

Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 04 September 2024

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Present

In the Chair- Keith Bacon, Richard Atkins, Harry Blathwayt, Christine Cane, Peter Dixon, Geoff Doggett, Tony Gibbons, Tim Harris, David Lilley, Katie Phillips.

In attendance

Hannah Davison- Natural England, Andrew Farrell- Partnership and External Funding Manager, Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Hannah Norman- Farming and Catchment Officer, Kylie Moos – Administrative Officer, Jo Thompson – Waterways and Recreation Officer.

1. Appointment of Chair

Keith Bacon was proposed by Harry Blathwayt and seconded by Peter Dixon.

There being no other nominations Keith Bacon was appointed Chair of the Broads Local Access Forum for the forthcoming year 2024/25.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

David Lilley was proposed by Harry Blathwayt and seconded by Richard Atkins.

There being no other nominations David Lilley was appointed Vice-Chair of the Broads Local Access Forum for the forthcoming year 2024/25.

3. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies received from Edward Gilder, Duncan Holmes, Peter Mason, Joe Mitchell, Steve Read, Chris Yardley.

4. Declarations of interest

Members indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered and set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

5. Minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 5 June 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2024 were approved as a correct record and agreed by the Chair.

6. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings

Staithe

The Broads Authority are still in discussion with the Environment agency regarding the management of a public staithe in the Broads. Progress has been slow due to a new

collaboration agreement, the involvement of the landowners and finding time in the Environment Agency workplan.

A Forum member commented, the Environment Agency have been looking into disposing some of their assets, including riverbanks, and asked if this will happen with Environment Agency owned staithe. Dan Hoare responded, any discussions that the Broads Authority have had regarding freehold have been on a case by case basis.

[The Staithe of the Broads](#) report is only available online. A Forum member suggested that it would be nice to have the report as a book. Dan Hoare responded, the report was commissioned by the Broads Authority, so it is likely that they will hold the copyright. A Forum member offered to contact Professor Tom Williamson and recommended involving parish councils if the report was made into a book.

Keith Bacon and Andrew Farrell have been working with Professor Tom Williamson on a new book [Broadland: Shaping marsh and fen](#) which is a definitive history of the Broads and will include staithe. The book will be available to purchase from 1 November.

The Waterways and Recreation Officer agreed to investigate with the Broads Authority communications team and Forum member Geoff Doggett who has the publishing rights to the staithe report.

A Forum member commented, often the issue is knowing who is responsible for the access paths to staithe. If the access is not maintained, then the staithe becomes inaccessible.

7. Paths lost to the river

Jo Thompson presented the paths lost to the river report which provided an overview of the issue since it was first brought to the Forum in June 2021. Jo Thompson noted that there is not the same legal basis for paths lost to the riverbank erosion as there is for coastal erosion. The report recommended that local MPs are made aware of the concerns regarding losing Public Rights of Way to bank erosion on inland waterways.

Comments and answers to questions

A Forum member commented, contacting local MPs pushes the issue further down the line and any change in law would be a long process. National engagement is needed on the issue and organisations like the Ramblers need to be involved. At a local level, there are tools that county councils could use such as repairing the paths and diversion orders. Engagement with the local media would also be beneficial. Another Forum member recommended inviting a member of the Norfolk Trails team to a future meeting.

The Waterways and Recreation Officer agreed to invite the Norfolk Trails team to a future meeting.

The Chair reported that the issue had been raised at both the Norfolk Local Access Forum and the Rights of Way subgroup.

National Trails do not hold any additional power or importance than a Public Right of Way. The National Trails status is a marketing tool which is applied in addition to a Public Right of Way.

Referring to the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 in item 2.3 of the report, a Forum member questioned if 55B.3.b refers to riverbanks or just the coastline.

The Ramblers have advised a Forum member that there have been instances where metres of a riverbank have been lost in a single event and the court agreed that the path could not be maintained and had to be rerouted. In the Broads however, it would take decades to lose meters of a path to the river. Challenging the County Council would cost a lot of public money, and the challenge may not be successful.

The Broads Authority does have some powers for extinguishments and re directing public rights of way, and has exercised this power where flood banks have been realigned. Jo Thompson is investigating if this can be applied to other situations.

A Forum member questioned if a riparian landowner would be responsible for maintaining a footpath that runs along their bank. Another Forum member added, there are also different regulations for tidal and coastal waters.

The ten paths in item 3.3 of the report which have been rerouted and flagged to be extinguished were as part of the Broadland flood alleviation project. The paths were included in the report to show that it is possible for paths to be moved and is not a list of all the paths lost to the river.

