

## **Progress at last!**

We are delighted to tell you that work at our new boathouse site has started with the construction of the access road and the main building will follow later this year. Our growing membership means that a very large number of you have joined since our search for a permanent home began in 2005 so this newsletter is to bring a common level of information about the project and its timeline to the whole club. What follows is the story leading up to our search and the early trials and tribulations. It continues with details of how the project will now move ahead and how it has been and will be funded, ending with when we can move in and the plans and funding beyond that to complete the full scope of our planning permission.

## **Newsletter 1: GORING GAP BOAT CLUB - The Search For a Permanent Home**

### **The Early days**

The Club was founded in Goring over 25 years ago, and based there in temporary accommodation until the mid-2000s. During this time at least two potential permanent sites for a boathouse were actively pursued - one at the Thames Bank Nursing home in Goring, and another at the Swan in Streatley. In the former case, the landowner had a change of mind. In the latter case, the Environment Agency objected on the grounds that the reach between Goring Lock and Cleeve Lock is too short and therefore unsuitable for a rowing club. This objection was significant, as obviously it would similarly apply to any other sites on this particular reach - effectively ruling out anywhere in either Goring or Streatley itself. In 2005 the Club moved to Hardwick after the Oratory School made the offer to share their facilities. Although still temporary, the Hardwick accommodation was much better.

### **2005-2011**

While sharing with the Oratory School, the search for a permanent home continued in the background with a huge amount of work undertaken by the then Chairman, Richard Bowsher. A total of 25 sites were investigated by him stretching from Wallingford to Reading. He summarised this search in a report in 2011, by which time the Oratory had served notice on GGBC to vacate - adding urgency to the matter. Many of these sites were found to be unsuitable for the variety of reasons. Three were considered possibilities - Hardwick Estate (where we are now), Carmel College on the outskirts of Wallingford, and Reading School near Caversham Bridge in Reading.

These three sites were then investigated in greater detail, with two being considered particularly strong possibilities - Carmel College and Reading School. Hardwick was ruled out after speaking with South Oxfordshire District Council, as extremely unlikely to gain planning consent for another boathouse on the flood plain at the Oratory site. Detailed proposals for the remaining 2 were drawn up by Richard.

## **2011 +**

In 2011, the Club Committee voted 7 to 5 in favour of pursuing the Reading School option. Similarly, at the AGM, there was a narrow vote in favour of pursuing this option - and Hugh Baker Smith picked up the action as incoming Chairman. However, over the subsequent few months, the opportunity evaporated as the headmaster moved on and the school changed their mind about site sharing - and eventually decided to redevelop their boathouse on their own.

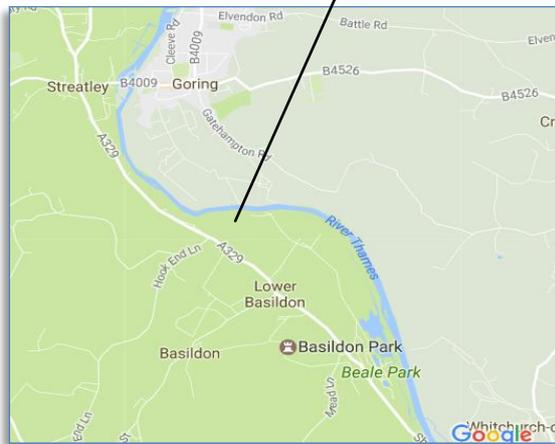
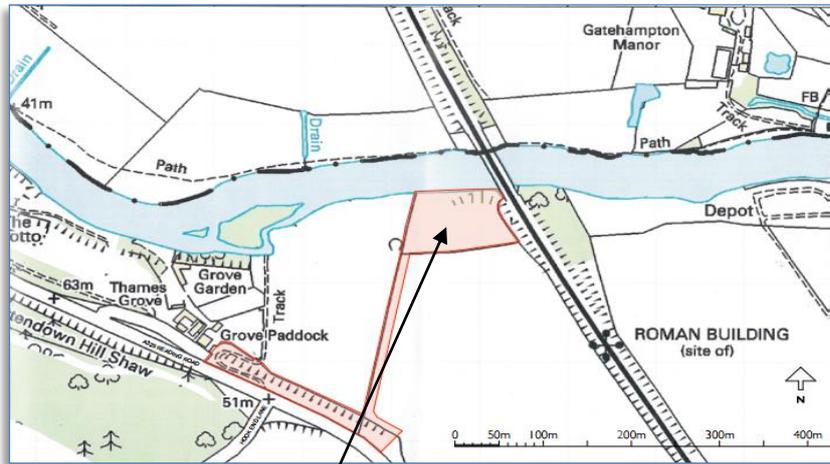
The Carmel College option was revisited, but it quickly became clear that GGBC would not be able to move ahead with this until wider planning issues for the site had been resolved - and this seemed likely to take years (in fact, more than 5 years later, these things have still not been resolved).

