

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2014

Present:

Dr Keith Bacon in the Chair

Mr Andrew Alston	Mr Brian Holt	Mr Simon Partridge
Mr Brian Barker	Mr Peter Horsfield	Mr Bryan Read
Mr Ashley Cato	Mr Peter Jermy	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Michael Flett	Mr John Lurkins	Mr Charles Swan
Mr Martin George	Mr Peter Medhurst	Mr John Tibbenham
Mr Tony Gibbons	Mr Philip Pearson	Mr Anthony Wright

In Attendance:

Mr S Birtles – Head of Safety Management
Mr W Burchnall – Projects Manager
Ms E Guds – Administrative Officer
Mr S Hooton – Head of Strategy and Projects
Ms A Kelly – Senior Ecologist
Ms L Marsden – Landscape Officer
Mr J Organ – Head of Governance and Executive Assistant
Dr J Packman – Chief Executive

2/1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Barbara Greasley, Ms Katie Lawrence, Mr Julian Barnwell, Mr Martyn Davey, Mr Robin Godber and Mr John Carr.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting including John Tibbenham as a new member replacing Mike Evans who was now his substitute, and Mr Peter Horsfield substituting for Robin Godber.

He also mentioned that the Broads Society now has two members, George Martin and Robin Godber, with Peter Horsfield as the substitute

Those present introduced themselves.

2/2 Chairman's announcements

The Chairman referred to Item 2/15 stating that in accordance with the Openness of the Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 which came into effect on 6 August 2014, members of the public would be able to take photographs, film and audio-record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings as long as they did not make oral commentary during the meeting. He advised that arrangements would be made to ensure that members of the public who objected to being filmed would not be included in any filming shots.

The Chairman reported on the Broads Authority meetings of 26 September 2014 and the issues discussed including:

- (1) Procedure regarding a vacancy within the Navigation Committee
- (2) Branding
- (3) Hoveton Great Broad
- (4) Strategic Direction
- (5) Governance of the Authority
- (6) Financial Report
- (7) Planning – the planning committee was reviewed and the outcome was that they are performing well
- (8) Local Governance Openness
- (9) Strategic Partnership

2/3 To receive and confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

- *Minute 4/10 Broad Reed and Sedge Cutting Association. Title and Para 1: Cutting Association should read Cutters Association*

2/4 Public Question Time

No questions had been raised by members of the public.

2/5 Summary of progress/actions/response taken following discussions at previous meetings

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received.

The Chief Executive informed the members that the decision about abstraction at Catfield Fen was still awaited and planning on a workshop on fen hydrology was therefore on hold. It is likely the 'minded to' decision on the abstraction licence will be made by the middle of November.

Regarding the waste collection issue the Chief Executive updated the members that the Broads Authority as landowners would need to be involved in collecting waste from one or two sites and that a waste management strategy would be generated by the Authority for 2015.

In response to a question from Michael Flett as to whether the BESL site at Ludham Bridge could be used as a car park the Chief Executive responded that he was not aware of any proposals but that future plans for the Ludham Bridge area were currently being discussed with the Environment Agency .

2/6 National Park Branding of the Broads

Members received a report which provided details of the Broads Authority's consultation on the proposal to use the term Broads National Park for marketing related purposes when referring to the Broads.

Members were informed that The Broads missed out on becoming a national park in the initial phase in the 1950s because of the sheer complexity and a concern about cost. The 1988 Act established an organisation which looks after The Broads and gave The Broads the same status as a National Park.

The Chief Executive emphasised that the proposal only related to the branding of The Broads and did not involve any changes to the formal name or legal status of the executive area or the functions, name and responsibilities of the Broads Authority. The Broads Authority's three purposes of conservation, recreation and navigation would therefore remain of equal priority. The Chief Executive further stressed the point that the name change would purely be for promotional reasons without any hidden agenda.

Tony Gibbons mentioned that The Broads was different to one big park accessible everywhere and open to everyone like they have in the USA and therefore might not be perceived as a national park. The Chief Executive responded that National Parks in the UK, including the Lake District and Pembrokeshire Coast were not widely accessible because they were primarily privately owned and not owned by the state as in the USA.

