Broads Authority

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2026

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Please note these are draft minutes and will not be confirmed until the next meeting.

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Present

Harry Blathwayt – in the Chair, Stephen Bolt, George Boyd, Gary Champion, Peter Dixon, Alan Goodchild, Tony Grayling, Gail Harris, James Harvey, Tristram Hilborn, Heather Hilburn, Tim Jickells, Curig Johnston, Leslie Mogford, Tim Munday, Matthew Shardlow.

In attendance

Sarah Cowley – Chief Executive, Lucy Burchnall – Head of Ranger Services, Dan Hoare – Head of Operations, Emma Krelle – Director of Resources, Rob Leigh – Head of Communications (item 11), Joseph Balaam – Governance Officer, Lorraine Taylor – Head of Governance/Monitoring Officer.

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014

The Chair explained that the meeting was being audio-recorded. All recordings remained the copyright of the Broads Authority and anyone wishing to receive a copy should contact the Governance Team. The minutes remained the record of the meeting. He added that the law permitted any person to film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of public meetings of the Authority. This did not extend to live verbal commentary. The Chair needed to be informed if anyone intended to photograph, record or film so that any person under the age of 18 or members of the public not wishing to be filmed or photographed could be accommodated.

Apologies were received from Tom Daly, Martyn Hooton and Siân Limpenny

2. Chairman's announcements

The Chair confirmed that there was no change to the order of the agenda and that no members of the public had registered to speak.

The Chair welcomed the Authority's new Chief Executive, Sarah Cowley, to her first Broads Authority meeting. The Chair further extended the gesture to new member George Boyd who was also attending his first Broads Authority meeting.

The Chief Executive (CE) thanked the Chair and Members for the warm welcome she had received since joining the Authority. The CE said it was apparent she had joined a passionate community that cared for the Broads and looked forward to listening to and working with a diverse range of stakeholders with varying interests and opinions.

The Chair informed members that he and the CE had recently attended the National Parks UK Conference on behalf of the Authority. The Chair found the topic of devolution particularly interesting and noted we could learn from how the Lake District and National Parks in Scotland and Wales had approached this.

3. Introduction of members and declarations of interest

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

4. Items of urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public question time

The Chair said that there had been two questions submitted and that Members had received a copy of the questions and accompanying text as set out in Appendices 2 and 3.

In her absence, the Chair read the question submitted by Ms Morris and provided the Authority's response as set out in Appendix 2 to these Minutes.

Mr Morris was also unable to attend. The Chair read his questions and the provided the Authority's response as set out in Appendix 3 to these Minutes.

The Head of Governance would provide both individuals a response to their questions via email, within 20 working days.

6. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7. Summary of actions and outstanding issues

Members received the latest summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings. The Head of Governance (HoG) said there were no further updates to the report.

A Member commented that a number of organisations that were partners in the bid to the National Lottery Heritage Landscape Connection Scheme were unsure what they stood to gain from the bid and the Member believed this needed to be clarified. The HoG said they would inform the Head of External Funding that some confusion had arisen.

The report was noted.

8. Strategic priorities – update and draft strategic priorities for 2027/28

Members received the report of the Head of Governance (HoG). The HoG said the report contained an update to existing priorities, as well as potential priorities for the upcoming year; future reports would also reflect priorities from the Broads Plan once it had been published.

A Member requested updates on the capital programme be included. The HoG agreed to this addition.

A Member commented 2028 would be an important year for the Authority due to the delayed mayoral elections and the introduction of the Broads Plan. The Member said devolution changes would result in the Mayor obtaining a regional planning role which would impact how BFI recommendations were taken forward. The HoG said it would be important for the Authority to build a positive working relationship with the new Mayor. The Member believed health, safety and wellbeing warranted inclusion amongst the Authority's priorities.

A Member asked whether the priorities being carried forward were still relevant. The Member asked the Chief Executive (CE) if there were any priorities they believed warranted inclusion. The CE said existing priorities would be closely examined before being carried forward to the new Broads Plan to ensure they warranted inclusion. The Member asked for clarification on what on track meant in relation to strategic priorities and believed this to be vague. The CE agreed and said they would like to change the style of reporting to include a traffic light system which would provide greater clarity on how items were progressing.

A Member commented that the list of priorities had become longer and more detailed during their tenure with the Authority. The Member believed the report should focus on items where changes and development were necessary. The CE agreed that the Authority should focus on a shorter list of priorities where the Authority could make a difference.

