

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 02 September 2021

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Present

Nicky Talbot – in the Chair, John Ash, Linda Aspland, Stephen Bolt, Harry Blathwayt, Andrew Hamilton, Leslie Mogford, Greg Munford, Simon Sparrow, Paul Thomas.

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (until item 10), Emma Krelle - Chief Financial Officer (item 10), Sarah Mullarney - Governance Officer, John Packman - Chief Executive (until item 9), Rob Rogers - Director of Operations.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Mike Barnes, Matthew Bradbury and Alan Thomson.

Comments regarding agenda item 8 were received from Mike Barnes and Alan Thomson. These 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.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Stephen Bolt who was attending his first Navigation Committee meeting.

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 10 June 2021 were signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

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.

The Chief Executive (CEO) reported that Network Rail's repair work of the swing bridges had been delayed. The design work was due to take place at the end of September/beginning of October; however, the main works would not take place until October 2022.

It was also reported that Network Rail had provided bridge contact information to allow the public to contact swing bridge operators directly. The Authority would promote and distribute the phone numbers and VHF radio channel: [Bridge heights and openings \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](#)

One member asked about the status of Carrow Bridge, noting a sign at the site informing of its closure. The CEO explained that this was for replacing the top plates as a short-term fix; the substantial repair work was not currently programmed.

The report was noted.

7. Chief Executive's report and current issues

The Chief Executive explained that legal advice had been sought on whether non-decision-making committees could meet remotely; members were asked for their views on holding some Navigation Committee meetings via an online platform. Members supported this approach and a balance in holding the more contentious meetings that require debate (such as reviewing the navigation charge proposals) as ones that be conducted in person.

A member asked whether there was the possibility for hybrid meetings with members able to join remotely. The CEO responded that it was not currently possible, however it was an option the Authority would explore. A report would be presented to members at a future Broads Authority proposing a new way of working.

FiPL

Members were updated on the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme. Five grants for the Broads were approved by the Land Management Board on 24 August. The CEO said the applications would make a difference to the landscape and trialling of new ways of farming.

Carrow Road Bridge repairs

At the last Navigation Committee meeting held on 10 June, members had recommended not granting a works licence to Norfolk County Council (NCC) for repair works at Carrow Road Bridge. In response to a member question, the CEO explained that subsequent legal advice obtained by the Authority had supported the Committee's recommendation, and he and the Director of Operations had since met with the NCC Director of Highways and Waste. It was reported that NCC intended to submit a works licence with the understanding that this would be refused by the Authority. Officers had written to NCC to share their surprise at this decision.

Staff

A member commented on the analysis of ranger time reported in the CEO report, noting how busy the Ranger and Tolls teams had been. He suggested they be rewarded for going above

and beyond. The CEO responded that more work and potentially more prosecutions were being generated from having more Rangers patrolling the network. He said the Authority would need to address the impact on the Tolls team as the scale of work far exceeded the team's capacity. He said it was difficult to reward any particular group of staff as the whole Authority was stretched. However, he said the staff needed to be celebrated as all teams were delivering more than expected. The member said the committee would support this.

Safety

The Director of Operations reported that Rangers had been conducting surveys with hire boat users and the majority had fed back that they were happy with the handover they'd received. Minor safety issues had occurred over the season; however, the number of reported incidents were no more than expected and included slips, trips and falls. The Director of Operations noted that wild swimming was an area of concern that had seen an increase. This would be reviewed by the Boat Safety Management Group at their meeting in October.

The report was noted.

8. Waterways Management Strategy and Action Plan 2022/23 to 2026/21 (consultation draft)

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (CME) explained to members that the Broads Authority's waterways management aims were unchanged, and the purpose of the Waterways Management Strategy was to collate all of the current practices into one strategy. It incorporated the changes in methodology and new data that had been acquired. Members were presented with the five key areas.

Update of mean low water level (MLW)

Members were presented with updated data of the mean low water (MLW) levels. This was refreshed using Environment Agency river level data from the past 17 years up to 2020. It was noted that the methodology for obtaining the new MLW value was different and wasn't a robust means of comparing trends of water levels over time.

A recognised methodology had been used for calculating the revised MLW, giving confidence in the new baseline and allowed officers to better target areas and a better use of resources. In response to a member question, the Head of CME said that it was also possible to continue to monitor and verify the data on a 5-yearly basis.

The MLW baseline was used to calculate how much sediment there was below this level which in turn was used to calculate how much sediment to dredge in different areas of the network in order to meet the Authority's waterways specifications. Typically, the 2020 revised baseline level was slightly higher than previously recorded in 1993, resulting in less total dredge volume required to meet depth targets.

A member queried if the build-up of sediment in the lower reaches was the reason why the water levels had increased, noting the difficulty with vessels passing under Potter Heigham bridge and the perception that this was a result of a build-up of sediment. Officers responded

that model work from the Environment Agency suggested there was no correlation between accumulated sediment in the lower Bure and the water depths at Potter Heigham bridge. It was noted that the Authority had been actively dredging the lower Bure over the last 5 years.

