

## **Chief Executive's Report**

**Summary:** This report summarises the current position in respect of a number of important projects and events, including any decisions taken during the recent cycle of committee meetings. It does not include matters which are already on the agenda for this meeting of the Committee. Members are asked to note the report.

### **1 Impact of Drought**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Simon Hooton/CC4

#### **1.1 Summary review of the drought (taken from Environment Agency Briefing Notes).**

The wettest April on record and continuing rainfall in May and June has restored the levels in many rivers and reservoirs, easing the pressure on the environment and water supplies. But the plants and wildlife in some wetlands and rivers have not fully recovered from the below average rainfall over the past 20 months and are still at risk if there is a hot dry summer. A number of farmers went from experiencing hard dry soils to waterlogged fields in a couple of weeks. In places, wading birds that were struggling due to lack of water found their nests washed away as wetlands flooded. River flows have now returned to more normal levels. Groundwater levels have risen in response to the rain in the limestone and more responsive chalk aquifers but low groundwater levels remain a concern across many parts of England. Many are still at a similar level to those in 1976 and unlikely to return to normal levels before the winter. It will take more time and more rain to undo the effects of two dry winters on groundwater stores. In warm summer months most of the rain that falls evaporates or is taken up by plants as they grow, limiting further top ups to groundwater. In some areas with low groundwater levels, stream and river flows are likely to remain low until winter recharge occurs. There is still a risk that some streams will dry up and spring fed wetlands become dry as groundwater levels naturally drop over the summer. This could lead to environmental stress and we may need to work with landowners and others to try and protect fish and wildlife from harm. In hot dry summers there is always a risk of excessive weed growth and algal blooms occurring in rivers and ponds that can lead to deoxygenation and problems for fish and other wildlife. It is therefore important everyone continues to use water wisely and the Environment Agency recommend that all water companies continue to promote water conservation.

#### **1.2 Agriculture.** Virtually all winter storage reservoirs are now full thanks in combination to the rainfall received over the past few weeks and extensions we granted to winter licences. There are still a few abstractors who are struggling to fill their reservoirs. These include five licences in the Nar and Heacham catchments in Norfolk where conditions on the licences currently limit abstraction. Spray irrigation demand is very low in response to the high rainfall. In East Anglia around 400 groundwater licence holders agreed to some form of voluntary

restriction, and the Environment Agency agreed extensions to over 80 winter abstraction licences in this region. No licences have been subject to formal spray irrigation (Section 57) restrictions. Recent rainfall and our flexibility in extending winter abstraction licences have relieved the situation to some extent, but low groundwater levels remain a concern. For all sectors the return of hot, dry weather later in the growing season could swiftly reverse the current low soil moisture deficits and increase the need for irrigation. The last couple of years has highlighted the importance of investment in water infrastructure on farms, good water management practices and ensuring the regulatory regime is responsive and flexible to need. Farming is on the front line in terms of exposure to extreme weather and farming needs to continue to build its resilience to short term events and longer term changes in the climate.

- 1.3 Forecast. The forecast for the rest of this summer is very uncertain, due to a lack of any strong driving factors. Although there is a slightly increased chance of the season being wet, it looks unlikely that there will be very wet conditions. However, the probability of very dry conditions remains close to normal for the time of year. The probability that UK-average rainfall for June-July-August will fall into the driest of five categories is around 20%, whilst the probability that it will fall into the wettest category is 25-30% (the 1971-2000 climatological probability for each of these categories is 20%).

## **2 Premises Strategy**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: John Packman/None

- 2.1 During its meeting on 18 May 2012, the Authority agreed to award a design and build contract for the construction of the new workshop at the Dockyard, subject to acceptable tenders. The Authority also agreed to pursue options for relocating from Dragonfly House, with potential for considerable savings to the costs for office accommodation.

## **3 Governance of National Parks and the Broads Authority**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: John Packman/None

- 3.1 During its meeting on 18 May 2012, the Authority agreed its response to Defra's consultation on Governance arrangements. The Authority took note of the Broads Forum's summary comments from its meeting on 5 April 2012 and would represent the point that the Authority's boundaries would make it very difficult to determine an electorate, which would make the introduction of Direct Elections impracticable. The Authority would also respond that the suggested maximum term of eight years for members was considered to be too short and that a longer term in line with the OCPA guidance would be more appropriate, this being applied to all types of members.

## **4 New Standards Arrangements**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: John Organ/None

- 4.1 During its meeting on 18 May 2012, the Authority agreed a range of recommendations from the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer concerning new Standards arrangements following the implementation of the Localism Act 2011.

The new arrangements are scheduled to come into place on 1 July 2012, following which the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer will provide a briefing to members on issues of conduct arising from the Act.

## **5 Broads Visitor Giving Initiative**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Bruce Hanson/TR2

- 5.1 The Broads Visitor Giving Initiative was first mentioned at the last Broads Forum meeting on 5 April. This scheme is designed to enable businesses to raise money from tourists for conservation purposes or other 'good works' around the Broads. It is specifically not intended to cover any work normally undertaken as a statutory function, and all funds raised will be managed by the Broads Trust, an independent registered charity.
- 5.2 The initiative is now properly up and running, with seven pilot businesses signed up. The intention is to operate the scheme in 'pilot' mode until the end of this season, and then review its effectiveness prior to expanding further. A number of different collection models are being trialled, including 'opt-out' from bike hire and accommodation bookings, a levy on a selected retail product, boating holiday bookings, and on-line and text giving. Pin badges are also available, in display trays which double as a donation boxes. These have been placed in the Broads Information Centres, as well as at participating businesses.
- 5.3 A suite of promotional material is available, including A4 posters (which are also suitable for bedroom browsers), flyers and other information leaflets. Some of these can be personalised for a specific business, and all carry the newly-developed 'Enjoy Give Protect' branding. There is also an operating manual, which includes guidance on the practical operation of the scheme, plus advice on matters such as VAT etc.
- 5.4 A five-year business plan has been produced and this demonstrates clearly how the initiative can be grown and developed, if it receives the necessary support in the early years. The longer-term objective envisages reaching the point where at least £150,000 per annum is being raised. The feasibility of this aim is supported by evidence from elsewhere, and it is believed that the commitment of Broads Tourism will ensure that it is achieved

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