A Member commented that access was an important issue and the Authority had previously been focused on physical access. A Member commented the Authority should consider making the Broads accessible to more people.

A Member asked if local government restructuring presented a risk to the Authority. The HoG said this was considered in the Authority's Corporate Risk Register.

A Member was concerned there would be a lack of synchronisation between the new Broads Plan and the BFI plan, which was due in 2028. The Member said any changes to flood defences would impact ecology and navigation, and preparation would consequently be required.

A Member asked for updates on Lower Yare marker post removal and the joint maintenance dredge protocol with Peel Ports. The Head of Operations (HO) said the Environment Agency had agreed to the removal of posts that were recommended for removal by the Navigation Committee. The removal of posts was scheduled in the Authority's work programme and would take place over the next two years. The HO had received the draft dredge protocol document from consultants and would review this.

A Member asked if there would be further workshops in relation to the Broads Plan. The HoG said a full schedule would be sent to the Member.

The HoG said a more detailed draft of next year's priorities, which would include planned actions and milestones, would be presented to Members at the November meeting.

The report was noted.

9. Financial performance and direction

Members received the report of the Director of Resources (DoR). The DoR said there were no further updates to the report.

A Member asked whether all capital projects could be delivered before the funding deadline. The Head of Operations (HO) was confident that the majority of proposed expense items were on track and would be complete prior to the deadline.

A Member asked whether redundant specialist equipment stored at the Dockyard had been sold. The HO said these items were scheduled to be auctioned in October.

A Member was encouraged by the toll figures and asked whether the income was likely to remain ahead of budget throughout the year. The DoR said the budget had assumed a greater reduction in boats and expected tolls to perform ahead of the budget throughout the year as a result.

A Member asked if the Authority was sufficiently staffed and had enough resources to meet necessary and proposed actions. The Chief Executive said the Authority's resource allocation was important and hoped DEFRA would provide indicative funding allocation to enable longer-term planning resource allocation.

A Member praised the tolls team on their work which was positively reflected in the performance of toll income against the budget.

The report was noted.

10. Oil Spill Contingency Plan

Members received the report of the Head of Ranger Services (HRS). The HRS said as a Harbour Authority the Broads Authority were required to publish an oil spill response plan. The Authority reviewed the response plan every five years, with the next review due January 2027. The HRS highlighted the draft Oil Spill Contingency Plan attached to the report and commented the Authority had strengthened its relationship with Peel Ports since the previous plan was created.

A Member commented the plan was impressive and enquired as to why information relation to sampling oil spills was in the operational instructions but not present in the plan. The HRS said updated guidance from the MCA was pending and this would be added back into the plan once received. The Member asked whether the Authority had the equipment to boom and skim oil spills as outlined in the plan. The HRS said the Authority held a standing contract with a tier two responder and conducted oil spill exercises every three years.

A Member asked if the Authority had any contingency plan in place for nurdles. The HRS said any vessel that held cargo with the potential to create this type of pollution incident would need permission to enter the Broads. If this were to take place a plan would be created

before the vessel entered the Broads. The HRS added the risk of such pollution entering the Broads from the Peel Ports area was not sufficient enough to warrant the creation of a contingency plan. The Authority would be informed by Peel Ports should any such spill occur.

A Member commented that the plan was an enjoyable overview of the Authority's operations and asked what response the Authority would take in the event of an oil spill, via Peel Ports, as part of a larger major incident. The HRS said the Authority attended Peel Port exercises that presented various scenarios; the last of which was a boat fire. The HRS added the Ranger team responded to approximately ten spill incidents annually.

A Member asked if the Authority were confident that members of the public were aware of the various appearances different spills could take and the appropriate reporting method. The HRS said overreporting was more common than underreporting, which was seen as a positive. The Member asked if the Authority had considered plastic pollution entering the Broads from artificial football pitches. A Member commented the process would translate to a number of other spillages or pollution incidents. The HRS said the Environment Agency (EA) was the lead organisation for land based pollution entering the waterway. The Authority's statutory duty was boat based pollution, but a joint working agreement was in place.

The report was noted.