Hugh also revisited the possibility of sharing facilities with Adventure Dolphin, having meetings with them and with West Berkshire Council. However, this option would have required construction of secure boat storage facilities on Pangbourne Meadow, and the planning authorities made very clear that this would not be given consent.

In late 2011, a Club member called Paul Sedgwick had come forward to Richard with another potential site, but there had not been time for Richard to include this in his AGM proposal. Paul was CEO of Yattendon Estate (YE) owned by Lord Iliffe, and they had a riverside patch of land retained from when they had owned the Basildon Park estate. Hugh knew Paul personally, and they were able to quickly establish both the suitability of the site, and the willingness of the Yattendon Estate to help GGBC develop it. Pre-application advice from the Berkshire Planning Dept suggested that they would be sympathetic (although they subsequently changed their minds!!), and a solution was found for upgrading the current agricultural access so that it could meet the requirements of Highways.

In 2012, GGBC Club members were polled regarding whether we should pursue the potential site at Lower Basildon, and finance a formal planning application. The previous proposal to pursue the Reading School option had been widely contested within the Club and only narrowly passed, which had created a degree of ill-feeling between Club members - and the 2012 Club Committee wanted to avoid a repeat of this experience. Just over 70% of all Club members participated in the Lower Basildon poll, with every vote cast being in favour of developing this site and none against.

**So Lower Basildon it was**



First we had to get planning permission. It was a marathon task in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that took nearly 2 years, but we eventually received a conditional planning consent on 12th June 2014. However this contained 27 conditions, 14 of which needed to be discharged before we could start construction. One of these conditions required the boathouse to reach a level of sustainability called 'BREEAM Excellent' which we subsequently were able to prove was impossible for such a building. After a great deal of work by our project team we finally discharged the last of these pre-commencement conditions on 2nd February 2016.

### Who is on the Project Team?

Paul Springgay – Construction Project Manager  
 Matthew Crowder – Civil Engineer  
 Hugh Baker-Smith – Fundraiser / Partner Liaison  
 All club members who have volunteered their time and expertise.

### So why didn't we start construction in February 2016?

Because there were four major issues remaining to resolve:

1. Submit full design package and **secure Building Regulation approval**. The regulations relating to Phase 1 were discharged in February 2016 although we are still trying to get

the final regulations relating to subsequent phases discharged. This will not however prevent a start on site.

2. **Secure unconditional funding** offers from Sport England and Greenham Common Trust. We received conditional offers in September 2015 but the conditions had to be discharged before we had any certainty over availability of the funds. Some of these were quite onerous, particularly the requirement to submit to Sport England evidence of a registered lease between GGBC and YE. This was in turn dependant on the Access Agreement (see below) between YE and Hillfields Farm being signed. In the event the lease was not signed until December 2016. We have secured this from Greenham Common Trust but we cannot start the main build until Sport England have given us the go ahead and we are in the final stages of this now.
3. **Signed formal Access Agreement** between Yattendon Estate and Hillfields Farm, without which we cannot access our boathouse. This was a condition precedent to the S.278 Agreement (see point 4 below), and was only signed in December 2016, although the actual headline terms regarding access had been agreed by all parties prior to our planning application.
4. **Signed S.278 Agreement** between Hillfields Farm, GGBC and West Berks Highways Department to enable the junction with the existing highway to be built. This was signed in March 2017.