8. Active Travel England

Andrew Farrell, Partnership and External Funding Manager presented the report and provided an update on how the project is progressing. Every National Park in England was awarded £100,000 to create a Local, Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for their area. The project will align with the existing Norfolk and Suffolk LCWIPs.

The first phase of the LCWIP consultation was launched at the Royal Norfolk Show and consists of an [online consultation](#), engagement with parish councils, local walking organisations, businesses and public transport providers. Initial feedback from the survey has been largely from permanent residents, the majority of which, do not cycle in the Broads. Andrew Farrell commented that there are lots of opportunities to cycle and walk in the Broads, however there is a request for better signage and maintenance of paths. The online consultation is open until 30 September.

The second phase will be working with a consultant to develop feasibility studies and project initiation documents based on the data collected, by March 2025. Projects will be able to get started as and when external funding is secured.

Comments and answers to questions

A Forum member asked if bridleways have been considered. Andrew Farrell confirmed that they are aware of some bridleway routes which end in footpaths and feedback from equestrian groups is welcome.

The Waterways and Recreation Officer agreed to contact Christine Cane to set up an in-person event with horse riders in the Broads.

A Forum member suggested engaging with the geocaching community which appears to be quite large in the Waveney valley. Andrew Farrell responded, anyone can complete the online consultation. The geocaching community have not yet been approached because there are instances where users are encouraged to go onto private land, which the Authority does not support.

A Forum member suggested that car parking near trails should be considered. Many people access the Broads by car and chose to drive and park at the starting point of a circular trail. Andrew Farrell noted that there has been feedback about car parking at popular locations. The number of electric vehicle charging points needs to increase if it is going to be promoted as a sustainable travel option in the Broads.

The community rail partnership is a key partner and have offered free rail tickets to get people out into the Broads using public transport. Railway providers are being asked to make sure they provide enough space for cycles on new carriages. Andrew Farrell has also been in contact with bus companies who have routes in and around the Broads. A Forum member added, more needs to be done with public transport to allow for circular trails, often trails are linear. The circular routes that are available are often quite long. There is a need for smaller circular trails which are accessible for all.

Andrew Farrell has been working with the open churches movement which are used as wayfinding points on trails and allow the use of the church's facilities.

Hannah Davison asked if the consultation is being shared with diverse groups, and if the paths are accessible for all. Andrew Farrell confirmed that there has been some engagement, but they would welcome any additional suggestions that Hannah Davison or Forum members may have.

A Forum member asked if this project is a repeat of the Integrated Access Strategy (IAS) which was presented to the Forum last year and why has much of the focus has been on the Southern Broads with recent projects. Andrew Farrell confirmed that the IAS is still being followed internally. The terms of the recent projects, Water, Mills and Marshes programme which has been running for the last seven years was to focus on the Southern Broads. The project area could not go any further north than Upton.

A Forum member asked who is responsible for the maintenance of the Wherryman's Way near the Beauchamp Arms. Jo Thompson confirmed that Norfolk County Council are responsible, and they have asked for all issues to be reported through the [report a highways problem portal](#). Several Forum members commented that they have used the portal, but the issue is still outstanding, and they have not received a response. A Forum member proposed that the

Forum should raise a formal complaint to the Norfolk County Council Trails team about the lack of response and action taken when using the online portal and copy in the relevant councillor.

Peter Dixon agreed to draft a letter to share with the Chair. The Chair will then send the letter to the Norfolk County Council Trails team and relevant councillor.

9. Broadland Catchment Partnership and water quality

Hannah Norman, Catchment and Farming Officer introduced the Broadland Catchment Partnership and the water quality monitoring which takes place in the catchment. The partnership is co-hosted by the Broads Authority and Norfolk Rivers Trust and was formed in 2012. The aim is to improve the water environment and provide wider benefits for people and nature at a catchment scale.

The Broadland Rivers Catchment is relatively large at around 3,200km² and is mostly rural – over 80% is arable farmland. The wider catchment area is important because everything that is happening upstream impacts the Broads.

