

**Feedback from the consultation with Broads Forum groups
for discussion on the way forward**

This meeting of the Broads Forum will take place at 2pm on 26 April 2018 at the Broads Authority's head offices, Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich NR1 1RY.

All interest groups on the Broads Forum are invited to send a representative to this meeting and take an active part in discussions.

This paper is the only item on the agenda. The aim of the meeting is to discuss the future of the Broads Forum and present a summary of the views expressed to the Broads Authority meeting on 18 May 2018.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. A wide range of groups and individuals are stakeholders in the Broads, including the user and amenity groups on the Broads Forum. They have varied and sometimes opposing interests and involvement, often depending on how much they are affected by specific issues or able to influence what happens. The Broads Authority is also a stakeholder with direct and indirect roles including lead accountability, delivery partner and advocate.
- 1.2. Between us all is a wealth of knowledge and insight and we need positive ways to promote understanding, debate and action. This report highlights the findings from the consultation carried out in February-March 2018 with Broads Forum members and nominating interest groups and with Broads Authority officers, and offers a suggestion on improving our engagement processes.

2. Consultation with Broads Forum groups

- 2.1. The Broads Forum was set up by the Broads Authority in 2002 as a way for around 50 interest groups, through a smaller number of nominated representatives, to offer views and advice on how the Broads is managed and used. The Forum is good in theory and has in the past benefited the Authority's decision making. However, in recent years it has not worked well in practice, despite being reviewed and refreshed, and problems are highlighted by the Forum's interest groups and nominated members and by Authority officers.
- 2.2. At the Broads Authority meeting in November 2017, it was agreed to review the list of interest groups and organisations on the Forum, and others with an active interest in the Broads, and survey the Forum's groups about the effectiveness of the Forum and other engagement methods.

- 2.3. The consultation with Forum groups was through phone calls, face-to-face meetings and emails. The Authority also spoke to its own officers who regularly attend Forum meetings.
- 2.4. We used the following questions as a prompt, but encouraged people to speak freely:
- What do you know about the Broads Forum and its role?
 - What is your group's engagement with the Broads Forum and how useful is the Forum to you? (Do you know who your Forum rep is, do you regularly see Forum agendas and minutes, are you asked to put forward items for agendas and have you done so, how often are agenda items of interest to your group, do you get feedback from your Forum rep after meetings)
 - Do you have any ideas on making sure all Forum groups can play an active part?
 - How does your group find out about Broads Authority/Broads issues and talk to the Authority about matters relevant to you?

Summary of feedback

A listing of points made by those we spoke to are in Appendix A. The summary from these discussions are that:

- The membership does not represent the diversity of Broads' communities.
- Many groups have little or no connection with their nominated members and consequently with Forum meeting agendas, meetings or minutes. *Meeting attendance data for the past 5 years show that 67% of representatives or their deputies have attended fewer than 64% of meetings, indicating that some areas of interest are seldom represented in Forum debates.*
- As well as problems in reporting down to nominating groups, the upwards reporting and feedback loop between the Forum and the Authority does not work well. Members feel the Forum has an increasingly limited impact on the Authority's decision making.
- It has proven difficult to find agenda items and some items are of interest only to a narrow range of stakeholders. Some matters raised are not within the Authority's remit or strategic objectives, and/or the bodies accountable are not in the room to discuss them.
- Meetings can be dominated by a few individuals or subject matters, and some members seem to express their personal opinions rather than those of their nominating groups. There is a lack of courtesy at meetings that creates a tense atmosphere and does not help constructive discussion.

3. Other engagement methods

- 3.1. We also asked Forum groups how (apart from the Forum) they hear about the Authority's plans and activities and like to engage with us. Some groups are regularly involved while others are happy with occasional contact. Commonly used communication methods include:

- Direct contact with BA officers (at head office, or with front line staff) or BA Members
- Attend meetings (BA committees, partnership working groups/workshops, etc.)
- Attend drop in events (e.g. parish forums)
- Invite BA officer or Member to your group meetings or events
- Contact BA through 3rd party (e.g. parish or district councillor, community rep, interest group)
- Respond in writing to formal consultations
- Attend public events with BA/Broads presence (e.g. Royal Norfolk Show, Broads Outdoor Festival) Take part in BA environmental education events (e.g. schools outreach)
- Work as a BA volunteer
- Use digital and social media (BA/Enjoy the Broads websites, BA Twitter and Facebook feeds)
- Read BA newsletters and other publications (e.g. Broadcaster, Broadsheet, Chief Executive's newsletter, partnership newsletters)