### **What took the time?**

For the Access Agreement the owners of Hillfields Farm and YE instructed lawyers to produce the formal document with inevitable delays as the lawyers played ping-pong with the draft agreements. Unknown to GGBC both YE and Hillfields Farm had mortgagees with an interest in their respective land. The mortgagees would also have to approve and sign both the Access Agreement and the S.278 document. This situation was further exacerbated in March 2016 when the primary business of the owners of Hillfields Farm entered voluntary administration, which meant further external scrutiny of the Agreement.

GGBC has no direct relationship with the various lawyers or the mortgagees and although both third parties were chased incessantly GGBC otherwise had no influence over the progress of these documents.

### **Managing Third Party Relationships**

Although our boathouse is of relatively minor importance to either, both YE and Hillfields Farm have been fully supportive of the project and both will gain something by the development. YE will benefit from an income-producing lease on the boathouse field and, eventually, a slipway for the use of Lord Iliffe. In return YE undertook to build the access track and junction with the Reading Road. Their board approved a budget of £25k for these works, although as they subsequently discovered this proved an inadequate allowance. YE have also volunteered a place to dispose of the considerable arisings from the site. The owners of Hillfields Farm will also have use of our slipway, although they already have access to the river from the land adjoining our site. Other interested parties include West Berks Council, Sport England, Highways, The Environment Agency, Greenham Common Trust, Gatehampton Trust, local residents and Basildon Parish Council. All of whom need to be on board with our project.

### **What are we building ?**

A four bay boathouse with a pontoon just upstream of the Brunel railway bridge at Lower Basildon. At 600m<sup>2</sup> the size is generous, but it was felt that a 4-bay boathouse would enable us to attract tenants for 1 or 2 of the bays, so helping in the longer term to finance the project and importantly to produce a recurring income to finance the club. The aim is to keep the Club low cost and inclusive. A boathouse that can supplement members' subscriptions would be a great asset and enable that aim.

### **With a green roof?**

The design is of a high and relatively expensive level, and this was largely driven by the planning process. There was a significant level of opposition due to the location in An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and its perceived visibility from the Thames Path on the opposite side of the river. This led for example to the requirement for a proprietary "Green Roof" which could in itself cost upwards of £100k although we will be making considerable efforts to reduce this.

### **Was it always going to cost this much?**

Some members recall a figure of £330k being advanced as the potential cost of the project. As the design emerged this would never have been a viable estimate. When Paul Springgay became involved in 2014 he reviewed the budget from first principles and advised that the full budget to deliver the planning consent would be in excess of £500k. Our situation is exacerbated by the fact that we are unable to recover any of the 20% VAT we will pay. We have looked into VAT registration and although it would mean we could claim back a small proportion of the VAT, it has irreversible and onerous implications for how we manage the finances of our club into the future, so we have excluded that possibility.

At the 2014 AGM, it was reported that the boathouse would now be built in two phases, each costing an estimated £265,000. Costs have risen in the 3 years since then, but in particular, during the last year alone we have been impacted by sterling devaluation following Brexit and the request from YE for GGBC to fund their shortfall in the main access costs, which together resulted in an additional £50k. Our contractor Scorpion had been very cooperative in holding their price for 18 months following their initial tender, but with a high steel content they could not absorb the resultant increases, particularly in the price of fabricated steelwork. Their increases are not unreasonable.

That's why we needed the extra £30k to start work this May.

