

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2015

Present:

Dr Keith Bacon in the Chair

Mr Andrew Alston	Mr Robin Godber	Mr Philip Pearson
Mr Brian Barker	Ms Barbara Greasley	Mr Bryan Read
Mr Ashley Cato	Mr John Hiskett	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Michael Flett	Mr Brian Holt	Mr Charles Swan
Mr Martin George	Mr John Lurkins	Mr John Tibbenham
Mr Tony Gibbons	Mr Peter Medhurst	

In Attendance:

Mr Adrian Clarke – Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer
Ms Esmeralda Guds – Administrative Officer
Mr Simon Hooton – Head of Strategy and Projects
Mr Piero Ionta – Solicitor & Monitoring Officer
Ms Andrea Kelly – Senior Ecologist
Mr John Organ – Head of Governance and Executive Assistant
Dr John Packman – Chief Executive

Also in attendance:

Mr Will Hershel-Shorland – Insight Track

3/1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Martyn Davey and Simon Partridge.

Also present was John Carr.

3/2 Chairman's announcements

The Chairman reported on the Broads Authority meetings of 23 January 2015 and the issues discussed including:

- (1) The proposal on branding had been accepted.
- (2) The Ten Year Mooring Strategy Plan had been accepted.
- (3) The outcome on the Waste Facility Review is that the Broads Authority will only be involved with collecting waste at Ranworth because it is the landowner.

- (4) The 24 hour moorings and the Marsh at Geldeston will be retained but the woodland will be disposed of, although public access will be maintained.
- (5) The Agriculture Environment Scheme which was discussed and noted.
- (6) The use of electronic paper work by the Broads Authority and how the Committee will be encouraged to use electronic papers but will continue to be provided with paperwork if necessary.
- (7) Titus Adam has left the Authority as Head of Finance and has now been replaced by Emma Krelle.
- (8) Sediment Management Plan had been approved.
- (9) 1.7 % rise of tolls for next year had been approved.

The Chief Executive updated the members that he had just learned that the bid for £715K to the Department for Transport for the Wroxham/Hoveton to Horning Section of the Three Rivers Way Cycle Route had been successful. Furthermore members were updated that the Authority now had the details of how much it would cost to maintain the existing moorings for the next ten years, that the length of the Hoveton Viaduct mooring will be reduced by 50% and that the lease for the Thorpe River Green mooring would expire in 2017.

3/3 To receive and confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3/4 Public Question Time

No questions had been raised by members of the public.

3/5 Summary of progress/actions/response taken following discussions at previous meetings

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received and members noted the report.

3/6 Climate Change Adaption Plan

Members were provided with a report which outlined progress made with the Climate Change Adaptation Plan. The technically detailed plan was being developed to be sent to Defra but a simpler summary (circulated) had been approved for consultation with organisations and interested parties (subject to finer editing and design). They were made aware that their views were sought and that any responses received would be reviewed and used to inform any necessary revisions to the plans.

Members were reminded that a new approach was adopted making use of a concept developed by the National Wildlife Federation in the USA called 'Climate Smart' which seemed to be a helpful way to tackle the impacts.

Martin George (MG) mentioned he believed that water quality is absolutely key and advised members and the Authority to look into the research done after the 1938 flood on what steps to take to restore agriculture land damaged by sea water. He continued that he believed that the risks of fens being contaminated by salinity is overlooked and that whatever possible needs to be done to keep a predominately fresh water system within The Broads. The Chairman added that it was remarkable that the number of houses which were flooded in the 1938 flood was in single figures as back then they knew where to build and where not.

Robin Godber (RG) expressed concerns regarding the barriers which were put up in Ipswich and Boston and possibly another one in Lowestoft as this could lead to raised water levels in Norfolk.

After a comment from Andrew Alston (AA) that land takes a very long time to recover after it has been flooded by seawater, MG responded that the Dutch had been aware that water bodies are the slowest to recover and therefore believed it was a priority for land to be drained in order for it to recover quicker. Tony Gibbons (TG) believed that the issue therefore was not so much flooding but prevention of saline incursion.

Philip Pearson (PP) said that he was pleased with the set timeframe of two years for the Broads Climate Change Partnership to be implemented and believed it was important to stick to this, to which the Head of Strategy & Projects responded that although the two year timeframe was not guaranteed, he felt optimistic as the Environment Agency had not challenged it.

Richard Starling (RS) however thought there were too many adaption plans already and that this exercise had not led to any changes on the ground since it was started 6 years ago. Climate Smart involves funding in part by carbon offset schemes which remains a controversial program. It enables polluters to carry on without any change or adaption.

AA mentioned that if people living in the Broads like to continue to receive fresh water they would need to take some responsibility themselves.

Bryan Read (BR) said he welcomed the adaption plan and suggested he would discuss the issues with bodies he is involved with to explore what it might mean for them. This was greatly welcomed by the Head of Strategy and Projects who offered to support where he could any organisation wanting to review the document or do their own adaptation planning.

Members welcomed and noted the report.

3/7 Initial Results from Stakeholder Surveys

Members received a report which provided them with a summary of the outcome of the surveys of private boat owners (PBOs), hire boat operators (HBOs), visitors and residents that had recently been carried out for the Authority by Insight Track, a local market research company.

Members were informed that the research accords with the standards and best practice guidance of the Market Research Society and therefore the findings of the surveys provide the Authority with a solid evidence base on the views, priorities and opinions of its customers.

The survey highlights a number of positive outcomes for the Authority although perceptions of the Authority in the hire boat industry are significantly less positive than in the other audience groups.

