

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2010

Present

Mr Jonathan Bowman (Chairman)

Mr Andrew Alston	Mr Mike Flett	Mr Bryan Read
Dr Keith Bacon	Dr Martin George	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Michael Barnes	Mr John Hiskett	Mr Matthew Thwaites
Mr Henry Cator	Mr Brian Holt	Mr Jeff Toser
Mr Martyn Davey	Mr John Lurkins	Mr Kenneth Turner
Mr Mike Evans	Mr Peter Medhurst	Mr Hugh Tusting
Mr Terry Fleet	Mr Philip Pearson	Mr Anthony Wright

In Attendance

Ms M Conti – Broads Strategy Officer
Mr R G Holman – Director of Corporate Services
Mr S Hooton – Director of Conservation and Countryside Management
Ms A Kelly – Head of Conservation
Ms A Long – Director of Planning and Strategy
Ms E Murray – Conservation Officer
Mr J Organ – Head of Administration and Executive Assistant
Dr J Packman – Chief Executive
Mrs L Shute – Administrative Officer
Ms C Weller – Communications Manager

Also Present

1/1 Apologies and Announcements

The Chairman announced that former member Keith Clarke had died on 25 August. His funeral was held on 8 September.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Julian Barnwell and Mr Tony Gibbons.

1/2 Chairman's Announcements

(1) Report back from Broads Authority Meeting: 17 September 2010

Members noted that the Chairman had reported on the Forum's business at the Authority meeting on 17 September.

It was noted that the major items from the last Authority meeting were included in today's agenda papers.

(2) **Membership Issues**

(i) Parish Council Representation

It was noted that Mr Mike Flett from Ludham Parish Council and Mr John Lurkins from Chedgrave Parish Council had been selected as the additional Local Communities members.

(ii) Education Interest Groups

It was noted that to date no response had been received from Education interest groups for a replacement for Pamela Masters.

(iii) Members noted that there was a vacancy under Commercial Interest groups as Jane Cryer had left.

(3) **Closed Door Meeting**

Members noted that following comments made at the 'closed door meeting' every effort would be made to include further detail and an indication of the level of feeling or controversy in the minutes.

Keith Bacon pointed out an example in the minutes where it would have been useful to have an indication of who the member was providing information. It was agreed that this would be taken into account in future where appropriate when compiling the minutes.

1/3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 July 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1/4 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response Taken following Discussions at Previous Meetings

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received.

(1) **Fen Workshop**

KB and RS informed members that the workshop had been informative.

1/5 Responding to the Spending Review

Members received a report and presentation providing details of the expected results of the Spending Review which were due to be announced on 20 October 2010. The advice from Defra had been that the Authority should plan for a 30% reduction in National Park Grant (NPG) which would mean a total reduction in Grant of £1.48 million over four years including the 5% in-year

cut. This could not be achieved without major changes to the way the Authority was organised and operated and the number of staff it employed and could not be accommodated by natural wastage or retirement alone.

A reduction in income of such magnitude had meant that the Authority was examining all its activities and the extent to which they were best suited to the future delivery of its statutory duties. The first tranche of a series of service reviews had been completed and had been considered by the Resource Allocation Working Group at its meeting on 16 September 2010. It had considered optimum ways of delivering the Authority's purposes with reduced resources including examining the organisational structure so that the Authority could continue to deliver an integrated approach to the management of the Broads and look at ways of generating additional income.

The outcome from the remaining service reviews would be reported to the Resource Allocation Working Group on 21 October 2010 so that the Group could provide recommendations on future resource allocation to meet the anticipated reductions in NPG. These recommendations would be considered by the Authority on 19 November 2010.

Members noted a set of guidelines for the future allocation of expenditure which had been adopted by the Authority together with basic principles for the future delivery of services at a meeting on 17 September and were provided with details of the Authority's key activities together with their costs and were asked to indicate their priorities for allocation of future National Park Grant and future delivery of services.

In reply to a comment from John Hiskett, that the process was too complex, it was noted that, although it had limitations, it would be useful to have some indication from Forum members as to their priorities.

Henry Cator asked why Planning had been excluded from the process, it was noted that as this was a statutory service with government targets to meet, on initial review it had become apparent that savings would be difficult to achieve. Another member (KB) supported the way the current planning service was delivered.

In response to a question about the Authority's expenditure on consultant's fees, it was noted that this was negligible. Much research was carried out in partnership with universities. Expertise on the management of trees and listed buildings was provided on a part-time basis.

Henry Cator suggested that the exercise could be carried out as if the Authority was starting up.

Martin George commented that the maintenance of the fens was important given their diversity and importance ecologically. This was supported by the majority of members who strongly agreed.

Bryan Read pointed out that organisations should work with the Authority to support it and help provide facilities. He quoted an example where funding had been available to the Broads Society and not to the Authority.

Philip Pearson supported the Authority's work on biodiversity and its wider effects of maintaining habitats and water quality.

JohnHiskett supported the Authority's work on county wildlife sites and working with the Wildlife Trusts.

Mike Evans commented that the Authority should concentrate on safeguarding what it was dealing with now and stressed the importance of communications and being careful how the Authority projected itself.

