

Statement from Nicolette Boater to 24.1.13 meeting of the ECD PDS Panel

Thank you Chair for allowing me to comment on this path finding report .

As former adviser to other regions and cities seeking to make the most of their natural assets as well as a lifelong river valley resident, the first thing I want to say is thank you and well done to the large number of people whose hard work over the last 2 or so years has got this report to where it is today and especially

- the diverse experts and volunteers that comprise the River Corridor Group
- Members and officers of the Council
- senior representatives of partner organisations and the community

all of whom gave generously of their time and expertise to attend the SID and input into this report, and of course the Scrutiny team for pulling this altogether so splendidly.

Although I've been following the agendas of all the PDS panels since the current administration came to power, this is only the second time I've been moved to make a public statement. And on this occasion, as when I submitted a statement to the Resources PDS panel last July, it is because of the importance of decisions made and actions taken now to the long term interests of the communities the Council serves.

The work described in this report has been undertaken over a period of unprecedented financial challenge, uncertainty and structural change for the Council, but also one full of opportunity for those who want things to be done differently or better than before. In the middle of last year, the Council having updated and communicated its own vision, started looking out for other organisations who shared it and with whom it might work to deliver it – a very apt moment indeed to hold a public inquiry as to how best to unlock the potential inherent in our river corridor.

[refer to figure 1: “A new and more strategic way for the Council to deliver its vision...”]

Like many who attended and contributed to the SID last October, I was pleased how the vision and change agendas of many diverse organisations can combine and develop momentum in this way. For it is at moments like this that step changes are possible. However, as the report also recognises, a strong and widely owned vision is not enough alone. To drive the desired change a strategy dealing with reality as it is, warts and all, is needed.

[refer to figure 2: “Having examined the evidence, a strategy identifies the obstacles and works out how best and when to deal with them...”]

The RCG has provided us with a fantastic start to assembling the evidence. However it was apparent at the SID that there are some serious obstacles to realising the river Corridor vision. Although some good ideas as to how these might be surmounted, are reflected in the findings detailed in the report, there was also a feeling amongst river enthusiasts that some obstacles are just too difficult without decisive and dedicated leadership.

For all these reasons I hope the Panel will urge the Cabinet to grab the opportunity inherent in our River corridor by wholeheartedly supporting the two main recommendations suggested in this report, and be forthcoming with suggestions as to how the report might be made even more complete, persuasive, and authoritative.