

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2010

Present

Mr Jonathan Bowman (Chairman)

Dr Keith Bacon	Mr Brian Holt	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Julian Barnwell	Mr Michael Knights	Mr Jeff Toser
Mr Terry Fleet	Mr Peter Medhurst	Mr Kenneth Turner
Dr Martin George	Mr Philip Pearson	Mr Mark Wells
Mr Tony Gibbons	Mr Bryan Read	Mr Anthony Wright

In Attendance

Mr S Birtles – Head of Waterways Strategy and Safety
Ms M Conti – Broads Strategy Officer
Dr D Hoare – Waterways Conservation Manager
Mr S Hooton – Director of Conservation and Countryside Management
Ms A Long – Director of Planning and Strategy
Mr J Organ – Head of Administration and Executive Assistant
Dr J Packman – Chief Executive
Mrs L Shute – Administrative Officer
Ms T Wakelin – Director of Waterways
Ms B Williams – Conservation Officer (Waterways)

Also Present

4/1 Apologies and Announcements

The Chairman welcomed Mr Brian Holt from the Inland Waterways Association and representing Boating/Water Based Recreational Interest Groups to his first meeting of the Forum.

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Barnes, Henry Cator, Martin Davey, Mike Evans, John Hiskett, Matthew Thwaites and Hugh Tusting.

Members noted that the memorial service for Professor Aitken Clark would take place at 2.30pm on 3 September at Norwich Cathedral.

4/2 Chairman's Announcements

(1) Report back from Broads Authority Meetings: 14 May and 25 June 2010

Members noted that the Chairman reported on the Forum's business at the Authority meeting on 14 May via the minutes.

He had not attended the Authority meeting on 25 June. Details of important Authority matters that had taken place during the recent cycle of committee meetings were reported in the Chief Executive's Report (agenda item 11).

(2) Membership Issues

(i) Parish Council Representation

Members noted that as a result of the Authority's decision to extend parish council representation on the Broads Forum, both the Norfolk and Suffolk Associations of Local Councils had expressed their satisfaction with the allocation of three representatives from Norfolk and one representative from Suffolk. The Norfolk Association had been asked to organise a ballot of all parish councils in the Authority's executive area for the three representatives to represent the Northern Broads local communities.

Currently Kenneth Turner was the Norfolk representative and Terry Fleet the Suffolk representative.

(ii) Members noted that Brian Holt (IWA) was the new member for the Boating/Water Based Recreational Interest Groups.

(iii) It was noted that no reply had been received from the Education Interest Groups for a replacement for Pamela Masters.

4/3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 April 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4/4 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response Taken following Discussions at Previous Meetings

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received.

4/5 Reduction in National Park Grant

Members received a report and presentation setting out proposals for how Defra's cut of 5% to the Authority's National Park Grant for the current financial year would be accommodated. Members noted that this represented a cut in grant of around £212,000.

Further actions would also need to be taken in anticipation of further cuts following the Government's Spending Review due to take place in the autumn. It had been reported that, following the Review, some government departmental budgets, including that of Defra, would be reduced by 25% over the next three/four years which would have a significant effect on national

park authorities' funding levels. Members noted that the Authority would need to be prepared for a year on year reduction in funding.

It was noted that the Authority was carrying out comprehensive service reviews as outlined in the report and that the member Resource Allocation Working Group would be overseeing the process and reporting to the Authority in November. Decisions on the level of National Park Grant would be made by Defra at the end of the year.

Members expressed concern at the short notice and level of the cuts. A member pointed out that this would be particularly difficult given the requirement to bring internationally recognised sites up to a favourable level. He suggested that relevant data collected by Natural England could be used when seeking European support.

In reply to a member's comment that it may be beneficial for an accomplished person from an external organisation to be part of the review process, it was agreed that this might have some merit.

Other comments included the possibility of sharing volunteer costs with other organisations and a review of fen harvester and fen management costs. Members noted that the voluntary sector was increasing and currently the Authority had about 250 volunteers. Although it was looking at common areas with other organisations, organisations were responsible for volunteers and there were costs to be covered.

Members noted that the results of the Lawton Review were due in the autumn and that this may influence the Government's future plans. However it should be stressed that the Government's priority was to cut expenditure.

The Authority was looking at the possibility of other income streams.

In reply to a member's comment that there could be greater flexibility with the navigation funding for dredging it was noted that navigation expenditure was dependent on toll income and the Authority was moving towards a balanced budget. Any changes to the level of tolls apart from those planned would need careful consideration.

