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National
Historic
Ships

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Mr. Gary Lugg
Head of Planning & Trading Standards
West Berkshire Council

Dear Mr. Lugg

The Consuta Trust – Application No. 07/01717/FUL

I am writing to express my concern that the application by the Consuta Trust to establish a floating boathouse on Beale Lake has been refused by your council. I understand that although the Trust drew particular attention to the heritage merit of this Thames Umpire's Launch, this was deemed not to be a material planning consideration. I believe that your council has not understood the importance of this vessel, the specific needs that such vessels have in order to sustain their long-term future, and the wider benefit that such fascinating vessels bring to the communities in which they are placed.

Heritage Merit

Built in Goring in 1898, *Consuta* is a Designated Vessel on the National Register of Historic Vessels (NRHV) in view of her outstanding importance in the history of the growth of sporting and leisure boating on the Thames at the end of the 19th century. This status means that out of the 1200 vessels on the NRHV, *Consuta* is one of 200 vessels which form the National Historic Fleet and which therefore demand the highest levels of support in order to ensure their survival. *Consuta* has had a long and distinguished career culminating in her careful restoration between 1973 and 2001 during which her original steam engine was returned to the hull, and her fittings brought back to former glory. All this has been done to the highest standards by the respected boat restorers Henwood and Dean, Kew Bridges Engines, and a great deal of volunteer work. The Heritage Lottery Fund recognised both the outstanding heritage merit of this launch and the Trusts commitment to making her accessible to the wider public by awarding a grant to support the restoration programme. *Consuta* has been presented at various Thames regattas and festivals and has also worked as an umpire launch, thus (unusually for many historic vessels) returning to carry out her original purpose. It is therefore fair to say that National Historic Ships holds this launch in the highest regard. A history of her is to be found on our website, the new address for which is www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk.

I cannot accept the view of your council that *Consuta's* national historic status is not a material consideration to be taken into account in determining the Trust's application.

Sustainability

Keeping vessels such as *Consuta* in operation and good order is challenging and expensive. Crucially: they need protection and good working space. I believe that the proposal for a floating boathouse based on catamaran hulls in the form of a traditional Oxford college barge is a clever and sensitive solution which will enhance the presentation of the lake as a whole

whilst providing the facilities necessary to sustain *Consuta* in the long term. Without such an arrangements, her future is bound to be in jeopardy, her public usage will be under threat and the investment made in her by the nation through the Heritage Lottery Fund wasted.

Public Benefit

Consuta evokes the history of the Thames in a very special way. The Trust has shown its commitment to public benefit by using her at river events and the boathouse proposal will allow for limited public access in the winter period. At the same time the Trust has shown great sensitivity to the needs of Beale Lake and will not permit over-usage to undermine the special character of the area. Without proper support facilities *Consuta* will be exposed to deterioration, and the best that can be hoped is that she is maintained out of the public eye which will be great loss.

As the body appointed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to advise on all matters concerning historic vessels it is my role to intervene when National Historic Ships sees that the interests of such vessels are not being given due account. I would urge West Berkshire Council to reconsider its decision to refuse permission for the *Consuta* boathouse: I believe that the heritage merit and public benefit of this imaginative scheme has not been properly investigated or understood. I appreciate the nervousness which your council may have on the possible over-use of this sensitive water environment, but these issues are well understood by Trust and there are monitoring mechanisms which can be put in place to ameliorate such worries. This is by no means the kind of intensive intrusive development which would detract form the character of the area. Furthermore I understand that there have not been any objections by individuals or other local bodies to this proposal.

The Consuta Trust is in the process of submitting a formal appeal on all of this. I support that appeal. If I can be of further assistance to you or your council in resolving this issue I will be happy to do so.

Yours Sincerely

Martyn Heighton
Director & Secretary to the Advisory Committee
National Historic Ships