

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2021

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Present

Nicky Talbot – in the Chair, Linda Aspland, Mike Barnes, Harry Blathwayt, Matthew Bradbury (from item 7), Greg Munford, Simon Sparrow.

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Emma Krelle - Chief Financial Officer, Sarah Mullarney - Governance Officer, John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Operations, Adrian Sewell – Rivers Engineer.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from John Ash, Andy Hamilton, Leslie Mogford, Paul Thomas, and Alan Thomson.

Comments regarding agenda items 7 - 11 were received from John Ash, Paul Thomas, and Alan Thomson. They were read out by the Chair and formed part of the discussion.

Recordings

The Chair announced that the meeting would be recorded and that the copyright remains with the Authority; however, a copy of the recording could be requested from the Governance team.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest to declare.

3. Matters of urgent business

No items were proposed as a matter of urgent business.

4. Public question time

No public questions were raised.

5. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

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

Members received a report summarising the progress of issues that had recently been presented to the Committee.

There were no further updates and **the report was noted.**

7. Chief Executive's report and current issues

The Director of Operations provided an update on the safety package previously approved by members. Rangers were now able to patrol the network 7 days a week, facilitated by the extra Rangers in the team, and the designated Compliance Ranger who focused on prosecution work, a task that would have previously taken Rangers off the network. It was also reported that additional super safety days and ad hoc checks had been held.

Clean Maritime Bid

Members supported the application for renewable energy schemes and discussed exploring hydrogen fuel technology as an alternative to electric solutions.

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Environment (CME) explained that the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil bio diesel fuel was being trialled in Broads Authority excavators and wherries. The Authority was in discussion with the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) regarding shared bulk purchase and use of the IDB's existing fuel storage.

The report was noted.

8. Carrow Road Bridge repairs

Members felt very strongly about Norfolk County Council's (NCC) proposed temporary (5-year) closure to facilitate repairs of Carrow Road Bridge. They discussed the implications of the proposal and fears that it would result in a more permanent closure.

The Committee discussed the contents of the NCC Options report, with one member expressing disappointment with the lack of justifications for closing the bridge. A member said it was unacceptable to close the bridge for this period of time, adding that it would be the end for tall vessels reaching the Port of Norwich. Another member commented that the NCC Options report failed to consider whether low demand from taller vessels was due to the difficulties in making the passage to access the bridge. It was suggested that an operating opening bridge would encourage more visiting vessels into the centre of Norwich.

The Chief Executive (CEO) clarified that his understanding was the NCC report now presented to the Committee had been produced subsequent to the summary report considered by the NCC Cabinet and previously shared with the Broads Authority's members. It was through further discussions with the NCC Director of Highways and Waste that the temporary closure was identified as a minimum of 5 years. The CEO explained that the repairs could reveal more fundamental problems with the bridge, which could result in a longer-term closure needed for repairs.

It was suggested by one member that a new bridge be built; he said it was an important crossing that required a more substantial repair, and urged NCC to be more enthusiastic about the prospect. Another member said it was not known what would be needed for Norwich in the future and that the Committee needed to fight to keep the bridge open. A member said the Committee should object to NCC's proposals from a strategic and navigation point of view. He expressed concern that NCC and other local authorities were not using a

strategic approach for the area and it was short sighted decision making that didn't take navigation into account. He said the possibility of a permanent closure should be taken very seriously. It was added that NCC should be encouraged to look at a long-term approach, as there was an opportunity for Norwich to embrace the river front much as other cities had.

The Chief Executive said that these specific repairs were part of a wider issue in terms of the future for navigation and the use of the river in Norwich. He discussed the changing commuter habits and different ways of working as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had put into question the level of rail infrastructure needed. It was explained that recent work at Trowse bridge had shown that there was still capacity in the single swinging rail bridge to meet predicted demands in traffic on the railways. He concluded that a long-term, strategic approach was needed.

The Chair concluded that the strong feelings of the Committee needed to be shared with NCC. From a navigation point of view, there was a legal obligation to keep the bridge open. Members agreed that it was the Navigation Committee's duty to protect and preserve the rights of navigation and said that granting a Works Licence for the repairs as proposed would be in contravention of the Authority's statutory duty. However, members were in favour of working with NCC to find a solution so both organisations could meet their obligations.

Simon Sparrow proposed, seconded by Matthew Bradbury and members unanimously supported the following statement:

The Navigation Committee is of the view that Norfolk County Council's proposal to carry out a minimal repair to Carrow Road Bridge, effectively welding it shut so it is unable to open to tall vessels, is totally unacceptable. It would be contrary to the County Council's legal obligations, under the Norwich Corporation Act 1920, which are to maintain and operate the bridge to allow vessels that require passage to pass. In our view, officers should refuse any Works Licence application for this superficial repair work and the County Council should be encouraged to perform repairs in a way that maintains navigation rights to this historic and important gateway to Norwich, in accordance with the legislation.

