

Hon. Secretary,  
Liverpool yacht Club

[Address removed for  
publication]

16<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

Dear Hon. Sec,

**LYC proposed merger with TSC.**

Thank you for your response to my last letter. I also received a response from Steve Harrison and I would like to reply to both in this letter as my comments are to the club, rather than any individual member of committee or officer.

Steve assures me that there is no hidden agenda for a merger, which comment I accept. However he goes on to say that, 'there will be a joint commodore and senior officers'.

Your reply says, 'the committee would have the same structure as now but for the next year one of the elected members would act as a, 'Rear Commodore – TSC site'.

I am surprised that I am being told two different versions of what is proposed at this late stage of the committee's deliberations and I am concerned that if we have a joint commodore and senior officers, that in itself will be a merger of the clubs.

It matters little what the RYA say. They will still recognise the two clubs if each retains its name and pays its own affiliation fees. What is more important is that the members of each club have their interests safeguarded by their elected club officers.

This can only be assured if each club retains its officers to look after their members interests. If you combine the officers' roles to look after the interests of both clubs' members', they have been compromised and will have to make the best decision for both clubs, which may not be best for each club individually.

Moving on to fees. Steve Harrison has said, 'it will become necessary to align fees at the first opportunity'. I do not see that this is necessary if the club accounts are being run separately. I note your comment that, 'the momentum to run a membership at TSC may be depleting due to the low membership and the active sailors currently keep their boats and sail out of Liverpool'.

It would obviously save any argument, if the fees paid by LYC and TSC members is the same. It would prevent a person joining the cheaper club simply to avoid cost.

However, looking to the future, if the costs associated with TSC was to increase the cost of running the Alliance, then that liability would fall on all the members, both LYC and TSC. This would not be to the benefit of LYC members. Many of us see; not owning a club house; not having a yard; and not having a launching slip as the key to our being able to run a successful programme of racing, whilst maintaining a low membership fee. We may be low in fixed assets, but this in itself maintains our freedom to react to any unforeseen eventuality.

By example, the club has transferred its winter racing programme to Pwehelli, without having to concern itself with the consequent loss of income to Liverpool Marina.

I really am struggling with how to vote on 28<sup>th</sup> November, because, whilst I want to help TSC, and acknowledge that the Alliance option is better than a merger, I still do not have enough information to come to a conclusion on the proposal, which appears to be premature.

Steve, in his letter states. 'We have been talking to planners, developers and local politicians around TSC and we believe the difficulties are offset by great opportunities. What I hope all of us are agreed on is that it would be wrong to stand by and see TSC fail and the clubhouse, boatyard, moorings etc lost forever for boating.'

You in your letter have said. 'We have also talked with TSC about our prospective plans. An article was published in Grapevine describing what is being considered for the Tranmere site and a further article is submitted to the next Grapevine.'

These plans include developing use of the boatyard and slip. We have looked at costs and practicalities of craning boats out at TSC and it seems it could be reasonable. The clubhouse is in reasonably good condition and the current TSC members are interested in continuing to run this in the short term at least.

If the Alliance is a success then over the next few years, funds permitting, we have talked about the possibility of introducing day sailing boats and to develop a youth side to the club.'

This information is all we have been given and having used the site in the past and visited it during the last week, I find myself unable to accept the committees statements as being correct.

Use of the existing facilities without major expenditure is not possible for the following reasons.

### **Boat Yard.**

- (i) The existing boatyard is very small and cannot be enlarged due to its proximity to the clubhouse and difference in level to surrounding ground.
- (ii) The access to the yard requires a sharp turn off an unsurfaced track and it is difficult to imagine anything larger than 25ft getting in.
- (iii) The yard is currently full with 16 boats of approx 25ft length, which are locked in by one another, such that it would not be possible to get individual boats out without moving a minimum of three. There appears to be no room to place three boats anywhere-else, to allow exit for the boat wishing to launch.

## **Slip.**

- (i) The slip has a restricted width at the top (10 feet.) due to the boundary fence of the adjacent property. It is not wide enough at this point to allow passage of wider vessels and would be difficult for a crane of any size.
- (ii) The slip is shallow and any vessel being launched would have to be taken out to a position where there is sufficient depth of water. This appears, from my site inspections to be a long way out and beyond a simple crane lift from near the top of the slip. It is more likely that the boat would need to be on a trailer. The crane would have to go down the slip and set up in a suitable position. The trailer would have to be driven down to the crane and the boat then offloaded into the water.