4. Option for change

- 4.1. The survey responses and the Forum's performance in recent years indicates that the Forum's role as a consultative and advisory body to the Authority is limited and the current format is not a constructive use of time or resources, either for the interest groups and their nominated members or for Broads Authority staff.
- 4.2. Based on this evidence we suggest the following proposal that we hope is positive for all concerned, and we welcome your views.

Focused debate

- 4.3. We suggest that the Broads Forum committee meetings are replaced with **open 'conference' style events** for all Forum groups to meet and discuss issues of strategic importance for the Broads.
- 4.4. We can hold two Broads Forum conferences a year open to all Forum groups. Each event will focus on a strategically important topic linked to Broads Plan objectives – for example, the implications of climate change and sea-level rise, the future of agriculture post-Brexit, or ways to inspire the next generation of Broads users. Topics will be set one year in advance and guest speakers (such as accountable or influential organisations, specialists, key local stakeholders) will be invited to present information and answer questions. Broads Authority officers and Members will also attend.

Ad hoc discussion

- 4.5. As well as these conferences, we can have **ad hoc special meetings** of the Broads Forum to discuss urgent or important matters. These meetings can be held at short notice and as agreed by the Authority and Forum Chair.

Chair and reporting processes

- 4.6. The Forum can have an independent Chair, selected through an open process, to chair conference events and special meetings.
- 4.7. The current list of Forum interest groups will be updated and expanded, and all groups will be invited to conference events. Groups can send anyone to represent them, and this can vary depending on the topics being discussed. Targeted interest groups would be invited to ad hoc special meetings as agreed by the Authority and Forum Chair.
- 4.8. Outputs from conference events and ad hoc special meetings will be reported to the Broads Authority and/or relevant organisations to take action and ongoing progress will be reported back to all Forum groups.

Regular contact for individual groups

- 4.9. Interest groups can contact the Authority at any time and can also make use of existing consultative partnerships. In our survey, Forum groups were positive about using the following methods.
- Make use of topic/area based consultative partnerships in the Broads, particularly where accountable or influencing bodies are in attendance. Lobby partnerships, ask to attend their meetings or invite them to your own meetings. The BA can support stakeholders in this process. Examples of partnerships: Broadland Catchment Partnership, Broads Tourism, Upper Thurne Working Group, Broads Environmental Education Network and Broads Biodiversity Partnership.
 - Invite officers or Members from the BA, other accountable or influencing bodies, consultants or specialists to your own group meetings or events to present information and answer questions.
 - Promote direct contact between interest groups or individuals and named BA officers. If the BA is not the relevant body to speak to, it can help put you in touch with the appropriate sources.
 - Sign up to BA and partnership newsletters and social media (Twitter/Facebook) feeds
 - Liaise with the BA through parish councils or other community representatives (the BA hosts regular Parish Forum events for parish council representatives).

- Respond to formal and informal consultations.
- Attend or take part in public events with a BA/Broads presence (e.g. Broads Outdoors Festival, Broads Village at the Royal Norfolk Show, environmental education days).

5. Summary

5.1. The interest groups that make up the Broads Forum have a wide-ranging depth of knowledge and insight to bring to the Broads Authority on important issues for the Broads. However, the current structure of the Broads Forum does not encourage this, creating frustrations for all involved, and new ways of working are therefore suggested. All Forum groups have been invited to this meeting and your ideas are welcomed.

5.2. Your feedback will be reported to the Broads Authority on 18 May.

Attachment: Appendix A

Contacting the Broads Authority

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Comments/suggestions from Broads Forum groups

About the Broads Forum

Membership representing interests and diversity of the Broads

- Never been terribly keen on the idea of one representative at the Forum representing a number of organisations, and would rather that each interested body had its own representative, albeit we accept that could risk larger unwieldy meeting.
- Don't have strong links with other organisations in interest group – but uses BEEN (Broads Environmental Education Network) to connect with other educational bodies.
- General lack of understanding of farming issues/stresses. Specific issues mainly around Thurne/ Ant, elsewhere ok. Farmers don't get fair hearing/press.