The Broads Authority would like to work with the County Council to find a solution that meets the statutory obligations of both organisations.

9. Delivery of mooring provision within the Integrated Access Strategy Action Plan 2019-21

The Chief Executive thanked the Director of Operations, Head of CME, and Rivers Engineer for their work. He introduced the interim report which provided members with an update on progress with the Integrated Access Strategy action plan and a prioritised list for the replacement of piling.

It was explained that piling was a big issue for the Authority as moorings were being lost due to the changes to the flood defences made by the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project (BFAP). The Authority's preference was to purchase sites for the mooring network; however, if this

was not possible, then a long-term lease would be sought to justify the investment in replacing the piling. The CEO said the Authority could not afford to take on responsibility for sites without the security of tenure through purchase or a long lease.

Members commended the report and the level of detail provided. A member also shared appreciation for the work completed at St Benet's, noting the difficulties in negotiations with the landowner. He said the extra height of the key heading had added safety to the moorings.

Further information on the work of the Authority's network of mooring assets would be presented to the Committee when available.

The report was noted.

10. South Walsham slipway

Members discussed the proposals to improve the access arrangements at South Walsham slipway.

A member said if the barrier were removed it would encourage other boat owners to launch bigger vessels, adding that if tourism was to be encouraged then parking and public conveniences also needed to be considered.

Another member likened the facility to the Hickling slipway, which was easy to access and was an asset to the village. He would like to see more access to South Walsham slipway to the general public, noting that the use of small boats such as canoes or paddle boards provided exercise.

Greg Munford proposed, seconded by Simon Sparrow and it was unanimously recommended that the Broads Authority remove the locked barrier for a trial period to allow open access.

11. Mutford Lock – operations and risk assessment

The Rivers Engineer outlined the proposals to restrict the beam width of vessels using Mutford Lock to 6.05m, and to suspend the procedure of free flow until further notice. In response to a member question, he said the number of vessels of that width using the Lock averaged 1 or 2 per year and that 2015 was the last time free flow was used.

Members were in support of the proposal. One member commented that Mutford Lock was a principal gateway to the Broads and was very important to the navigation. It was an important route for a number of commercial operators. Another member commented that restrictions on its use could impact commercial traffic and they may wish to request passages outside these new limits. The CEO acknowledged the old age of the Lock and that, as the owners, the Authority needed to be careful in terms of management whilst encouraging its use.

The Rivers Engineers discussed the long-term plans for Mutford Lock. He said a third hydrographic survey would be conducted to identify any problems. The maintenance bill was an estimated £1.65 million over the next 40 years. A member suggested reserving additional

money each year to ensure the Authority had the funds for any major repairs, in light of any problems identified from the survey.

The Director of Operations clarified that the proposed restricted width would not prohibit Reedham chain ferry from passing through the Lock.

Simon Sparrow proposed, seconded by Greg Munford and members unanimously recommended the following proposals:

- **A reduction in maximum vessel beam width to 6.05m when making passage through the lock system; and**
- **Free-flow unavailable until further notice.**

12. Annual income and expenditure 2020/2021

The Chief Financial Officer explained that there had been some delays to the completion of the Statement of Accounts due to issues with the fixed asset revaluations and staff changes within the Finance team. Members would be made aware when it was available to view on the Broads Authority's website.

The hire craft tolls income at the end of May was £15,216.95 above the annual budget, assuming the remaining split pay of £666,194.10 is collected. For private craft tolls, income was £20,874.44 below the annual budget, but this continued to improve on a daily basis.

Negotiations for staff pay increases were being conducted by the National Joint Council (NJC), however an offer of a 1.5% increase had been rejected by the unions. The Authority has budgeted for a 2% increase.

13. Construction, maintenance and environment work programme progress update

Maintaining water depths for navigation

Approximately 44,000m³ had been dredged of the 41,000m³ target for the 2020/21 programme. The Head of CME explained that a previous target of 50,000m³ was from the 2007 Sediment Management Strategy and included all waterbodies in the Broads Authority executive area, including those outside the public navigation area. Targeting dredging where of greatest benefit for waterways users is the priority.

Resources

Appendices 2 and 3 of the report included details of the proportion of time spent by the Operations teams on various navigation works. It was explained that some flexibility in optimising the works programme was achieved through mixing expenditure from the revenue budgets with the fixed staff resource. This demonstrated that any additional responsibility, such as the acquisition of new moorings, would either impact the existing work programme or require more budget.

A member commented that the addition of the information provided in appendices 2 and 3 had been helpful.

Other navigation works

Members were presented with the revised timetable for the Waterways Management Strategy. The strategy aims to include other activities that influence and benefit waterway users. It will also explore different ways of managing the navigation, including more accurate hydrographic (sediment) modelling and climate change objectives. The draft document will be presented to members at the Navigation Committee meeting in September.

The report was noted.

14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on Thursday 2 September 2021 commencing at 10am.

The meeting ended at 15:25

Signed

Chairman