This is far from easy, particularly as the crane would be operating off a sloping slip, rather than level ground and would be below the high water mark and therefore at risk. The hiring of cranes is no longer straight forward due to regulations which require a competent person to have carried out a risk assessment and method statement and that person must ensure that a competent person is present to carry out the lift. This could not be covered by a generic method statement produced once and re-used as the information which has to be included is specific to the lift. Eg reference number of the crane, type, model, capacity, test certificates for machine, drivers competence certificate, test certificate for lifting slings etc.

- (iii) There appears to be heavy silting within the launching area and on the bottom sections of the slip.
- (iv) Launching from a slip requires a degree of skill which many boat owners do not have and it is potentially dangerous. The difficulties should not be underestimated.

## **The Moorings**

- (i) We have already in previous reports been told that the moorings are in poor condition and that we cannot get anyone to maintain the moorings that LYC already have in the TSC side of the river.
- (ii) Boats have been lost off these moorings during the normal sailing season, particularly in strong South Easterly winds. I have personal experience of this when Calisto, a boat I used to helm, was lost due to a broken mooring in a strong South Easterly blow.
- (iii) Getting from the TSC slip to a boat on the moorings is dangerous. The tide is running fast 2hours before HW, the time you need to be getting on board, and if anything goes wrong with the outboard and you are in an inflatable, you will be washed towards Eastham very quickly. In a force 4 with wind over tide, this is a very dangerous situation. A hard dinghy is easier to row, but usually a lot less stable. Again, I have had personal experience of this going out to a well known boat, Mischief, a Ron Holland ¼ tonner, to do an LBSA race. We did eventually get on

board, it was a frightening experience, we were all very wet and far from being in the right frame of mind to go racing for the day.

- (iv) I can also remember Dave and Joan Leather getting stuck in the mud, when they were struggling to make the TSC slip and decided that they would not make it against the tide. They tried to land on the beach and did not appreciate how deep the mud was. They were rescued by the fire brigade.

It would be interesting to have the comments of TSC members who must already be aware of these difficulties and must be able to tell us what is possible at this launch site and what is not possible.

### **Royal Mersey Yacht Club**

Royal Mersey has a very different requirement to TSC in that it sails smaller keelboats, the largest of which is the Etchells. These can be simply towed down the slip with a car, left on a long rope to the trailer and floated off on the incoming tide. They also have a very good rescue boat, capable of helping to get boats from the launch site to their mooring. The same boat gets crew to the fleet on race days and back to shore at the end of each days sailing. The rescue boat is on a trailer and due to its shallow draught can be launched from the slip at the beginning and end of the season. The moorings used by their boats do not have to be particularly robust as the boats are small and light and these can be easily maintained from their rescue boat. There is sufficient space within RMYC to store their fleet on hard surface and each boat can be accessed for launching without moving other boats. Their clubhouse is very historic, but unfortunately in need of much repair.

If we re-examine the LYC committee proposals for future use of TSC site there is mention of introducing day sailing boats and to develop a youth side to the club. It must be obvious to our committee that this activity can already be better provided by an Alliance with Royal Mersey Yacht Club, so why is that not being considered rather than a duplication of facilities which can be in no-ones interest. I am sure that Royal Mersey would more than welcome an increase in the use of their facilities providing it was on the right terms.

### **Development.**

Steve has told me in his letter that, 'We have been talking to planners, developers and local politicians around TSC and we believe the difficulties are offset by the great opportunities.'

I am sure that before making any decision on the proposed Alliance, members will want to know what has been said. What are the prospects for doing something of benefit to members of LYC and others sailing on the River Mersey, What are the great opportunities.

We would also like to know, what are the difficulties that have been recognised and will have to be overcome. We need to be sure that they can be overcome, because if they cannot, then great opportunity will change into disappointment and possibly disaster.

I do have some experience of development. In my current employment, we prepare sites for developers and I am well aware of the costs involved. I have no idea of what is in the committees mind under the heading of future development of the TSC site, but I have written down both my concerns and my aspirations for the site to both widen the discussion and to hopefully inform the rest of the membership of what could be involved and what might be considered.

