

## **Broads Forum**

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2015

### **Present:**

Dr Keith Bacon in the Chair

Mr Andrew Alston	Mr Robin Godber	Ms Jenifer Parkhouse
Mr Brian Barker	Ms Barbara Greasley	Mr Philip Pearson
Mr Julian Barnwell	Mr John Hiskett	Mr Bryan Read
Mr Henry Cator	Mr Peter Jermy	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Michael Flett	Mr John Lurkins	Mr John Tibbenham
Dr Martin George	Mr Peter Medhurst	Mr Anthony Wright
Mr Tony Gibbons		

### **In Attendance:**

Ms Natalie Beal – Planning Policy Officer  
Ms Esmeralda Guds – Administrative Officer  
Mr Simon Hooton – Head of Strategy and Projects  
Ms Andrea Kelly – Senior Ecologist  
Dr John Packman – Chief Executive  
Mr Rob Rogers – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Environment

### **Also in attendance:**

Prof Jackie Burgess – Chair, Broads Authority  
Paul Gurbutt – substitute for Ashley Cato  
Colin Dye – substitute for Matthew Thwaites  
Kelvin Allen – Broads Angling Strategy Group  
John Currie – Broads Angling Strategy Group

### **5/1 Apologies & Welcome**

Apologies for absence were received from Hugh Taylor, Ashley Cato and Charles Swan.

### **5/2 To confirm the appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

Chairman and Vice-Chairman had been appointed at the last meeting 30 April 2015.

### **5/3 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman informed members he would address the issues discussed at the Broads Authority meeting later on in the agenda at the Chief Executive Report.

**5/4 To receive and confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2015**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5/5 Public Question Time**

No questions had been raised by members of the public.

**5/6 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response taken following discussions at previous meetings**

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received.

The Chief Executive highlighted that in regards to the proposed permissive footpath from Ludham to St Benet's Abbey, the three landowners had finally agreed to the terms and the solicitor had sent final agreements for signature.

In regards to the signage at the moorings at West Somerton, members were updated that the signs were in production and should arrive back from the suppliers next week.

Members noted the report.

**5/7 Angling and Prymnesium on the Broads**

Members received a report and a presentation from Kelvin Allen (KA) and Tony Gibbons (TG) outlining the objectives, achievements and challenges of the Broads Angling Strategy Group (BASG).

The BASG's objectives were maintaining and improving all aspects related to angling, improving information and education and resolving conflicts of interest.

Some of the achievements mentioned were that in 2014 angling was recognised within the Broads Authority's Strategy, the Broads Pike Tagging Project, reducing the impact of tidal surges and getting the message across in regards to Prymnesium.

It was pointed out that one of the challenges was to maintain future sustainability and that this would involve continuing to encourage newcomers, encouraging more people to fish into the low season and working with tourism.

TG said that boaters were not causing much of a problem for anglers as they had become used to coexistence over recent years.

In response to Henry Cator's (HC) question whether it would be an idea to start an academy in the Broads, TG responded that Norwich had an academy

in Barford, but that it would be safer to start newcomers in a commercial pond as bringing newcomers to the Broads would hold too many risks.

Members were informed that angling added a considerable contribution to the local economy (approx. £100 million), and that bad publicity like the Prymnesium bloom could have an adverse effect on fishing and habitat in and around the Broads.

Members received a presentation from John Currie (JC) about Prymnesium and were informed that this type of algae had been killing fish in the Broads for approximately 100 years.

JC stated that because dredging could cause a Prymnesium bloom, the dredging team should proceed with caution and make sure that as many as possible safety measures were set in place. He said that dredging in cold water was not safe but safer, and highlighted that anglers were not opposed to boating and dredging but did not believe the safety procedures currently in place were good enough. He pointed out that his duty was to offer support as well as looking over the Authority's shoulder to see whether correct safety procedures were being followed.

Andrew Alston (AA) enquired whether reservoirs and/or drains might provide a suitable solution for accommodating fish, to which TG responded that drains would not be suitable as they could be full of salinity and ochre. He explained that although containing fresh water, reservoirs would not be suitable either as moving a large quantity of fish into them would be too risky.

Martin George (MG) commented that Prymnesium could only thrive in brackish water.

Members welcomed the presentation.

## **5/8 Hickling Project Development**

Members received a report which set out the details of a proposal for a master plan project for the enhancement of Hickling Broad. It set out the background and context to the project, as well as explaining the stakeholder involvement to date. The views of the Forum were sought in refining the proposal prior to further consultation with the Authority's committees.

