

Broads Forum Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2017

Present:

Dr Keith Bacon (Chairman)

Andrew Alston
Ashley Cato
Michael Flett
Tony Gibbons

Barbara Greasley
John Lurkins
Jennifer Parkhouse
Paul Savage

John Tibbenham
Peter Wall
Anthony Wright

In Attendance:

Ms Esmeralda Guds – Administrative Officer (Governance)
Mr Simon Hooton – Head of Strategy & Projects
Miss Sarah Mullarney – Administrative Officer (Governance)
Dr John Packman – Chief Executive
Mr Rob Rogers – Director of Operations

Also In attendance:

Mr Kelvin Allen – BSG and Member of the Authority
Prof Jacquie Burgess – Chair of the Authority
Mr Steve Lane – Environment Agency
Mr Paul Mace – Norfolk County Council

3/1 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Henry Cator, Martyn Davey, John Hiskett, Philip Pearson, Charles Swan, Richard Starling, Hugh Taylor, Robin Godber and Bryan Read

Members were reminded to contact Substitutes if they knew they would be absent to attend instead.

The Chairman welcome Jacquie Burgess the Chair of the Authority to the meeting.

The Forum was reminded that they would be entitled to make their own recordings and that this meeting was being recorded.

3/2 To receive and confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3/3 Public Question Time

No questions were raised by members of the public.

3/4 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response taken following discussions at previous meetings

The Members of the Forum had received a report summarising the progress of current issues and were informed there were no further updates.

The Chairman informed the Members that he wasn't able to provide any feedback on the last Broads Authority meeting on 27 March as he had sent his apologies, however updates on the Broads Authority meeting were provided in the Chief Executives report later on the Agenda.

Members noted the report.

3/5 Rural Development Leader Programme

Members received a presentation from Paul Mace (PM) about grant funding opportunities provided by the Leader Programme also known as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Members were informed that there were five Local Action Groups (LAG) across Norfolk and North Suffolk, for which Norfolk County Council was the Accountable Body. These LAGs represented public, private and social organisations and created local development strategies defining local priorities and actions they wished to fund in their respective area.

It was noted that the Leader Programme was a varied programme which could deliver on six different Defra priorities and that the key aspect was to generate jobs and growth. Members were informed of the funding guidelines which defined who could apply and which criteria needed to be met. Projects were welcomed from anybody that could meet the relevant criteria and were primarily directed at job creation.

Members were further informed that up to a maximum of 40% of total budget could be funded if it could not be found elsewhere, but that all match funding would need to be in place and funding would be paid in arrears. In light of Brexit the Chancellor's Statement stated that funding would be guaranteed until the UK leaves the European Union.

Tony Gibbons (TB) raised concerns about the risk of an application being unsuccessful, especially as the project needed to be funded in full by the applicant in advance. It was explained this risk was relatively small because that as part of the application process the applicant would need to demonstrate how they would access/secure other funds before claiming the money back. Also, funding up to 40% was considered to be a high intervention rate, so applicants perceived the programme as an attractive opportunity.

When the Chair enquired whether a Parish Council would be eligible to apply, it was explained that it wasn't so much an issue whether they were eligible but, depending on the project, they were unlikely to meet the criteria of creating new jobs and growth.

Andrew Alston (AA) commented that the Broads LAG was looking to appoint someone who understood training and mentoring due to new funding coming on stream.

Members welcomed the presentation.

3/6 Prevention of Saline Incursion

Members received a presentation from the Broads Angling Strategy Group (BASG) and the Environment Agency on the prevention of saline incursion.

On behalf of the BASG Tony Gibbons stressed the importance of protecting the Broads from saline intrusion and highlighted the detrimental consequences which could occur if nothing was done to prevent this.

TG referred to an incident in October 2013 when thousands of fish were found dead on the surface of the river Thurne and stressed the danger if a salt surge went as far as Wroxham as they would be unable to replace the fish stocks that would be lost.