Members discussed Potter Heigham Bridge and the long term impact an increase in water levels and pressure had on structural assets around the Broads.

The Head of CME said predicting longer term trends and impacts of sea level rise fell within the remit of the Broadland Futures Initiative (BFI). This group were focussing on the wider impact on water levels in the Broads as a result of climate change, sea level rise, and wetter winters. Research had shown that the water levels at Potter Heigham had been higher over the last two winter periods. The Head of CME said this was an impact of heavy rainfall and the aquifers in the wider Broads catchment being fully saturated, as well as tidal conditions.

One member commented that there should be more reference in the strategy to rising sea levels and the effect this had on the Broads waterways, such as air draft under bridges. The Head of CME noted the comments.

Revision of waterways specifications inside and outside marked channels

Members were shown examples of different waterway specifications for the Broads. It was explained that the waterways specifications were the depths that were dredged to. The revision inside and outside of the marked channels was proposed to reflect the volume of sediment.

The Head of CME said it was not proposed to set specifications for outside the marked channels at Heigham, Martham, and Bargate Broads as there was no navigational benefit to dredging outside the marked channels. However, it was proposed to conduct a survey at Bargate Broad to see what the water depths were. There was an increase in aquatic plant growth in the area so the survey would be used to set a clear specification for the defined marked channel.

A member queried potential bank erosion when dredging outside the marked channel adding it was an issue found with estuaries; the Head of CME explained that the Authority had never dredged outside the channel at Breydon. Members were reminded of a study commissioned to examine the water and sediment flows through the area which found it to be a largely self-scouring system that naturally flushed the sediment through and the channel position was stable.

In response to a member question it was clarified that the increase of pluvial flood events had invariably resulted in some sediment entering the river network via the pump drained marshes, however this sediment source is not known to be more significant than direct soil run-off elsewhere in the catchment.

Revision to Breydon-Lower Yare commercial waterways specification

The strategy proposed to change the waterway specification for Breydon Water to Cantley to 2m low water level.

Members discussed the long-term benefits in maintaining a channel depth of 4m in regards to commercial use of the waterways. It was noted that the propellers of larger vessels helped maintain the required depth, however the return of commercial shipping in the immediate future was currently unlikely. A member commented that the challenges with using diesel road vehicles could see a reappearance of commercial transport using the waterways. A member asked whether the depth could revert back to 4m if there was a need for commercial use in the future. Members would be informed if a change in depth was required for this purpose.

Revision of waterways specifications – above and below the water

The revisions to the waterways specifications above and below the water aimed to redefine the river profile that was managed by the Authority. This included a change to the slope to the edge of the river from a ratio of 1:3 to an easier to manage 1:2 slope. It was also proposed to continue the rotational management of overhanging trees in areas with issues concerning safety, visibility, and habitat preservation.

Introducing internal carbon pricing

The Head of CME discussed the difficulty in justifying the financial aspect of achieving zero emissions as a response to the climate emergency. The strategy suggested using an internationally recognised methodology of incorporating the societal and environmental costs of carbon being emitted when reviewing fuel pricing. When adding carbon costs to the cost of fuel, the more expensive, greener fuel options were more, or equally, economically advantageous.

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (CME) concluded that the response to the Waterways and Management Strategy was not a public consultation; he said the strategic objectives were already set and member input was required on the operational aspects and deployment of resources. Further member response could be emailed to the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology by Friday 17 September.

The views of the Navigation Committee would be reported to the Broads Authority at the 24 September meeting.

9. Construction, Maintenance and Ecology work programme progress update

Members were informed that there was extra resource from the Kickstart placements, with three more placements being advertised. A member commended the scheme and asked what the prospect of employment was following the placements. The Head of CME said the scheme was still underway but said the individuals were keen and engaged in the work. The Director of Operations added that the scheme is accompanied with a grant for training which benefits the individuals.

The report was noted.

10. Navigation Income and Expenditure 1 April to 30 June 2021 actual and 2021/22 forecast outturn

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) reported the income figures for the end of August. There was an expected surplus of £97,000 for private craft and £57,000 for hire craft. She said options for utilising the surplus included completing projects before the end of this financial year, or banking the money for use on a new tolls system in future years. The CFO explained that a specification would need to be developed for a new tolls system, however, due to staff changes within the IT team, there could be a delay in implementing the system. Members would be involved in the system review as part of the wider toll setting process.

The minimum reserve policy would also be reviewed in light of the pandemic, to assess whether 10% was still appropriate. Options for spending the surplus monies would be reported to members.

In response to a member's concern, the CFO clarified that the navigation income and expenditure were recorded separately.

The Chair stated that the Authority was in a better position financially than expected and noted that not as many hire boats had been lost from the network as predicted.

The report was noted.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on Thursday 21 October 2021 commencing at 10am.

The Chair reminded members of the navigation charges briefing session for members to be held on 28 September.

The meeting ended at 11.38am

Signed

Chairman