It was highlighted that dredging was considered to be a high priority across all audiences as was wildlife conservation and educating the next generation about the Broads.

The main challenge for the future is responding to the outcomes of the research in the context of the Authority's ability or capacity to deliver in some of the areas highlighted by respondents.

RS mentioned that the survey should have illustrated the figure of boat owners and residents in percentages and questioned the statistical validity of the survey as a whole.

Will Hershel-Shorland from Insight Track's response was that although they did not interview all the residents, 10 % was considered to be a very robust sample which included all profiles and therefore would have much the same result as a census where 100% of the residents would have been interviewed.

Peter Medhurst said that the survey in many ways was confirming what they already knew, but the Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer added that even if this was the case it was important to get what they already knew confirmed and evidenced.

The Chief Executive commented that there were some surprising elements to the survey like the future boat ownership. He mentioned that the view prior to the survey had presumed that the overall profile of boat owners was that dominated by retired individuals. The survey showed brought to light that in future younger people were aspired to increase the number and size of boats they own.

Mike Flett said that another surprising fact was that a third of the residents were unaware of who was responsible for managing The Broads and unaware of the Government's proposal regarding direct elections.

Barbara Greasley highlighted the dissatisfaction of the HBOs and wanted to know if the Authority had made any plans to approach them to improve communication to which the Chief Executive responded that a meeting with the Chairman of the HBOs had already been set up.

Members noted the report.

3/8 Workshop on fen ecology, hydrology and holistic water management in the Broads

Members were informed that the Authority is proposing to hold workshops to raise awareness of and discuss fen ecology and hydrology and holistic water management and that their views were sought on the objectives and who should be considered for involvement in these workshops.

It was pointed out that the workshop would be divided into a technical ecology and hydrology workshop and a summary workshop on ecology and hydrology and that an appointed steering group who would be responsible for facilitating the workshop would consider the members views when agreeing on the speakers and the discussion topics on the agenda.

It was highlighted that due to the decision making process of water abstraction around Catfield Fen area by the Environment Agency the background for this workshop would be politically sensitive.

The Chairman believed that the Workshop ought to include representatives of the Local Access Forum and Parish Councils as the fen areas are located in local communities and should be made accessible to the public as public money is being spent to preserve them.

RS mentioned that as long as the workshop wouldn't be held in the busy summer months during the bird nesting period and the sedge harvest, he thought it was a good idea. However, he believed clear and easy to understand information was required, particularly in relation to whether dredging would improve water quality as currently information given was inconsistent.

The Senior Ecologist responded that this was not the purpose of the workshop and there was another workshop focusing on the Lake Review. However to respond to this point she agreed that whether the value of sediment removal was enough to clear water improvement was a complicated matter and that it would therefore be important for knowledge to be shared to members through a non-technical workshop which was not the subject of this paper which was about a fen ecology and hydrology seminar.

Although the Chairman said that he would have preferred one larger workshop including everyone, PP believed that, knowing how technical these discussions can become, a summary workshop would work better so they could draw on experiences from the Dutch and be accessible to a wider audience. PP continued that it was important to look at pathways and identify the key areas which required most effort and that feedback from hydro ecologist needed to be included in the workshop.

Both members and officers agreed that a lot of information had been collected for fens and hydrology and it would be of benefit to share this at this time.

With the large amount of information that is available this should not hinder moving ahead to continue improving and protecting fen habitats.

Members welcomed and noted the report.

3/9 Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive presented his report, which summarised the current position of The Authority's strategic priorities.

Members were updated that the Broads Landscape Partnership was progressing very well and that currently the Authority was assessing over 60 projects which had been put forward. One of the strategic priorities for the coming year would be to develop a long-term plan for the future of Hickling Broad. The Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism and the Broads Plan were both coming to an end and were up for review.

Members noted the report.

3/10 Parish Issues

Ludham Bridge Footpath

Members were informed that although it took a long time to come to an agreement as The Authority had to deal with 3 different landowners, the final draft of the agreement regarding a permissive footpath from Ludham to St Benet's Abbey had finally been sent to the solicitors and the aim was to have the footpath open to the public by the end of April 2015.

Harbour Revision Order

Charles Swan enquired whether any progress had been made with the Harbour Revision Order to which the Senior Waterways & Recreation Officer replied that Suffolk County Council had informed him that it was likely to happen this year but would get an update and feedback to the Committee.

West Somerton

Brian Barker mentioned professional signs regarding waste were needed at the moorings in West Somerton and RS added that visitors needed to be made aware where available facilities were located.

3/11 Current Issues

John Lurkins updated the members regarding the converted pig barn without planning permission in Chedgrave Common.

3/12 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business

No items were proposed as items of urgent business.

3/13 Matters for Chairman to raise at next Broads Authority meeting

The Chairman would report to the Broads Authority meeting on the various issues discussed by the Forum.

3/14 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

Several items were suggested to be discussed at the next meeting which were:

- A Broads Society Paper on Heritage Boats,
- Police cover in the Broads in view of recent budget cuts and the number of incidents of thefts at Staithes
- An update regarding a proposal from the parish councils to fund community officers,
- The Ferry Festival Fair
- A report on the source of sediment by Natural England
- Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair
- Network Rail proposals for Reedham Station

Also, Peter Medhurst mentioned he wishes to withdraw as Vice Chairman.

3/15 Date of Next Meeting

To note that the date of the next meeting will be Thursday 30 April 2015 at 2.00pm at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich.

The meeting concluded at 5 pm.

Chairman