While the Chief Executive pointed out that tourism was very important to the local economy with the term National Park potentially helping retain existing and attracting new visitors, several members believed that too much emphasis was put on tourism.

Richard Starling (RS) in particular believed the impact of tourism on the economy is not that substantial as tourism primarily creates low paid, seasonal and part-time jobs. He also believed that as UK taxes were higher than abroad becoming a National Park would not attract extra visitors.

Brian Barker added that as tourism was only accountable for 14% of income coming to Norfolk it would be more important for the Authority to concentrate on other types of industry which would bring in more income.

The Chief Executive responded that using the term National Park could have financial benefits to the Broads and that the impact of tourism spends would be much wider than just the tourist economy.

Peter Horsfield mentioned that he did not believe the Broads Authority should decide for areas which were outside The Broads executive area to which the Chief Executive responded that the success/benefits of using the term National Park would not be delivered mainly by the Broads Authority but by businesses such as Hoseasons and Richardsons and could be beneficial for the wider catchment rather than just the Executive Area.

While some members did not see any issue with the name change as the Authority had set out the legal advice in the consultation document others said they would feel more comfortable if Defra could put this in writing.

John Lurkins (JL) mentioned that attracting visitors to waterways should not just be to benefit the hire boat companies, but should also advantage the boat building industry and did not believe a name change to National Park would do that.

Andrew Alston (AA) commented that the Authority should consider all three of its purposes as a National Park equally and remain central to all discussions. He also considered that, for this concept to be successful, the Authority would need support from local residents.

Philip Pearson said that changing to a National Park would be beneficial for moving forward with joined partnerships and projects and therefore it would be important not just to look locally but to keep the bigger picture in mind, despite some of the conflicts involved.

An informal show of hands for the Chairman to help him gauge how to report back to the Broads Authority indicated that the majority of members (13 v 5) supported the proposed use of the term Broads National Park for branding purposes.

The Chairman agreed to circulate the views of the Forum to its members for comment, prior to these being forwarded to the Broads Authority as the Forum's response to the consultation.

2/7 Water, Mills and Marshes: The Broads Landscape Partnership Bid

Members of the Committee received a report which highlighted the key aspirations of the Broads Landscape Partnership bid which in addition to undertaking conservation work to mills and biodiversity enhancements for the area, would reconnect communities with their local landscape, skills training, and improve and make available more information about the history of the area for use in educational projects and interpretation.

The Chairman commented that he would like to see the Landscape Partnership Bid area extended to the north of Acle so half a dozen interesting windmills would be included in the project. The Project Manager responded that they would look into this but that getting support from landowners remained a big issue.

The Head of Strategy & Projects responded to a question from Andrew Alston (AA) that in order to obtain realistic targets around engagement the Authority was talking to other successful Landscape Partnership bids to ensure figures used were measureable and achievable.

Members noted the report.

2/8 Initial Consultation on the Draft Strategic Priorities for 2015/16

The Broads Plan 2011 sets out the main themes, objectives and priorities for the area and sets the framework for the Authority's activities. Members received a report which sought to identify the important areas of work they would like to see addressed as part of the Authority's Strategic Priorities for 2015/16.

One of these areas was to deliver partnership projects to improve the chemical and biological condition of water bodies.

RS and Martin George (MG) mentioned that the water quality and the chemical constitution in the water was improving and that members of the public should be made aware of this, although the amount of sediment in the rivers remained a problem.

MG continued that instead of just treating the symptoms the Authority would need to look at the cause of the problem and therefore to reduce erosion on the banks it might be useful to revive boat design research in respect of wave creation for instance by using water jets instead of propellers as this would produce less disturbance of the sediment.

Other areas which were highlighted were Development of the Landscape Partnership Project, Promotion of the Broads and working with Broads Tourism on the development of a new Broads Tourism Strategy.

Members welcomed the prioritising of Hickling Broad in the Draft.

2/9 Broads Authority Act 2009 Provisions: Temporary Closure of Waterways

Members were informed that an approach to the temporary closure of the waterways provision in the 1988 Act was being developed in order to enable the Authority to close the waterways temporarily. This related to circumstances as defined in the Act such as a large recreational event e.g. a regatta.

They were made aware that the approach allows the users some protection in that the duration of the closure must be minimised and alternative provision for the passage of vessels must be considered.

