

# Voluntary Code of Practice for the Visitor Industry 2012

Reducing nuisance from touting and improving the quality of the city centre experience

## Executive Summary

The City Council is firmly committed to improving the quality of the city centre experience for residents and visitors. This includes the reduction of nuisance related to the activities of city centre businesses as they seek to attract customers. The quality of the city centre experience matters to business and businesses and can suffer if potential customers feel uncomfortable, harassed or even unsafe in our city.

This Voluntary Code of Practice outlines practical and strategic measures that will be taken to reduce nuisance from commercial touting in the city centre. They have been endorsed by the City Council and signatories will be eligible to display a form of kite mark.

If this Code of Practice does not achieve its aim of reducing nuisance in the city centre by voluntary means, the Council is resolved to investigate further legal action and use the Byelaw, which was ratified by the ODPM in 2005.

## Why is the Voluntary Code of Practice being proposed?

The aim of the Code is to reduce nuisance from commercial touting in the city centre. This Voluntary Code of Practice outlines recommendations for actions to be taken by commercial punt<sup>1</sup> operators that sell their services or products to residents of and visitors to Cambridge City Centre.

Whilst the Code is written for visitor industry operators, it must also impact upon statutory bodies, in order for it to be effective. The responsibilities outlined in the proposed Voluntary Code of Practice will affect a large number of sectors and groups, including;

- visitor industry operators;
- individual citizens;
- Cambridge City Council;
- the Police; and
- central government

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<sup>1</sup> For the avoidance of doubt, although this Code refers specifically to punts (as being by far the most numerous commercial river craft deployed in Cambridge), any other boats, craft or other river vessels that may be from time to time deployed by commercial operators will also be covered by this Voluntary Code of Practice. All references to "punts" in this document should therefore be interpreted as referring to all commercial boats, craft or river vessels. Likewise, all references to "punt operators" should be interpreted to include operators of any other commercial boats, craft or river vessels.

## **What are the benefits to the visitor industry?**

The quality of public space matters to business. If it is clean, safe and welcoming it not only encourages visitors to linger longer but also to make return trips. It therefore goes without saying that anything that causes people to feel uncomfortable will damage that 'dwell time' and repeat visits reducing the potential for business.

There are undoubted operational benefits to punting companies in redeploying staff into other areas if the number of touts allowed is restricted as proposed in this Code, areas that may improve pre-booking, punt station sales, operational efficiency or service quality.

The positive public relations opportunity for the city represented in the successful implementation of the Voluntary Code of Practice and associated improvement to the public experience should not be underestimated.

## **Demonstrating good practice**

This Code of Practice provides the ideal opportunity to demonstrate your respect for the area in which you work.

## **Definitions**

### **Touts**

This refers to any individual operating beyond the confines of their business premises seeking to solicit customers or patronage. In this document the term touts also includes chauffeurs acting in a touting capacity but does not include chauffeurs merely acting as chauffeurs.

### **Punt Operators**

This is a general term that not only includes the established formal businesses with multiple punts, but also covers independent collectives of two or more punts or individuals with a single punt.

### **Punt stations**

At their meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> September 2011 the Cam Conservators formally recognised six official, authorised punt stations on the river Cam and confirmed this in a letter to commercial punt operators on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 as follows:-

*“Six locations only will be regarded as recognised punting stations for the purposes of registering punts and other craft for hire to the public at the present time. They are:*

*Granta Mill Pond  
Mill Pit west  
Mill Pit east  
Trinity College frontage  
Quayside*

## *La Mimosa”*

The City Council recognises these formally authorised punt stations, but not informal mooring points or unauthorised use of public and private land for hiring punts.

### Introduction

This paper sets out a Voluntary Code of Practice, directed at members of the visitor industry, giving practical and strategic measures that can and should be taken to reduce the nuisance caused by touting in the city centre. This paper forms part of the Council’s response to the issues of punt touting in the City Centre.

As previously stated, direct statutory responsibilities for elements of the touting issue lie with a number of different public and private bodies. Local authorities have responsibilities for maintaining the quality of public spaces, as do owners of private properties bordering public land such as shop frontages, colleges and business forecourts.

This Code of Practice is a voluntary agreement. There are no statutory or legal obligations attached to the requirements stated in the Code of Practice, at this stage. A number of elements in the Code recommend examples of best practice to enable operators to achieve certain minimum requirements.

The recommendations contained within the Code of Practice are designed to build on existing good practice in the industry. They will continue to be assessed to ensure their effectiveness and to avoid unreasonable resource burdens on businesses, public bodies and local authorities. It is proposed that they be reviewed at the end of the first year to incorporate practical and desirable improvements based on the first year’s experience.

### **Supporting the Code of Practice**

Operators are encouraged to consider ways in which they can integrate recommendations from this proposed Code of Practice into their business practices, guidelines and staff training.