TG continued that although a barrier would protect from flooding, it wouldn't protect against salt incursion. He explained that as salt water is heavier it enters the system underneath fresh water and therefore fish would stay near the top of the rivers. Salt incursion had proved to be an issue particularly in dykes where fish had nowhere to go.

Steve Lane (SL) from the Environment Agency (EA) gave a presentation to Members about how the EA was managing fisheries in the Broads. He highlighted the social economic importance of fish as a tourist attraction. He further mentioned that there was a strategic framework for fishing in place in partnership with the Broads Authority, the Angling Trust and the Broads Angling Strategy Group and that the three core objectives were Access to Angling in the Broads, Communication & Education and Environment for Fish.

SL mentioned how salt surges and prymnesium were unique threats to the Broads. He explained that fish could maintain in brackish conditions if they had time to acclimatise, however fish couldn't react to the rapid change of surges. Therefore, apart from causing flooding, surges also had a serious impact on fish stocks.

SL continued that these risks could be managed by means of understanding fish stocks and their distribution. He described that through hydro acoustic surveys the EA was able to provide fish density distribution and that hydro survey boats were fitted out with water quality sensors to check dissolved oxygen, salinity, and ph levels within the rivers. Sonar survey would help tracking fish and monitor seasonal and daily movement and the reaction of fish to salt incursion.

A skimmer wall, which is a partial barrier, was described as a solution to push fresh water to the top, providing more time for a solution.

Andrew Alston (AA) asked that if the proposed directive on fish was brought in who would be responsible for fish in privately owned waterways and it was clarified that if the issue was significant enough the EA would work closely with the landowner or business towards resolving the issue.

AA informed Members that he was building a reservoir at Catfield and that it would be possible to pump water from there into Hickling Broad which might alleviate brackish conditions.

The Head of Strategy and Projects discussed the need to be confident enough to look at new potential solutions for flood surges which may affect people in different ways but overall would bring the best result to society.

Following on from that the Chairman raised the issue that in a situation of a seawater flood, whether it would be the EA's or the Internal Drainage Board's decision to protect either the farmlands and pump flood water into the rivers, or to safeguard the rivers and keep floodwater on the land.

Members recognised that this scenario illustrated the many different requirements which needed to be balanced within the Broads and although it was appreciated that there was no easy solution, Members agreed it would be better to be prepared.

Kelvin Allen (KA) requested that in future angling bodies and fisheries would continue to be included in the flooding debate.

The Chairman queried about the decrease in younger people involved in fishing and the impact of this on angling in the Broads. SL stated that the Agency was working with the Angling Trust to coach and mentor younger people to encourage them to the sport.

KA presented to the Forum a forward view of the BASG, its achievements and the challenges ahead. He informed Members that the Angling Trust had managed to increase the EA budget by 81% to £386,000 over two years.

Whilst there had been an increase in funding this had not been enough to solve the funding issue in the Broads and so the EA had recently funded a National Grants Officer to look at sourcing additional grants.

As the BASG wasn't set up to manage substantial grants it had recently been proposed to disband the BASG and set up a new community investment company called the Broads Angling Community Group.

The Broads Angling Strategy relates to the Broads Plan and the new company aims to refresh the Plan in stages.

Members welcomed the presentations.

3/7 Mooring Strategy Update 2017

Members received a report which provided them with an update on the Authority's mooring strategy and the action plan to maintain the Authority's moorings that was adopted by the Broads Authority in November 2014.

When Barbara Greasley (BG) requested whether details of the length of the moorings could be made available in Appendix 2 the Director of Operations informed members that at the recent Navigation Committee (20/04/17) it was agreed to update the table in appendix 2 to include details on the length of moorings as well as colour coding highlighting the popularity of each mooring.

Barbara Greasley (BG) stressed the usefulness for information of moorings for hire boat industries as currently customers were struggling to find places to moor.