### **Considerations for Development.**

- (i) The clubhouse, boatyard, slip and moorings in use by TSC can all be improved to a standard which would allow their use by day sailing boats. There seems little point in doing this as the existing facility exists at Royal Merseyside and it would be better to improve their facilities to give more certainty to their current activities continuing and hopefully expanding.
- (ii) Development of the TSC site to make it suitable for the boats we currently operate out of Liverpool marina is not possible without a major cash injection. It would require the acquisition of land adjacent to the top of the slip to make it wider. Improvement of the slip to gain safe access for boats to deep water. The purchase or hire of suitable equipment to move/lift boats from the yard to the water.
- (iii) The TSC site on its own is of no use to a developer as it is of insufficient size and is blighted by its surroundings.  
The adjacent Shell storage facility is a major hazard and there could be a presumption against development as being too close to such a potential hazard. Existing uses only are likely to gain consent.  
The disused storage facility adjacent to the slip, together with the pipe jetty which used to load the ships is a very contaminated site. The cost of the clean up of this site will never be justified against the value of the land on which the tank farm and existing buildings are sited. Soils containing more than 1000 parts per million of hydrocarbon are classified as hazardous waste. Disposal costs are typically £1,200.00 per 20ton lorry. I would expect the cost of remediation to be of the order of £300,000.00 to £500,000.00 and would not be surprised if it was not even higher, due to its proximity to the river and the special measures that may be required to satisfy the Environment Agency Requirements. The pipe jetty could remain but it does blight the site. Its removal costs will be high as the work is over water. Much will depend on the condition of the structure and if it is safe to progressively demolish from seaward, using the remainder of the structure for access. If this is not an option then plant involved will have to be barge mounted and the works will then be subject to tide conditions, adding additional costs.  
The public house, 'The Admiral', is only attractive to bikers and is hardly a going concern. The current owners/managers leave skips of rubbish lying around the premises and make no attempt to provide a good environment. Its position on the site is prominent and would restrict/prevent development of the rest of the site. It would have to be acquired to form a development footprint.

The land and buildings occupied by TSC divide the site into two and would only be of use if they were combined with the Admiral pub's land. The largest area on the development footprint is that owned by Royal Mersey. It is however furthest from the river, and in its cut off position not as attractive without a river frontage.

There is also a large area of land, probably owned by Wirral Borough Council, opposite Royal Mersey, TSC and the Admiral pub. This land could be put to use as part of the development footprint and allow better access to the beach area.

Because of the existence of the existing Shell tank farm and its massive piled sea defences on the river side and the existing slip and pipe jetty. It may be possible to design an economical proposal to infill this area for use for the sailing clubs and boat storage/ handling facilities, thereby releasing the remainder of the site to a developer. Inclusion of some social/low cost housing would be required to obtain a planning consent and this could be sited nearest to the tank farm to act as a screen to the remaining development. It may also be possible to generate an income from the infilling to help towards the cost of developing the boat storage/handling facilities. A new clubhouse would also be needed to replace the existing Royal Mersey and TSC facilities. This could also be a permanent home for LYC if that is what members want. It would be far more viable if used by all three clubs.

Permission for infilling the river would require permission from MDHC, ( Peel Holdings, could be a problem. They would want to control the action.) It may also require an act of parliament, similar to that required for the building of Seaforth Docks.

The only real way of assessing the viability of the site is to get agreements in place to protect your own position. 'Options,' and then to take it to Developers to assess their interest and find out what they are willing to do. Options between LYC, TSC and RMYC should be possible at minor cost but it is likely that the owners of the Disused Tank farm, The Admiral and Wirral MBC would cost a tidy sum.

I hope that my thoughts have given everyone a flavour for what may or may not be possible. You all have to make up your own minds. Without an Alliance we are not involved in TSC or anything that happens on the Wirral side of the water.

If nothing can be made to happen on the Wirral side of the water then it will do us no particular harm. We can carry on concentrating all our efforts on what we are currently doing. Providing the best sailing/racing on the River Mersey.

If however you believe like some of our committee obviously do, that TSC site can improve our prospects for the future, then you should give the Alliance idea your support, but I must add my words of caution. Let's not put the coach before the horse. I can see no reason for going any further than having a simple Alliance, in which the clubs remain as they are, but share our current activities. This state of affairs should remain in place

whilst a joint committee of both clubs, hold discussions with Royal Mersey and all agree a way forward, in which everyone's interest is acknowledged, a plan of action is drawn up and the great opportunities are more rigorously tested to see if they are indeed achievable or simply on our wish list.

I hope we can achieve great things for this site but I would advocate that we get on with that particular task prior to us changing anything, by all means, form the Alliance, but change nothing, unless it has to be changed as of necessity. That should be the test. The Alliance should, in my opinion, be capable of existence alongside of our existing club, without our existing club having to change.

Regards

Alan Burns.