Local authorities, City Centre Management, the Police, other land managers and stakeholders are encouraged to take the requirements of the Code of Practice and implement them where possible.

**The success of the proposed Code of Practice is dependent on support from other agencies and in all cases it is the spirit as well as the letter of the Voluntary Code of Practice that should be adopted.**

# Code of Practice (Punt Operators)

**I/We agree to ensure that:**

- A All operators must have valid commercial punt licences from the Conservators of the River Cam.**
- B None of our staff approach a prospective customer when:**
- 1** they have made a firm indication to another tout that they are not interested in taking a punt tour or have been seen to have rejected approaches from 2 other touts;
- For the public one of the most unwelcome issues related to punting is being approached by tout after tout over a short distance.
  - It is this activity that can lead to people 'feeling' harassed even if each individual tout is not acting in a harassing manner.
  - If the member of the public is interested in finding out more information they should be left to make the next move and approach your staff if they wish.
- 2** they are in discussions with another tout;
- The term aggressive touting when analysed usually relates to incidents between touts involving a member of the public.
  - Touts should be aware that they can be prosecuted under an existing byelaw if they tout in "such a manner as to cause obstruction or give reasonable grounds for annoyance to any person in that street or public place."
  - Touts should not step in front of another tout in an attempt to hijack a prospective customer.
  - Touts should not hover near other touts while they are in discussion with a prospective customer, effectively interfering with that tout's business.
  - Touts should not attempt to interfere with other touts' discussions with prospective customers by trying to join in the conversation, talking over them or attempting to lure those prospective customers away with blandishments.
- 3** they are, or are about to undertake business with other city centre traders;
- This means not approaching customers when they are queuing for ice creams, waiting to enter restaurants, 'window shopping' or similarly interacting with other city centre businesses.
- 4** they are in the process of being guided, or in a group led by a Cambridge Blue Badge Guide.
- Touts should not get on to coaches or stand on the steps of coaches unless the group in question has a pre-arranged tour with their company.
- C None of our staff will stand in the path or obstruct prospective customers.**
- The underlying objective of this Code is to ensure residents and visitors feel comfortable walking through the city centre. It is important that they should not feel unable to, or restricted from, passing a tout and should certainly not feel the need to step around a tout, potentially into the carriageway for example.
- D None of our staff will run towards or pursue prospective customers.**

**E Our staff avoid making gratuitous reference to other competing operators.**

This is intended to stop unnecessary and unprofessional derogatory remarks about competing operations that create a negative impression of Cambridge.

**F None of our staff shout or hawk for business.**

This includes touts raising their voices to “broadcast” the cheapness of their tours, the imminence of the next tour departure etc

**G Our staff take no for an answer.**

This is an easy statement to make but requires staff to take an open and empathetic approach to dealing with customers, picking up on clear verbal and non-verbal rejection signals.

**H Our staff will act in a courteous and customer focused manner.**

**1** Staff will be polite and professional at all times and avoid getting into arguments or making derogatory comments aimed at prospective customers.

**I We maintain a register of all our staff’s contact details to be used in the event of complaints.**

**1** Should a complaint be registered by a member of the public, the police or other public body, that complaint will be logged against the named staff member.

**2** We have formal internal procedures to deal with any complaints lodged against staff.

**J Our staff are clearly identifiable by a company uniform or a company badge.**

**1**

- All staff must also wear a company uniform, or clear badge with the name of the punting company to enable customers to identify them
- Companies are encouraged to issue smart and consistent uniforms to their staff.

**K We will only operate from an authorised punt station or stations**

Using the Cam Conservators’ definition of a punt station given above all participants in this Voluntary Code of Practice will operate from a station and not from any available mooring / loading point they may find convenient or lucrative. It is proposed that, where necessary, action will be taken by riparian owners to prevent all commercial punting activity not taking place from legitimate stations.

**L We will display clearly at all times and at all sales points, our range of prices for private punt hire and chauffeur punt hire.**

**M We will restrict the number of touts per punt station to 7 staff members.**

**N All sales or pre-sales activity by touts or staff directly with potential customers will ONLY take place in the specific areas marked on the Map attached to this Code and subject to any other contractual**

**limitations regarding numbers of touts as set out in the respective leases or licenses from the City Council as landowner of a punt station.**

In practice this option is intended to confine touting activity to areas immediately adjacent to mooring / loading points.

For the basis of this document it is assumed that any tout referring business to a company is employed by said company and should therefore adhere to the code.

This option is not intended to restrict other sales and marketing opportunities such as a ticket sales deals with retail outlets, hotels provided they do not involve touting in a public place, but does not specifically approve them either.

**O To abide by any relevant Byelaws or legislation that may apply**

Signed  
(on behalf of operator)

Date

Signed  
(on behalf of local authority)

Date

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