### **Given the increased costs, could we submit a planning application for a smaller, lower quality boathouse?**

- Even if we were successful the whole process would probably take at least 2 years from now and we probably will have been ejected from the Hardwick Site by South

Oxfordshire District Council by then so we would possibly not even have a club at that point.

- Whilst the planners would accept a smaller footprint they almost certainly would not accept any reduction in quality.
- Another application would give another bite of the cherry to potential objectors.
- Our existing project team would be unlikely to be willing to work pro-bono and from scratch for another 2 years.
- Most importantly we would be at significant risk of losing some, if not all, of our external funding. Sport England has many potential projects competing for funds and they may well lose patience with us if there is any further delay.

### **Can we reduce the costs?**

After phase 1a is complete there will be opportunities to save some money with volunteer labour. This will be a huge undertaking and will take a lot of willing parties both to volunteer and manage the work. As an aside the committee has already made a number of appeals for volunteers but received very few positive responses. However, there is still the potential to reduce phase 1b by up to £20k with a volunteer army.

### **When can we row from the new site?**

Our planning conditions made a number of items a condition precedent to using the boathouse. These include removing the surplus excavation arisings from the site and laying out the car-park as shown on the planning drawings. If we move in before we have completed these we risk an enforcement notice from the planning officers. Not only could this see us having to stop rowing, this could alienate our funders, prejudicing any possible funding of future phases. Therefore we need to keep fundraising. There is at least another £50k to find before we can move in.

### **Could we have stayed at Hardwick?**

Most of us would agree that Hardwick is a wonderful site. But we cannot stay here. We are here with the good grace of the Hardwick estate which has been incredibly supportive and we have a good relationship with The Oratory, but SODC have not given us their permission and in fact have asked us to leave once already. They could enforce that at any time. This is one instance where an understaffed planning department is working in our favour.

### **Once we have cleared this hurdle and started rowing from the new site how much more money do we need to raise to complete the full scheme in accordance with our planning consent ?**

At current costs about £260k, but if we take say 3 years to raise these funds this cost will have inevitably risen. Again there will be scope to reduce these costs with the help of a volunteer army.

### **What Next?**

The access has started with the completion of the junction with the main road. We needed to do this to have started the project within the timeframe required by the planning permission.

As soon as we get the go ahead from Sport England the initial landscaping and the building of the shell will take the rest of the year and early 2018 as well. We expect to move in Spring 2018, so by this time next year we should be visiting the site and installing our pontoons, racking and initial facilities. We will also spend this year fundraising and seeking new grants. With a shell under construction and work going ahead it is conceivable that by the time we move into the new building we will already have identified grants and funds for the next phase to fulfill our immediate club requirement at the end of phase 2a.

### **Can I help?**

Yes, especially if you have skills that could contribute to fitting out a building, landscaping, fundraising or grant generation!

We are going to be producing a list of working groups that will focus on different aspects of the boathouse build and development. A list of these will be on the website. Please let us know if you can offer your skills or time and we will find a role for you.

### **Can I visit the site?**

Not while it is a construction site due to health and safety rules. But we will aim to organise site visits at intervals so that club members can see the progress.

### **What else should I know?**

We do not want to detract from the main purpose of the club, which is to row as a recreational and community friendly boat club. We do not intend to divert all our energies and resources to building the boathouse at the expense of maintaining our current fleet of boats and offering a variety of rowing activities. Our new premises will provide an excellent environment on one of the most attractive and least crowded reaches of the river Thames, but building it will not detract from our main objective, to row.

### **Further Updates**

We will be updating the website with a regular newsletter to show you where we are with the build: money raised, issues arising, decisions taken, advice sought. Pictures too. We are excited and hope you are too.

### **Any more questions?**

We do not aim to answer every question here, it's long enough already. There is a model of the new boathouse on the club website, but if you want to know more or if you want to help, please call either Co Chairs, Ros Crowder on 07981 516009 or Lorraine Slade on 07813 766142 or speak to us at a club session.