Water quality challenges

Current challenges identified by the partnership

- Physical modifications
- Pollution from agriculture and rural areas
- Pollution from wastewater

Wider water environment challenges identified by the partnership

- Nature Recovery, protect and enhance rare habitats including chalk streams
- Reduce storm overflows and drainage system incidents
- Protect and restore healthy soils and nutrient balance
- Build environmental resilience and adaptation to climate change
- Support Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Removing plastics/litter from the water environment

Future challenges anticipated by the partnership

- Changes to the natural flow and water levels
- Pollution from agriculture and rural areas
- Pollution from wastewater

Future challenges predicted by the Environment Agency

- Future challenges in 2050

- Invasive non-native species
- Physical modifications
- Pollution from wastewater
- Emerging challenges
 - Physical modifications
 - Pollution from wastewater
 - Pollution from towns, cities and transport

Broadland Catchment Partnership projects

- Water Sensitive Farming – Tesco funded the purchase of a ‘BE Wonder Wheel’ that was offered to growers to trial for free. This piece of machinery is towed behind a tractor to shape the soil in potato beds and reduce run-off from irrigation and rainfall events.
- WATR sensors –one is located on the Waveney and is looking at turbidity, another is currently in the Upper Bure where Crayfish were detected with the sensor. Additional monitoring probes are available to purchase, but they can be expensive.
- Witton Run – working with the RSPB and a UEA student to improve water quality. The project involved catchment sensitive farmers from Natural England who were able to work with local landowners and support farmers to take voluntary action to reduce water pollution across their holding.
- Fish health on the Wensum – a student is currently finalising the report which looks at pollutants in fish.
- Water resource training- led by Water Resources East and the Broads Authority. The aim of the project was to give the Catchment Partnership an introduction to water resource management planning, so that all partners would be better equipped to engage with this subject in future.

CaSTCo - Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative

- Project led by the Rivers Trust looking at water quality monitoring across the country – in the Broadland Catchment focused in the Wensum.
- 38 sites and 30 volunteers
- Working with Environment Agency and UEA to validate data
- Framework for incident reporting and data validation with the Environment Agency.

Feedback from the Environment Agency is that the testing for phosphorous is good. The monitoring picked up issues related to septic tanks on the Wensum. The issue was reported to the Environment Agency and resulted in people having their tanks cleared out.

River Waveney Trust bathing water project

- Monitoring faecal indicator organisms on the Waveney around Falcon Meadow with volunteers.
- Aim to put in a bathing water application in 2025 but also about awareness
- Funded by Anglian Water, with additional funding from Broadland Catchment Partnership and local charities.

Other monitoring

- Environment Agency monitor for several purposes including compliance assessment against discharge permits, investigation of pollution incidents or environmental monitoring.
- Anglian Water now have event duration monitors on all their storm overflows. The information is displayed on the [storm overflow map](#).

Outfall safari and opportunities

- A method of surveying pollution at surface water outfalls
- Designed to detect missed connections
- Works best in more urban areas
- Survey carried out once a year

Comments and answers to questions

The Water Framework Directive uses a traffic light system to report on water quality. The aim was to turn every water body in Europe green. A Forum member asked what state the Broadland catchment is in. Hannah Norman responded, the Water Framework Directive targets are included in River Basin Management Plans. There are areas in red within the catchment because the target includes forever chemicals. The Environment Agency is planning to separate out the forever chemicals target. A Forum member added, phosphorus stripping needs to be applied at a catchment level to improve water quality.

Riverfly monitoring takes place across the catchment and is an accessible method for citizen scientists to monitor water quality. Invertebrates are very sensitive to the water quality and are a good indication that there has been a change. Where possible, citizen scientists are trained to carry out more than one type of survey.

A Forum member commented that high river flow is the best source for cleaning rivers and the Broadland rivers have a low flow of water which also effects the salinity. The Forum member asked if the current standard for how much water is being abstracted from Broadland rivers is correct. Hannah Norman responded, this is an evolving issue with climate change and population increase, there is less water to go around. Water Resources East have been working with water companies on their water management plans and look to bring in other sectors into the planning process. A Forum member commented, the more organisations that are involved in the process, such as Water Resources East, the longer it will

take to see any results. Another Forum member added, changing water quality at a catchment scale isn't down to partnerships, but instead, down to the government Ofwat and water companies.

The recent ruling on Manchester Ship Canal Company Limited v United Utilities Water Ltd would only have an implication on private waterways in the Broads.

A Forum member asked if there had been any news regarding neonicotinoids pesticides being authorised for use for another year. Hannah Norman responded, there has been no update since the general election.

Hannah Norman is attending a speech tomorrow by the Secretary of State for Defra where it is thought that there will be an announcement relating to water. Hannah Norman agreed to share any relevant information with the Forum after the event.

10. Any other business

Harry Blathwayt has been appointed as the Chair of the Broads Authority.

A Forum member asked if there was any update on the bank repairs that are taking place at Potter Heigham which have closed a section of the Weavers' Way path. Jo Thompson responded, the works are due to be completed by the end of March 2025.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum would be held on Wednesday 20 November 2024 at 10.00am. Broads Authority officers are going to investigate if the meeting could be held in the new Waveney room at Yare House.

The meeting ended at 12.00pm.

Signed by

Chair