Level of connection with nominated member

- Know about the Forum - however have remained largely ignorant of it until quite recently, probably because of the low value of outputs from it in terms of debate, leadership and direction.
- Have no contact with the Forum, who is the rep?
- Other conservation interest groups don't send representatives. Feel like a lone voice.
- Not sure Broads Forum is relevant to my organisation.

Agenda items

- Breadth of consideration must not get narrow, vital to draw on all interests/wider interests that impact on environment including interests on natural, built, social, and economic matters.
- The current agendas are not dynamic enough.
- Organisation has limited time so is unlikely to attend Broads Forum meetings.
- Theory of the Broads Forum is a good idea but in practice it is unlikely to become high enough up the agenda to make attendance likely.
- Has contact with the Broads Authority through BEEN and happy with this. Would attend Broads Forum meetings if there were items of interest on the agenda.
- The Forum is a good method but it currently has a fixed agenda. This makes it difficult to engage in discussion.
- Recognise that not all elements are best tackled through the Broads Forum with the example of current consideration of agri-environment schemes changes being better tackled by small group discussions with farmers.
- The content of the Forum is wrong. A concentrated basis is needed so Members can engage in discussions.

The Forum's impact on the Authority's decision making

- There is no link between the Broads Forum and the Broads Authority, information is not getting to the full Authority. Broads Forum Members don't receive responses to their questions.
- Broads Authority Members should be more involved and give more direction to Broads Forum Members – Broads Forum Members should have a stronger role to play.
- Feel issues decided before they reach Broads Forum. Think Broads Forum should continue.

Open and constructive discussion

- Broads Forum can be dominated by a few individuals, restricting others.
- Recently discussions at meetings have tended to be dominated by a few and concerns were not always within the responsibilities of the Broads Authority and the chair had not been so adept at controlling the members and getting helpful outcomes.
- Groundhog Day – same individuals bring up same issues time and time again. Members should have a set time to put their case so not dominated by a few individuals.
- No commonality of view between representatives on what Broads Forum is trying to achieve.
- There is not a lot of commonality between the Broads Forum interest groups.
- Success of the Broads Forum is dependent on all Members taking an interest and active role.
- Would like to see clarity of purpose and that purpose embraced by Broads Forum Members.
- Broads Forum meetings not always a constructive use of time: more likely to attend if there is something specific of interest on the agenda
- Organisation personally has a good rapport with Officers, however has perceived that the current format of the Broads Forum creates friction between Officers and Members of the Broads Forum.

Other general feedback

- The Broads Forum has a vital role in communicating between the Broads Authority and the general public
- Broads Forum is very helpful and would be sad to see it go; it is useful to air views and hear views of others.
- Find Broads Forum meetings helpful, and have used them to voice some issues.
- There is a place for the Broads Forum but don't feel it is working in its present form.
- The Broads Forum format is more presentations than dialogue between Members/groups.
- Several groups commented that they found presentations at the Forum useful and interesting and would like to see more of them.
- Broads Forum is an opportunity for people to have an input to the Broads.
- Agenda items are of interest to those working in the Broads.
- Broads Forum content doesn't cover the Norfolk Broads enough.
- Very supportive getting a range of views coming together. Understood that Broads Forum was working well.
- Locality of meetings not ideal, but moving away from Norwich may present other difficulties.
- Would like better engagement with the Broads Authority and to know more about what's going on. Broads Forum could be a way to do this if had a better understanding of the Forum's functions.
- Concept of Broads Forum good but worked better in past.
- Topics covered by the Forum have been really good over the years.
- Not clear what the function of the Broads Forum is in its current state. Suggest a change in format.
- The format of the Forum needs refreshing.

- Noted the wider reputation of the Broads Authority (disgruntled people using internet forums to voice views), suggested utilising the Forum to counter this and to promote the Broads Authority more positively.