11. Policy and Protocol Review

Members received the report of the Head of Governance (HoG). The HoG said the Social Media Policy and Monitoring Officer Policy were due for review. The HoG and the Head of Communications (HoC) had reviewed the Authority's Social Media Policy against model guidance published by the Local Government Association (LGA) and included a section on safety as a result. The HoG said this section had been highlighted in the appended draft Social Media Policy, along with some other minor changes. The HoG added the Monitoring Officer Protocol had also been reviewed and no changes were required; except for minor changes to job titles.

A Member commented a new LGA policy on AI in relation to freedom of information (FOI) requests would likely be introduced. The HoG said this was possibly due to the sharp increase in FOI requests to public bodies across the country. These requests were longer and more detailed compared to non-AI generated requests, which had created a significant amount of work for local authorities.

A Member expressed concern with the ethics of some social media platforms which were used by the Authority and asked whether alternative platforms have been explored. The HoC said the platforms used by the Authority were reviewed regularly. The HoC shared the Members ethical concerns but said the Authority posted factual information to the platform, relating to issues such as boat safety, which were of benefit to boaters who used the platform, and some central government departments used the platform. The HoC commented the Authority's use of the platform was under close review.

Heather Hilburn proposed, seconded by Tim Munday.

It was resolved unanimously to:

i. **Approve the amendments to the Policy on using Social Media; and**

ii. **Note that the Monitoring Officer Protocol has been reviewed and there are no changes required.**

12. Items of business raised by the Designated Person in respect of the Port Marine Safety Code

There were no matters to report under this item.

13. Minutes to be received

Members received the minutes of the following meetings:

Navigation Committee – 16 April 2026
Planning Committee – 3 July 2026

14. Other items of business

There were no other items of business.

15. Formal questions

There were no formal questions of which notice had been given.

16. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Authority would be held on Friday 27 November 2026 at 10.00am at the King's Centre, 63-75 King Street, Norwich, NR1 1PH.

17. Exclusion of the public

The Authority **resolved** to exclude the public from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the consideration of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Paragraph 1, 3 and 4 of Part1 of Schedule 12A to the Act as amended, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public benefit in disclosing the information.

The public left the meeting and the recording was suspended.

18. Exempt minutes of last meeting

The exempt minutes of the last meeting held on 24 July 2026 were confirmed and would be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting. A summary of the discussion was contained in the exempt minutes.

19. Land Acquisition

A summary of the discussion was contained in the exempt minutes.

The meeting ended at 11:55am

Signed by

Chairman

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Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Broads Authority, 25 September 2026

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Peter Dixon	7	Trustee and Chair of the Museum of the Broads. Partner in bid to National Lottery Heritage Landscape Connection Scheme.

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Appendix 2 – Question from Ms K Morris

Ms Morris asked a question via email, dated 18 September 2026 as follows:

In its April 2025 report, the Authority identified cost-of-living pressures as contributing to the growing problem of unwanted, abandoned and sunken vessels. It reported that specialist recovery could cost between £40,000 and £80,000, that full cost recovery was rare, and that the navigation budget therefore bore the brunt of the expense. The Authority has also previously confirmed that insurance audits were discontinued around 2019/20 and that it now relies principally upon owners declaring that the required insurance is in place.

Will the Authority publish, for each of the last five financial years, the number of abandoned or sunken vessels with which it has dealt; the actual gross cost of recovery, storage and disposal; the amount subsequently recovered from owners or insurers, whether through court action or voluntary repayment; the resulting net cost borne by toll payers; and the number of those vessels found to be uninsured; and explain how reliance principally upon self-declaration provides adequate assurance within the Authority's marine safety management system and enables it to demonstrate compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code?

Answer:

Thank you for your question. The Authority recognises the risk that abandoned, sunken and unserviceable vessels pose to navigation safety and the environment and has made their removal a priority.

Rising boat ownership and living costs are believed to be contributing factors.

For clarity, and under Broads Authority legislation, abandoned, sunken, and unserviceable vessels have separate, clearly defined criteria that distinguish their designations. The subject of abandoned, sunken, and unserviceable vessels is detailed and complex.

The public question requires a more detailed response, as it requests yearly figures, costs and insurance details that would take up too much of this Committee's time. Therefore, the Authority has asked the Director of Delivery to review the publicly raised question and provide a detailed response to the Chair of the Broad Reform Action Group.

Appendix 3 – Questions from Mr M Morris

Mr Morris asked a question via email, dated 18 September 2026 as follows:

We are now roughly halfway through the Authority's Recreation and Tourism Strategy 2024–29, which seeks to widen participation, attract new audiences and strengthen year-round tourism.