The Senior Ecologist reported that together with the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) and landowners the Authority would be able to deal with the ochre issue in the fresh water system. She continued that from the Lake Review it became clear that removing sediment for the purpose of reducing nutrients alone was not appropriate as the nutrients moved between the water and the sediment and it would also create deeper and darker waters which reduce plant growth. She also said that rather than delivering the project in the piecemeal fashion when and if funding was available, and expression of interest had been submitted to Interreg (on a theme of water and peat) for funding. The project was called MULTIPLE.

*Jenifer Parkhouse entered the meeting.*

Richard Starling (RS) welcomed the report and the project proposal and said he believed the benefits would reach the entire Upper Thurne. However, he said that the phrase conversion of arable land was not quite accurate in that the need was for reversion to pasture land at some locations only. The Authority should also use nesting bird records as the over wintering bird counts did not give an accurate picture of Hickling Broad's condition and its impacts on wildfowl numbers/populations.

RS expressed some concern in regards to the lack of water flow on Hickling with previous suggestions to improve matters having been ignored. The narrow opening left at Duck Broad would restrict water flow and probably silt up. He suggested that the project include an annual water quality report by the Environment Agency which will show everyone any progress/improvement in the catchment. This could be presented at this Forum.

John Hiskett (JH) said that in principle the Norfolk Wildlife Trust was supportive of the project and were convinced of the merits of the proposals, however it was wary of the experimental nature of the projects and would need more time before it could comment fully.

MG said he remembered Hickling Broad being in prime condition in Feb 1961 but that it had declined ever since and now was a disgrace. He said that the broad was nutrient rich and ecologically unstable and did not believe this to be a sediment but a fresh water issue. However, GM welcomed the report and the suggested steps to make a change and recognised that doing nothing would be a greater sin. He continued that as much could be learned from a failed project as from an accomplished one and that there could be a problem if you just addressed the symptoms rather than the cause of the matter. He concluded that he congratulated the Upper Thurne Working Group on the good work they had done on Hickling Broad so far.

To a question from AA about what was being done about salt coming into the fresh water system the Senior Ecologist responded this was a natural occurrence but that the IDB is currently trialling approaches to reduce salt input from the catchment. She explained that if the trials are to be scaled up the evidence of benefit would have to be well demonstrated as it was likely to be expensive. The occurrence of salinity whether from groundwater or the sea, would not have an effect on the project which was mainly about enhancing the reed margins.

The Senior Ecologist confirmed that the salinity in Hickling needed to be brought down by approx. 20% to reach the standard level at Martham Broad. She stressed this was not a full lake restoration but an enhancing project which would not change matters overnight but should boost plants and birds alongside the improvements to depths in the navigation channels.

Philip Pearson (PP) agreed that Hickling was a disgrace and that as a fully designated area it was a shame it had been allowed to fail. He was concerned whether the new project would jeopardise the recovery of the new plants which are starting to grow. He continued that clear communication with the working group is essential so any concerns could be addressed early on.

The Senior Ecologist responded that they were aware of the Prymnesium issue and water plants and therefore would proceed with caution and with all safety procedures in place. She added that it is very likely that the low water this spring had meant a better light climate in which more water plants had grown although it was uncertain whether these conditions would continue.

The Chair asked whether it could be possible to have access to see the broads as currently so few places gave good views of the lakes. He also wanted to know whether fresh water could be abstracted from the crag aquifer as part of a Fish Refuge plan and proposed whether the dredging disposal sites could be restored to heathland to replace heathland lost as Catfield and Hickling once were.

JH responded that BESL had created better views across Hickling Broad on the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve however admitted this could be advertised better.

Peter Jermy (PJ) said that he was conscious that because of the complications of Hickling Broad there was the risk that nothing would happen, which would be much worse.

Bryan Read (BR) welcomed the news from the navigators and was glad to see the Broads Authority getting a grip on the situation.

John Tibbenham (JT) was keen to see boat access improved.

Brian Barker (BB) enquired what was being done in the short term, because his concern was that boats getting stuck in the shallow waters of the broad would be impacting on the viability of boating.

The Head of Construction, Maintenance & Environment responded that the Authority had been given planning permission to do some small scale dredging but are waiting for the water temperature to drop.

Barbara Greasley mentioned that she had not received any invoices from the Bridge Pilot this year, suggesting water levels were very low in this reach.

Members welcomed the report and the overall expression was that they were in favour of the project.

## **5/9 Riverbank Stabilisation and Mooring Guides**

Members received a report which presented revised guidance on riverbank stabilisation and the design of moorings which would form background

evidence and steer the implementation of policies in the reviewed Local Plan as well as help determine planning applications. The Forum was informed that their view was sought as part of the consultation on these guides.

The Planning Policy Officer confirmed that the guidance would be for anyone who was planning to put in mooring or bank stabilisation.

