantly we have accepted the freeze on recruitment and our proposal is based on using existing front line lock staff. We accept subject having lock keeper residents in place and the Volunteer Program with summer relief and summer assistants employed as necessary. We are very concerned that the plan to let any lock cottages which become available to members of the public indicate a plan to entirely dispense with resident lock keepers in the future.

In 2008 EA faced a most difficult period when it suggested the radical change to the way the river was managed, by proposing the sale of these lock cottages. It was decided at that time that it was not appropriate to change. Lock keepers are paid a basic salary of £21,000 and it is only by providing accommodation that right calibre of applicants are attracted to work with their individual responsibility of providing service to the public and maintenance of river levels. The current EA Plan does not give much credence to their wider role. The River Thames deserves better than 'spread-sheet' management.

Since the announcement was made on 7 October time is running out. I am charged to write this letter to you on behalf all that have signed below. A public campaign might be necessary if we cannot find a resolution.

We ask you to meet with us urgently to avoid public actions in the hope that an agreement between EA and ourselves can be reached very soon.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Shefras MBE  
TUGn Coordinator

**Copies to: Ruth Hall and Suzanne Warner**

**And on behalf of the members of Thames User Group (Navigation),  
Chairs of RUGs and River Thames Society as below.**

**AGREED AND FURTHER SIGNED BY:**

**Mike Chambers Thames WWG - Thames FERAC**

**Richard Chase Thames Hire Cruiser Association**

**Margarita Davidson Chair RUG 1 & 2**

**Alan Dawe Chair RUG 3**

**Peter Finch Chair River Thames Society**

**David Fletcher Chair NABO**

**Keith French MBE Chair Passenger Boats Association**

**John Howe IWA Regional Representative**

**Louis Jankel Thames WWG - Thames FERAC – NABO**

**Bob King Thames WWG – Chair RUG6**

**Mike Gates Thames WWG – Chair BMF – TV**

**Peter Moore Chair RUG 4/5**

**John Pleace BMF – TV Honorary Treasurer**

**Michael Shefras Thames WWG – Chair ATYC – Chair RUG 8 – Vice President  
River Thames Society**

**Andy Soper Thames WWG -Thames FERAC,**

**David Sowter Thames WWG Thames FERAC**

**Chris Turner Chair RUG 7 - Vice President ATY|C**

**Richard West Thames WWG –**

TUGn is a federation of Regional Boating Governing Bodies covering all boating on the Thames which includes the Trade, Passenger and Hire Boats as well as Recreational Boaters of all disciplines and are members of the Thames WWG

RUGs membership is open to all those who are interested in the well being of the River Thames. There are six River User Groups between Teddington and Lechlade numbered 1

– 8, with RUG 1 & 2, and RUG 4 & 5 conjoined and are members of the Thames WWG are able to be part of TUGn

River Thames Society works to provide a sustainable and healthy river and is a member of the Thames WWG are able to be part of TUGn

**ACRONYMS – (For information)**

**ATYC – Association of Thames Yacht Clubs**

**DBA – The Barge Association**

**IWA – Inland Water Ways Associaton**

**NABO – National Association of Boat Owners**

**BMF-TV – British Marine Federation – Thames Valley**

**PBA – Passenger Boat Association**

**RYA Thames Valley & London –Royal Yachting Association Thames Valley & London Region**

**RTA – River Thames Alliance**

**RTS - River Thames Society -**

**RUGs – River User Group**

**Thames FERAC - Thames Fishing Ecology Advisory Committee**

**Thames Rowing Council/British Rowing Association**

**Thames WWG – Environment Agency Thames Waterways Working Group**