It was agreed that there were difficult decisions to be made and the Forum offered to help in the process. A suggestion was made that the subject of cuts could be debated by the Forum at a designated meeting.

4/6 STEP and Branding

Members received a presentation/report on the STEP project which would bring together the Biesbosch National Park in the Netherlands, a flood relief project beside the River Schelde near Antwerp and the Broads Authority in an Interreg funded scheme to support sustainable tourism. A grant of €500,000 would support expenditure of €1,150,500 in projects including re-application for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, branding and website

work, new interpretation and visitor facilities and support to minimise the adverse environmental impacts of tourism businesses.

Some aspects of spending which went back to 2008 had been incorporated into the bid with most project work taking place from now to the end of the scheme in early 2013. There was likely to be scope to revise the budget following discussion with partners and the central secretariat which would enable the Project to provide vital investment and support for tourism in what would be a period of transition due to public spending changes.

As part of the activities outlined in Appendix 2 to the report, members received a presentation on the new tourism website and Branding Project which had recently been launched.

In reply to a members request for the number of hits on the new website, it was agreed that as the information was not available this would be quoted in the minutes and is 2,429 visits during the period 28 June to 28 July.

A member commented that priority should be given to providing information for children's activities. It was noted that in addition to the website, information on events was available in the Broadcaster.

Members were requested to provide information on their organisations' events which could be linked via the website.

In reply to a member's comment regarding the avoidance of overcrowding sensitive areas, it was agreed that there was a balance to be met for visitor management and the principle of sustainability would be applied.

4/7 Broads Authority Annual Water Plant Survey 2009

Members received a presentation giving details of the Annual Water Plant Survey for 2009 and noted that there continued to be a general trend of increased water plant abundance in most of the broads surveyed. However at some sites there appeared to be a lack of continued stability in the plant communities, with a few key sites suffering drastic loss of overall water plant abundance and the disappearance of formerly abundant species.

Steady progress was being made towards achieving lake ecological and water quality targets through the Lake Restoration Strategy. Where mud pumping had been completed a marked switch back to diverse plant communities had been observed. However much work remained to be done across the Broads to bring degraded broads back to health, in line with national and EU drivers, and to increase and subsequently maintain the diversity of those broads lacking in species richness.

In reply to a member's comment regarding the individual management of the Broads, it was noted that the Water Space Management Plan identified the various areas and the various management plans that were in place.

Members agreed that the annual water plant survey continued to be an important part of targeting and measuring the success of restoration work and provided ongoing monitoring.

4/8 Broads Plan: Draft for Public Consultation Draft

Members received a report giving details of the review of the Broads Plan which had commenced in mid-2009. Following considerable work from Broads Authority members and officers, the Broads Forum and other stakeholder bodies, the draft Broads Plan 2011-16 had been published for public consultation on 7 June 2010. Consultation on the draft Plan would continue to 13 August 2010.

It was noted that the timetable for the review of the Plan would be adjusted to allow the Authority and key stakeholders to further assess priorities for the Plan in the light of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review and decisions on National Park Grant. It was now intended to take a revised plan to the Authority in the New Year, rather than in November 2010.

Members made various comments including that there should be references to staithe and access to water, commercial boating, sustainable transport and the limited network and to cycling and cultural heritage. Some members confirmed that they would be making their comments in writing.

A member commented that the Plan should include an account of what the region was all about at the beginning, similar to that in the 2004 Plan. Another member commented that as it was a strategic plan, there was no need to make the document longer especially as the Authority already published a Business Plan.

In reply to a member's criticism of the consultation process, it was pointed out that there was still an opportunity to comment on the draft Plan. This was the third time the Forum had contributed to the Plan's development.

The member went on to state that the sustainable management of the fens had been ignored, commenting that this included the inefficient use of the fen harvester. In reply it was pointed out that different management techniques based on research were needed to manage different parts of the fen. The member went on to say that water levels had been allowed to rise so that reed and sedge cutters were losing sites for commercial cutting. Another member representing the RSPB confirmed that it would like to see additional sites and that at Sutton Fen this was already happening. He agreed with the Authority that the fens were subject to a range of management techniques but the RSPB would support the establishment of additional sites to grow reed and sedge commercially where practical.