RS asked the Broads Authority to ensure that those participating in any review of staithes were aware of the provisions under Section 10 of the Broads Authority Act 2009 and Section 25 of the 1988 Act and that Parish Councils were fully consulted as to the location and rights of use of the Parish Staithes for which they were responsible together with local landowners who own the private staithes.

Members noted the report and welcomed the proposal.

2/10 Agri- Environment Schemes, Rural Payments and Assessment of Current Intention of Grazing Marsh Farmers in Response to some of These Changes

Members received a report which summarised the current changes in the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy and the 2015 changes in the UK's Rural Development Programme, including agri-environment payments.

Members received a presentation from Mike Edwards (Natural England) in which he explained how the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, previously known as NELMS, and run by Defra, was a new design which integrated all the previous schemes and made payments to farmers and land managers to improve the natural beauty and diversity of the countryside. The scheme delivered multiple outcomes with their main objective being biodiversity and water management across the whole landscape.

Members were informed that the aim for The Broads was to maintain, restore and create priority habitats like coastal and flood plain grazing marsh, and associated ditches, lowland fens and reed beds.

It was then mentioned that The Broads had particular issues with nitrates, phosphates, sediments and pesticides in the Bure, Waveney and Yare and that organisations that advised landowners should consider options and capital works that would address these issues.

Finally it was highlighted that the Countryside Stewardship Scheme provided advice and guidance with advice provision depending on whether it was Higher or Middle Tier.

In reference to the mention of the scheme delivering sustainable land management, RS was unconvinced the scheme would make a significant difference to sustainable management, as from his experience often the management was not truly sustainable or not undertaken in the way intended.

Members were also informed by the Senior Ecologist that a questionnaire and analysis was commissioned by the Broads Authority to investigate marsh farmers' views and intentions in response to some of the policy and programme changes and their impacts within the grazing marsh environment. Although only a low sample size (12% of marsh farmers) the survey was interesting, with the main outcome that farmers were choosing to maintain marshes as low input with low returns involving limited ploughing.

AA asked whether flood plains were to be connected to the river under new Countryside Stewardship (CS) and whether a saleable reed was to be a condition of reed bed management options under CS as currently many floodplains are not connected to the river. In response Mike Edwards replied that the agri-environment prescriptions scheme did not go into detail of water management at each site but that this was agreed between the landowner and site managers.

The Senior Ecologist recognised the point AA made that fertilizer needed to go where it was required and not just disappear in the ditches (and therefore it was essential to use best practice to achieve this) and that farmers were responding to global changes in commodity prices meaning that the decision making process for farmers can be ever changing

Members noted the report.

2/11 Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive presented his report, which summarised the current position of improvements to the A47, Hoveton Great Broad, Navigation Committee Appointment Process Update and Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

Regarding access to Hoveton Great Broad MG believed it would be a big mistake to renovate and open it up to navigation as this would be harmful for the ecology. The Chairman explained that Hoveton Great Broad would not necessarily be opened up completely but that greater public access was needed within the proposed scheme.

The Chief Executive referred members to the report to the recent Navigation Committee which indicated that tidal waters do not automatically have a right of navigation. He added that the issue at Hoveton Great Broads was that if large amounts of public money are proposed to be spent on a privately owned site, particularly in a National Park, there needed to be an appropriate level of public benefit.

Members noted the report.

2/12 Parish Issues

Mooring rates

JL mentioned that Langley Parish Council had threatened to start charging rates for mooring and believed that toll payers may need to fight this. The Chief Executive responded that he would look into this and circulate a note to the Forum's members but that it was likely these were business rates which the council would have to apply if they were charging for mooring.

2/13 Current Issues

When asked to comment on how water-skiing on Breydon Water would impact on conservation issues the Chief Executive responded that given the very low level of activity with only three people using the area for waterskiing last year the impact on bird wildlife was extremely low.

2/14 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business

No items were proposed as items of urgent business.

2/15 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, and in particular the members' view on branding.

2/16 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

JL recommended that it would be useful to discuss the charge of mooring rates which might be introduced by Langley Parish Council.

2/17 Date of Next Meeting

To note that the date of the next meeting will be Thursday 5 February 2015 at 2.00pm at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich.

The meeting concluded at 4.55 pm

Chairman