Peter Medhurst stressed the importance of keeping the access network going.

Anthony Wright asked whether the Authority had considered a reduction in salaries. It was explained that some national park authorities had considered this route when a 10% reduction in National Park Grant had been mooted. Now the Authority was trying to accommodate a 30% cut and this would not provide a sufficient reduction in costs.

It was noted that the results of the exercise would be taken into account when the Resource Allocation Working Group were considering the matter (a summary is set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes). The Group's recommendations would be considered at the Authority meeting on 19 November 2010.

Members emphasised the importance of maintaining the special qualities of the area and the need to allocate resources where they would be most effective.

1/6 Broads Plan Review

Members received an update on the progress on the draft Broads Plan 2011 which had been published for public consultation from 7 June 2010 to 13 August 2010 together with a report containing responses received. Copies of all the representations received had been published on the Authority's website. These would help to inform the next stages of the review.

It was noted that the timetable for the review of the Plan had been amended to take into account the timing of the Government Spending Review and decisions on National Park Grant and allow the Authority to undertake further work through consultation to develop and firm up robust priorities for the next Plan period (5 – 7 years). It was now intended to take a revised plan to the Authority in the new year, rather than in November 2010.

1/7 Broads Forum Meeting Venues

Members received a report considering the rationale for currently holding Broads Forum meetings at Dragonfly House and a proposal for using alternative venues. Members noted details of the background and advantages of moving to Dragonfly House which had included the opportunity to promote sustainable travelling for staff and members and providing the Authority with cost savings including those of staff time.

It had been recognised that some members were frustrated by the lack of car parking close to the office and their proposal for using alternative meeting venues would not only provide parking but the opportunity to engage with local communities. The increased costs and time officers were away from operational tasks could be substantiated by the benefits of further engagement with local communities especially if arranged and publicised in conjunction with parish councils and supported through the Forum's parish council representatives.

A suggested trial that the meetings in April and July 2011 could be held in parish locations was considered. Anthony Wright stressed the importance of ensuring that any venue had adequate public transport links and the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal were considered. Members were divided on the issue with individual comments being made on the inefficient use of car transport (Philip Pearson), the advantages of community involvement (Henry Cator) and the Park and Ride service to Norwich which was cheap and effective (Mike Evans).

Following a tied vote on the proposal, the Chairman decided to support a proposal that one well publicised meeting (April or July 2011) should be held at a Broads venue with transport links.

This could be reviewed at the meeting in October 2011 to determine the interest of the public and whether the levels of attendance warranted the additional officer time and incidental costs.

1/8 The Carbon Audit and Broads Authority Action Plan

Members received a report giving the likely risks to the Broads of climate change and its possible impacts on the area. To understand the scale of greenhouse gas emissions, the Authority had commissioned a carbon audit and reduction plan for both its own operations and in the wider context of the Broads. As a result, the Authority had identified the main areas for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from operations including travel, utilities and procurement of paper, timber and aggregates. In addition, it had also stimulated work with the tourism industry to try and lessen associated emissions. As well as this mitigation work the Authority, along with other national park authorities, had agreed with Government to produce an Adaptation Plan.

The Authority had been working closely with partners through the Climate Change Adaptation Panel developing the outline structure of a Plan and a process that involved those with a stake in the Broads.

The outline structure suggested that the first step was to identify risks/vulnerabilities/opportunities. A climate change adaptation tool was being developed by the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership which could then help in assessing the acceptability and appropriateness of the various options as identified. The process of discussing and debating the features of the Broads to be retained and subject to adaptation for the future was important. The Broads Forum could be a central mechanism in refining the approach to climate change and providing a conduit to those with an interest in influencing such a plan.

The Forum discussed the issues with several members supporting the premise that individuals should be taking responsibility in reducing the impacts of climate change and providing examples of good practice, whilst others commented that as the issue was complex it should be left to the experts and the Government to provide evidence and technical guidance.

The Director of Conservation and Countryside Management confirmed that the Authority was happy to work with organisations to provide information and advice. It was accepted that given the local example of the sugar industry and China as a worldwide and wider context when considering emissions, the task of reducing these impacts did seem daunting, but this should not deter individuals and organisations from taking action. Recent evidence showed that emissions were rising and computer simulations of the future effects of climate change were very worrying. The message was that there was a real need to make every effort to cut emissions.

Suggestions were made to support the message going out to school children at an event at the Norfolk Show Ground in the spring (Henry Cator) and to advise Parish Councils (Richard Starling) and rural communities (Philip Pearson) so they could encourage awareness and action.

1/9 Broads Authority Peat Project

A report setting out the ever increasing value of peatlands for wildlife conservation and climate change mitigation was received. The Head of Conservation and Conservation Officer provided the figures relating to these values and highlighted the fundamental role of the Broads peat resource in supporting and conserving key habitats and species, as well as providing additional services as a greenhouse gas store. Globally peatlands form only 3% of the land area yet contribute 30% to global soil carbon and were England's most important carbon store when under good wetland management.