Another member commented that, although the earlier debate was not really for the Forum to discuss, the key to successful management of the fens was the ability to manipulate water levels. Obviously this was problematic in tidal areas.

4/9 Water Skiing Zones Mitigation and Wakeboarding Trial

A report setting out the proposed mitigation measures and variations to the Waterskiing Zones on the Broads and a proposed trial of recreational wakeboarding was received.

The Stakeholder Panel, which had been formed as part of the legal agreement which sets out the process for implementing the provisions in the Broads Authority Act 2009, had concluded that existing arrangements to manage waterskiing and wakeboarding were satisfactory. It had considered site specific risk assessments and addressed the outstanding issues to reduce risks in their recommendations. Variations to zones and times were also subject to public consultation and will be implemented from 1 April 2011 if agreed. The Panel also recommended a limited trial for manoeuvres to take place in summer 2011 to inform future management options, with a further review to take place in autumn 2011.

A member commented that the mainstream boating organisations were not happy with the proposals. In reply it was pointed out that the procedure as set out in the report had been carried out in accordance with the Act, and included an independent chair with a wide representation of stakeholders who were unanimous in their recommendations. The Panel had adopted a cautionary approach as it was conscious of concerns and the wakeboarding trial would be carried out under strict limitations, strictly monitored and reviewed after six months.

4/10 Sediment Management Strategy: Draft Action Plan 2010/11

A report was received which set out the current position with regard to the volume of material required for removal in order to achieve the Waterway Specifications, the current level of compliance achieved and the development of the draft Sediment Management Strategy (SMS) Action Plan 2010/11.

It was proposed that, following incorporation of members' comments on the Action Plan and Priority Actions, and approval by the Broads Authority, an updated SMS Action Plan 2010/11 document would be published. This would provide transparency on the Authority's programme as well as ensuring the supporting data was publicly available.

Given the number of regulatory, technical and operational developments since the original Strategy was published, and the expiry of the five year work plan next year, it was intended that the Strategy be revised and updated over the course of the coming year. This should provide a new focus for the Authority's activities and inform future work plans.

In reply to a member's comment that there had been problems during the Three Rivers Race in the Upper Thurne, members noted that the key was to provide dredging disposal areas close to the works, and this was the reason for the trial works at Duck Broad. If successful, capacity for dredging Heigham Sound would be provided but not for dredging all the River Thurne. This would

require a wider vision, and the results of a feasibility study which had identified different options had shown that there was much work to be carried out with land owners to see if any could be taken forward.

If the trial works at Duck Broad were successful and the engineering and environmental hurdles were overcome, the earliest year the Three Rivers event would be affected would be in 2012.

A member commented that bacterial action might contribute to the high levels of silt and research on this and the degradation of reed swamp should be carried out.

4/11 Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive presented his report, which summarised the issues considered by the Broads Authority and the decisions taken during the most recent cycle of meetings.

(1) Appointment of Broads Forum Chairman and Broads Forum Membership

Members noted that the Chairman had been invited and accepted the appointment of Chair of the Broads Forum for an additional term of three years expiring on 31 March 2013.

(2) World Heritage Status

In reply to a member's question as to the cost of applying for inclusion on the Tentative List, it was noted that no additional costs had been incurred. However the cost of proceeding to the next stage was not known but as the required management systems were already in place it had been assumed that these would be minimal.

4/12 Current Issues

A member informed the Forum that work carried out to St Benet's Abbey including the undergrounding of power lines, had greatly improved its setting.

Members went on to discuss access to the Abbey. Although access by boat was good and there was limited parking, the footpath network needed improving.

Members agreed that the issues relating to access could be looked at and asked that this be included in a future agenda.

4/13 Matters for Chairman to raise at next Broads Authority meeting

The Chairman asked that members contact him if there were any items they wished him to take to the Authority when he made his usual report to the next meeting.

4/14 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 7 October 2010 at Dragonfly House, 2 Gilders Way, Norwich, commencing at 2.00pm.

4/15 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

The Chairman expressed his wish that members provide topics for agenda items and presentations. He requested that members inform him of their views and wishes for the content of the agenda in plenty of time. This would be helpful for the planning of future agendas.

Members noted a provisional list of the items to be included on the next agenda as set out below:

- Broads Authority Act 2009 Designated Loading
- Peat Project
- Slipway Strategy Progress
- Fisheries Action Plan
- Carbon Audit of the Broads and BA Action Plan.

The meeting concluded at 4.50pm.

Chairman