About options for change

Focused debate

- Focused meetings: agenda items should come from Broads Forum and Broads Authority Members
- Suggested Broads Forum meet before Broads Authority meetings so that Broads Forum members can comment on the Broads Authority agenda.
- More priority needs to be given to environmental issues (climate change). The Forum is typically concerned with boating/mooring issues. Suggested a focussed meeting on environmental issues.
- Regular face to face update once a year might be helpful.
- Hold meeting in Broads once a year.
- Suggests central themed meetings - recreation/ access/ sailing/Anglian.
- Allow for more flexible meetings to min 2 per annum if no pressing matters. Broads Authority should inform Broads Forum of activities that need scrutiny or advice.
- Can see a place for a Forum type approach but more likely to be coming together of people on a specific project where there is definite items to talk about.
- Helpful to have health/ disability/ access issues considered in all Broads Forum discussions.
- 4 meetings a year may be too much but annual meeting may be helpful.
- Suggests members should be requested to submit agenda items under set headings, e.g. Agriculture, Tourism. Officers also to contribute.
- Have slimmed down themed agendas. Create task and finish groups where needed. Webinar/conference calls/e-mail correspondence are all options.
- Broads Forum could focus more on Broads Plan objectives.

Ad hoc discussion

- Create opt-in email to send updates about agendas/minutes to all organisations.
- Not just physical meetings - there are other ways to communicate remotely.
- Area meetings in response to requests for local networking.
- Annual get together to learn things and network might be worthwhile.

Chair and reporting processes

- Good chairing important.
- Use 'guests' to chair meetings with specific themes.
- Recognised the value of having an independent chair perhaps recruited through a formal targeted process drawing in people with skills from relevant backgrounds.
- Introduce rotating Chair.
- Consider a different representative? Current rep been on Broads Forum a long time.
- Suggests agenda to include 'open time' for members to give updates to each other.
- Use wide range of interest groups to pull out a series of individuals (15-20?)
- Keep minutes short and focused on actions.
- Ask Member organisations to change their rep if input not received.

- Suggests a brief report be presented at Broads Authority meetings by the Broads Forum Chair summarising Broad Forum discussion. Opportunity for questions.
- Suggested including additional groups in the membership e.g. Campaign to Protect Rural England.
- Invite comments from organisations that have not been represented at all least one meeting of the last three and review if their continued participation is still relevant. At the same time review if there are other additional organisations who are not currently represented.
- Suggested refreshing Broads Forum terms of reference.

Regular contact for individual groups

- Regular email would be useful to keep up to speed. (CEO briefing is news matters and not necessarily topics Broads Forum should cover)
- Regular newsletter (electronic) would be valuable to be kept in the picture.
- Recommend replacing Forum with an arrangement that gives stakeholders the opportunity to feel involved, and suggest a) increasing use of digital media to share information, b) From time to time, "Town-Hall meetings", perhaps annually, perhaps one for Navigation interests and involving Navigation Committee members, and one for NP/Tourism interests involving Authority members. These sound similar to the last several parish meetings, but they work best in a regular annual slot at the same time of year each year.

About other engagement methods

- Broads Forum not always the best method to discuss some issues – would go directly to officers. Some group's issues are not necessarily relevant to the other bigger organisations in the Forum.
- Tend to go direct to the Broads Authority with issues rather than via the Broads Forum.
- Broadland Catchment Partnership or arranged meetings with key players (NFU/farmers, EA, NE and NGOs) may be more appropriate than Broads Forum. Themed discussions good where there are problems – but difficult to get key players round table.
- Organisation uses variety of ways to communicate with the Broads Authority, overall communication very good. The organisation passes on information (such as consultations on the Broads Plan) in different ways and makes their members aware through their regional newsletters.
- Confident in contacting BA with issues assume that would be reciprocal. Links through Water, Mills and Marshes project also good and welcome. Digital and social media important way to raise awareness and help people buy into things.
- Suggested an annual senior leadership meeting to establish a joined up approach to engagement.
- In the past have had direct contact with Broads Authority Members: Organisation has made presentations to the committees.
- Social media is powerful. However not everyone has the time/inclination to use it in their personal time.
- Use the Broads Authority website a lot, it's very useful as well as very necessary and critical to a sustainable paperless Authority.
- Find monthly CEO briefing useful.
- Supportive of idea of using Broads Authority Members to attend parish meetings.