HC said he could not find timber that lasted and so made it affordable but as the guidance suggested the preference of natural materials he was concerned this would hinder him replacing his mooring/stabilisation with metal or plastic materials.

The Planning Policy Officer agreed that timber was preferred as it looks more natural but that the guidance touches on the lifespan and costs of different materials, including plastic. She continued that currently like for like replacement wouldn't need a planning application and that the Guide doesn't change whether planning permission is needed or not.

PP added some practical feedback on how the guide was written.

Members welcomed the report.

## **5/10 Review of Broads Plan 2011**

Members were reminded that the Broads Plan was the strategic management plan for the Broads and that the current plan was adopted in May 2011 and the review of the Plan was a strategic priority for the Broads Authority in 2015/16.

Members were informed that it was anticipated that the revised Plan would be adopted in March 2017 and that they and the organisations they represented would be invited to contribute to the review process at a planned workshop in the Autumn and through other participatory events.

Members were provided with a report which set out a summary of progress made against the objectives in the current Plan and were invited to provide comments on issues for discussion at the Autumn workshop.

Peter Medhurst (PM) said that as the outcome of the Stakeholders Survey showed that walking was one of the major activities in the Broads, improved access to the broads should be made a priority, especially in regards to Hickling Broad.

RS said that the reference "to safeguard water quality" (page 37 AL 1.2) was only possible with access to or the reporting of water quality information and that an annual report on catchment water quality would be welcome.

PP suggested that a partnership of different interest groups with common objectives should be considered and that breaking the plan down might help

bringing different interest groups together, while HC believed better communication between landowners and the BA was essential.

The Head of Strategy & Projects agreed that it would be important to involve landowners as well as good links with the representative bodies. He said that recent efforts to engage over matters like climate change had evoked very little response from farmers but that the Authority would persevere and would welcome any ideas on how this might be accomplished.

Members welcomed the report.

## **5/11 Chief Executive's Report**

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

When reporting back on what had been discussed at the Broads Authority meeting on 15 May and 10 July the Chair highlighted that the Parish Forums had been a success and well visited but that the most recent at Ranworth had attracted a very small audience. The Chairman explained that officers were looking to see whether having a more themed event would work better.

The Chair of the Broads Authority added that they had been trying to increase the ambassador role of members and encourage them to go out more to meet the public and improve the Authority's reputation.

PP enquired about an update in regards to the Water Skiing and Wakeboarding Trial on Breydon Water and was informed by the Chief Executive that usage of water-skiing on Breydon water was minimal but it was agreed by the Water Ski Review Panel that the zone on Breydon should be formalised. The Chief Executive added that the Authority had taken that view that rather than banning activities they should be managed appropriately.

Regarding the proposed improvements to the A47 the major concern about the Acle Straight members was public safety and this was due to be addressed. Economic development, for Great Yarmouth in particular, was another issue though the cost benefit analysis didn't suggest that the dualling of the road was likely in the near future.

Members noted the report.

## **5/12 Parish Issues**

John Lurkins mentioned the closed footpath beside the river Chet and it was confirmed that this was because a bridge near Hardley Flood had become unsafe. (This was a second bridge and not the one repaired by the Authority not long ago). The situation was being investigated by Norfolk County Council which is the responsible authority.

### **5/13 Current Issues**

HC requested for the Broads Forum Membership & Interest Groups list to be included in the Agenda again.

### **5/14 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business**

No items were proposed as items of urgent business.

### **5/15 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, including the Hickling Broad Project and angling on the Broads.

HC and AA both expressed concerns about the lack of engagement between land owners and the Broads Authority. AA believed that part of this is due to the conflict between farmers and the environment and farmers not attending meetings anymore.

The Chair of the Broads Authority responded that due to a farmer's busy diary, scheduling a meeting with them had been a challenge. She continued that many landowners can't afford to be involved on a regular basis, i.e being part of a forum.

However the Chief Executive said that the Authority engaged with landowners regularly on matters such as catchment management and climate change as well as through meetings facilitated by the NFU. One option which had been raised was the potential for updating the important report for the Broads on 'Why Farming Matters' which was brought to the committee in the past.

### **5/16 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting**

RS suggested a report on the increasing use off drones in the Broads.

Jenifer Parkhouse expressed concern on the subject of fracking and questioned whether the Authority should recognise this as a serious threat after the Government's announcement that National Parks were no longer off limits.

The Chief Executive responded that this was an issue the Authority was aware of but from the published evidence it appeared that the Broads was not a priority site for fracking and that the potential for this to materialize in the Broads as a significant concern was relatively small.

The Chair finished with informing members that it was Peter Medhurst's last meeting and thanked him for his contribution.



**5/17 Date of Next Meeting**

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

The meeting concluded at 4.55 pm.

Chairman