Paul Savage (PS) questioned the accuracy of the total length of the moorings presented in the report and therefore whether the objectives mentioned in paragraph 1.2 were being met. He said the report gave the impression of an increase of total available short term moorings, and he commented that the increase in Broads Authority provided moorings didn't mean an increase in the overall mooring lengths available for visitors' use.

The Director of Operations commented that the Broads Authority didn't have an influence over moorings outside their remit and that once the figures of the length of moorings were available a more accurate view would be provided.

BG suggested carrying out another, more in depth survey, asking members of the public about mooring, to obtain more statistics she could bring back to a future Forum meeting.

When discussing the mooring strategy and increasing of moorings PS commented that more effort should be made in exploring the solutions of wild moorings.

The Chief Executive informed the Forum that discussions had taken place between the Authority and the NSBA and Hire Boat Association investigating sites where there might be opportunities for additional moorings. PS suggested widening those discussions to include invitations to other stakeholders and further requested whether more detailed information about the locations of moorings could be made available.

John Tibbenham (JT) queried why Reedham Quay was not featured on the list of mooring sites. The Director of Operations explained that no lease had been agreed with the council due to the repairs required at the site and that Officers were chasing the issue daily.

Further the Forum was updated that the Authority was still negotiating pontoons moorings at Boundary Farm and was trying to reach an agreement with the landowner in regards to waste collection issues.

Members noted the report.

3/8 Chief Executive's Report

The Members received a report summarising the current position in respect of a number of important projects and events such as:

- the follow up from the Broads Authority meeting 24 March
- Appointment to the Navigation Committee.
- Broads Plan 2017 Adoption
- Education and Volunteer Strategies
- Landscape Partnership Scheme
- New Flood Risk Supplementary Planning Document
- Peer Review

When PS enquired about the criteria of the Peer Review it was explained that unlike previous peer reviews this review wouldn't be reviewing the whole of the Authority (NPAPA) but a review around governance and relationships, in particular with the Local Authorities. Details could be found in the report on the website which went to the Broads Authority meeting on 24 March.

Members noted the report.

3/9 Parish Issues

Mike Flett updated the Forum that an agreement had been reached in which Ludham Parish Council had signed a lease for the land of £1 per annum allowing North Norfolk District Council to continue to collect the waste at Womack Staith as domestic waste.

The Parish Council was trying to reach a similar arrangement with the Environment Agency for Ludham Bridge Staith, which was looking promising.

JT queried about the delay on weed cutting in Hickling Broad and it was explained that currently NE had only consented for weed cutting to be carried out within the navigation channel and that the Authority was currently going through a process whereby scientific data is gathered to accurately calculate the weed growth and density across the whole broad. Once this information is known the Broads Authority will progress the appropriate assessment required to gain consent from NE for any cutting trials within the Chara beds. A meeting had been arranged on 15 May to inform Stakeholders at Hickling of the processes and procedures required to progress this situation

3/10 Current Issues

No items were proposed as current issues.

3/11 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business

No items were proposed as items of urgent business.

3/12 Matters for Chairman to raise at next Broads Authority Meeting

The Chairman would report to the Broads Authority meeting on the various issues discussed by the Forum.

3/13 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

Members were asked to forward any suggestions for matters they wished to be discussed at the next meeting to the Chairman or the officers at the Authority.

Peter Wall suggested a report on tree preservation orders and riverbank clearance in particular at Womack Water and the River Ant.

Barbara Greasley highlighted that the Outdoors Festival starts on Sunday 1 May and that the launch that morning was very well received.

Jacquie Burgess reminded Members of the Forum of the Annual Open Morning on Saturday 13 May at Whitlingham Barn and the opening ceremony of the Ludham – St Benets permissive footpath on Tuesday 2 May 17.

3/14 To note the date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 27 July 2017 at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich commencing at 2pm.

The meeting concluded at 415 pm.

Chairman