The latest detailed Broads tourism data published by the Authority shows that, in 2023, total visitor numbers remained around 4% below the 2019 pre-pandemic peak, while the number of staying visitors fell by 7.9% in a single year, to 1.08 million. By contrast, the wider Norfolk and Suffolk visitor economy reached record levels in 2025, with 87 million tourism trips and a value of £6.16 billion, around 12% above its 2019 value.

Question 1

On what measurable tourism outcomes, as opposed to completion of planned activities, does the Authority base its assessment that the Recreation and Tourism Strategy is achieving its desired outcome?

Question 2

What objective assessment has the Authority made of the current quality and capacity of the Broads visitor offer, and what programme of investment and infrastructure development does it consider necessary, either directly or working with its partners, to address identified deficiencies in moorings, access, visitor facilities, information, sustainable transport links and the principal gateways into the Broads?

Question 3

What quantified growth targets and specific actions has the Authority established to increase the Broads' share of the growing Norfolk and Suffolk tourism market and develop genuinely new markets, including international visiting craft entering through Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft from nearby European boating countries such as the Netherlands?

Supplementary question

Will the Authority commit to publishing an annual tourism performance scorecard showing visitor numbers, new and repeat visitors, length and seasonality of stay, visitor satisfaction and tourism economic value, so that Members and the public can judge objectively whether the Strategy is delivering its intended outcomes??

Answer:
Firstly it's important to address the opening points made in the opening statement as it compares 2 different research methodologies and metrics. STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) data for the Broads and the Volume and Value report commissioned by the Suffolk and Norfolk LVEP. This uses a different research methodology… the 'Cambridge Model'.

Whilst the Norfolk and Suffolk 'value' of tourism is cited as 12% up on 2019, the STEAM data for 2024 indicates a greater increase of 21% (from £665M in 2019 to £805M in 2024). These figures do illustrate the value and importance of tourism to the local economy and the context needs to be understood. Everything is more expensive so visitor spend has naturally increased even if visitor numbers are not at the same levels.

2019 was a bumper year for the Broads and other UK destinations - Visitor numbers were at an all-time high and consequently all other metrics performed well. In 2024 there were 7.8M visitors to the Broads, so the numbers are back to 2018 levels but we have yet to reach the heights of 2019.

There is a current trend which both STEAM and Cambridge research models identify which is a small decrease in visitor overnight trips. It is a pattern seen nationally and may be indicative of changes in buying habits because of reduced disposable income. The LVEP and Visit the Broads DMO's (who we work with closely) are adjusting their marketing and branding activity to try and address this focussing on new markets and extending the traditional visitor season.

Please also note, that paragraph 1.2 in the Broads Recreation and Tourism Strategy 2024-29 sets out the Authority's resource limitations relevant to this subject.

Question 1:
The assessment is based on the following measurable data:

- STEAM data
- Volume Value report (LVEP)
- Performance of Visitor Services – TIC's, Yacht Stations, Boat Trips
- Boat Numbers
- Partner feedback – the Authority takes an active role, supporting and collaborating with the Visit the Broads DMO and Suffolk and Norfolk LVEP

Question 2:
Such an assessment does not exist. It would require considerable additional resources and funding both for the research and a programme of improvements to address any identified shortfalls.

Question 3:
The Broads Recreation and Tourism Strategy 2024-29 contains an action plan. The Authority has previously led the development and marketing of new products when additional external funding was available (for example Visit England funding, the National Park Experience collection and Interreg 'experience' funding). In the absence of additional external resources or funding, the Authority is working collaboratively with the LVEP and DMO's on their collective marketing efforts which benefits the Broads visitor economy.

Question 4:
The Annual STEAM report is not normally published by the Authority but it could be if there was a need. It is supplied to anyone that requests it including partners, stakeholders, students etc. It records many, but not all of the metrics mentioned in the questions…For example

visitor satisfaction information would need to be collected and collated from a variety of sources. A comprehensive visitor survey would be required to collect accurate and reliable information from a statistically valid sample regarding repeat visits. In the past, National Park Authorities (including the Broads) occasionally conducted such surveys. Sample sizes were on average around 1,000 people and obtained from up to 30 sample points. They are less common in recent years because of reduced central funding and limited external funding opportunities for such activity.

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