

I am Cllr Duncan Hounsell, Saltford ward councillor, and I am also speaking on behalf of my ward colleague Cllr Alastair Singleton. Mead Lane, Saltford, is a beautiful and iconic location. The river has been used for transport and recreation for many years. The river-bank is a public space and in the interest of equality needs to be available to all sections of the public and not any one interest group.

Following concern that the 2005 stabilisation works never envisaged moorings, the decision in January to have a temporary ban on moorings until the stability of the bank could be assessed was the right one for public safety. We would like to thank all the boaters who adhered to the restriction during this period.

The Atkins report is clear that the river-bank is apparently stable but recommends periodic reviews. Decisions can be made now about the future use of this short stretch.

We have seen a wide range of uses of the river-bank this summer by members of the public - paddle-boarding, fishing, wild swimming, and picnicking. We have also seen a revival in the wild-life, flora, and fauna. The plants on the river- bank and adjacent shallow water supports a whole set of special invertebrates which suffer from unrestrained mooring.

The package of recommendations before you strikes a fair balance between the wishes of the boating community and other groups and individuals. The river-bank to all the residents of Saltford is like its village green. The reallocation of the 48 hour mooring section as open space for other leisure purposes is welcomed and may be the first step to establishing a nature-reserve on the river-bank. Moorings can be prevented in this open section with simple buoyage, a floating line, and clear signage. A ban on all moorings for four months over the winter period is sensible in the interests of safety.

A criticism of the previous Conservative administration was that a mooring trial was introduced with no funding allocated for monitoring and control. The creation of a joint River Warden post with the Canal and River Trust is excellent news. This will help boaters to fulfil their CRT continuous cruising licensing conditions, ensure action is taken in relation to overstays, and be a point of engagement for all parties. A MiPermit type charging regime could also help with boat identification and deter overstays.

We welcome the recommendation in the Atkins report that the temporary parking restriction is made permanent. Mead Lane has no pavements and a parking ban allows for pedestrian safety, social-distancing, and removes congestion. The Wessex Water Scientific Centre at the end of Mead Lane is open seven days a week for delivery of drinking water samples and wastewater/effluent samples from a variety of sources including reservoirs. The Centre also requires the delivery of essential supplies. It is vital for public health that access/egress is not impeded by parked vehicles.

The long -term aspiration is to re-allocate moorings away from Mead Lane. Key to that is the on-going work identifying alternative sites, positive engagement with the boating community, and full public consultation.

Some have described the complex issues around Mead Lane in terms of a clash between cultures. This is and always has been nonsense. Saltford is a kind, welcoming, and liberal-minded community.

The recommendations before you represent the hall-marks of a Liberal Democrat council administration: evidence-based and transparent decision-making, fairness, concern about equality and fulfilling the public sector equality duty, ecology and the environment, and improving people's lives.

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