Given the value of mitigating environmental damage through storage of CO₂ the Authority was working within a framework for understanding and restoring

degraded peat habitats in the Broads, feeding into national peat studies and raising awareness through local school peat projects.

It was noted that information relating to the peat project would be made available on the Authority's website.

Members welcomed the fen protection the management of peat soils might bring. However Martin George pointed out that management was more complex than just keeping the peat wet.

Officers agreed that different management techniques were necessary in different parts of the Broads and on occasions it was difficult to be effective where competing demands were made on the land.

In reply to a question as to whether the Authority was looking to increase the acreage of wet woodland, it was noted that where work was being carried out to keep open fen, it may not be effective to remove small areas of scrub. Keith Bacon expressed serious concern that this appeared to be a change in the Authority's policy and that fen management decisions should not be made according to the effect on climate change alone. In reply it was noted that although the Authority was committed to increasing and managing the areas of fenland, the effectiveness and sustainability of management techniques used should be questioned where it was not possible to get back to open fen. Richard Starling commented that involving local people who could utilise the wood may be a method of keeping the fens open.

Members strongly agreed that the management of the fens should continue to be a priority.

Martin George commented that the Broads consisted of a mosaic of marshes and the Authority needed to be clear as to what it was trying to achieve. Grass marshland on fen peat was vulnerable as there would be increasing pressure to increase production of food through agriculture which could mean draining marshlands and unlocking the peat.

1/10 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) Dragonfly House Mooring

In reply to a question, the Chief executive explained that the reduced visitor mooring scheme provided four moorings and was for the site as a whole.

Members noted the design of the pedestrian bridge to be located at a site near to the mooring which should be similar in height to Bishop's Bridge. Jarrolds had indicated that work on the bridge should start shortly.

In reply to a question as to when cycle racks for members of the public would be installed at Dragonfly House, it was noted that officers shared the frustration at the extended delay and members were encouraged to indicate their concern to Elizabeth Smith at Jarrolds.

(2) **Impact of Geese on the Broads**

Richard Starling commented that although this matter was also being considered by the Upper Thurne Working Group, he was concerned at the damage that was being done to the Broads by the geese and wished to know the returns from licensed egg pricking which Natural England should be able to collate since they issued the licences.

Philip Pearson commented on the concerns of the Upper Thurne Working Group that needed to be addressed. A strategic management approach for the control of the geese was needed, especially for the issue of licences for the control of geese numbers. In reply to a question by Richard Starling he confirmed that the geese could be shot but not sold as this could have an impact on other species of geese and their conservation.

Members were asked if there was sufficient interest and on what aspect of the matter they wished to receive information. Philip Pearson confirmed that the wider issues could be considered.

1/11 Current Issues

Martin George drew attention to the lack of stoneworts at Hickling Broad which had been a National Nature Reserve since 1950 and which was recognised for the richness of its water weed flora. Members were reminded that as a result of the increase in *Chara Intermedia* in 2000 a management regime had been implemented. Along with the regression of the stoneworts, the numbers of weed feeding birds had also reduced as had emergent plants like Mare's Tail. This suggested that something significant was happening and there would be great interest in the report by Professor Tony Davies, who had been exploring what was happening, when it was published.

In reply it was noted that the Authority and Upper Thurne Working Group were aware of the situation and that there were complex issues involved.

Philip Pearson confirmed that efforts were being made to record and document pollution events.

Martin George expressed concern that research information was not always shared and that in this case the Authority should press for details.

Andrew Alston referred to the recent fire on a RSPB marsh and whether the results would be monitored to see if it would be beneficial to bring back burning.

Philip Pearson confirmed that this accident had affected the invertebrate species for which these sites were protected and CO₂ emissions and that they were monitoring the changes. Natural England currently did not support the practice of burning as an effective management tool in these locations.

1/12 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 at the next meeting.

1/13 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Thursday 10 February 2011 at Dragonfly House, 2 Gilders Way, Norwich commencing at 2.00pm.

1/14 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 in future agenda as set out below:

- St Benets Abbey – Presentation by Ann Mason
- BA Act 2009 Designated Loading: Item
- Boat Census
- Feedback on the
 - use of the Fen Harvester (from workshop and Spending Review)
 - Geese Control and their effect on Water Quality (from Upper Thurne work shop)
- Fisheries Action Plan
- Slipway Strategy Progress

The meeting concluded at 5.10pm.

Chairman

Appendix 1 Broads Forum Exercise

Each Member of the Forum was given three red dots and 1 green dot, the red indicating areas for reduction in expenditure and the green for areas that should be protected. Corporate functions such as finance and committees were excluded on the basis that they would attract a large number of reds and not force a choice between front line priorities. Planning was also excluded on the grounds that it is a statutory service. The results, which have to be treated with care, were as follows.

Wetland Habitats	11 Green
Tourism	9 Green 1 Red
Broads Restoration	3 Red
Cultural Heritage	4 Red
Visitor Centres	4 Red
Boat Trips	7 Red
Events, Visitor Facilities and Public Rights of Way	9 Red
Communications	9 Red
Landscape	9 Red
Projects Team	12 Red 1 Green