

Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 08 March 2023

Contents

1.	Apologies for absence and welcome	2
2.	Declarations of interest	2
3.	Minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 30 November 2022	2
4.	Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings	2
	Open water swimming	2
	Lost paths in the Broads	2
	Staithe report	3
5.	Proposal to renew the Dogs on Leads Public Space Protection Order for Herringfleet Hills	3
6.	Water quality monitoring	3
7.	Permissive access and ELMS	4
8.	Current access projects by the Broads Authority	5
9.	Any other business	7
	Somerton Parish Council footpath	7
	Potter Heigham Bridge	7
10.	Date of next meeting	7
	Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests Broads Local Access Forum, 08 March 2023	8
	Appendix 2 -Environment Agency response to bacterial water quality monitoring in the Broads	9

Present

Keith Bacon – in the Chair, Linda Aspland, Harry Blathwayt, Christine Cane, Tony Gibbons, Tim Harris, Steve Read, Christopher Yardley.

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Kylie Moos – Administrative Officer, Andrew Walters – Waterways and Recreation Officer, Ken Hawkins- Norfolk Local Access Forum.

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies received from Richard Atkins, Katie Baxter, Peter Dixon, Peter Mason.

2. Declarations of interest

Members indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered and set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

3. Minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 30 November 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings

Open water swimming

The Authority website was updated last summer after reviewing its position on open water swimming through a number of smaller working groups. The Authority does not promote open water swimming, other than for organised events. The Authority website highlights the hazards of open water swimming. The action has now been complete.

As part of a project funded by Anglian Water, The River Waveney Trust are currently undertaking 12 months of water quality monitoring at Bungay. The aim of the project is to test the feasibility of the site becoming an official designated inland bathing water.

Lost paths in the Broads

The Chair has previously written to Norfolk and Suffolk County council to identify paths “lost to the river”. Several members of the Forum were disappointed that there had not been a reply or acknowledgement and suggested specifying certain areas in the Broads in future correspondence to prompt a response.

Ken Hawkins suggested that the Chair raises the query at the Norfolk Local Access Forum Rights of Way subgroup meeting which is taking place next week.

The Authority and Norfolk Country Council was successful in a partnership bid to the Community Infrastructure Levy fund. The funding includes the restoration of footpaths on the Wherryman's Way including, Hardley Flood, Bramerton and Surlingham.

Staithe report

The Chair has previously written to the Environment Agency (EA) for their opinion on the Staithe report, no response has been received. There is a concern for staithe which have been previously inherited by the EA but for which the EA has not taken ownership. Dan Hoare suggested selecting two staithe of interest to the Forum and submitting a new request to the EA. Since the original request was submitted there has been a change in staff members at the EA and a targeted approach may produce a response.

The Chair agreed to select two staithe of interest to the Forum and contact the EA.

5. Proposal to renew the Dogs on Leads Public Space Protection Order for Herringfleet Hills

East Suffolk Council have contacted the Forum for their views on extending the current Dogs on Leads Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Herringfleet Hills. The area is Open Access land and would be in place for a further three years.

As Open Access land the Authority has a duty to carry out checks for any barriers to access. Any issues would be fed back to officers who could then inform the Forum.

Forum members agreed with the proposal to keep the PSPO in place for a further three years.

6. Water quality monitoring

At the previous Forum meeting there was a request for the EA to present results of bacterial water quality monitoring in the Broads. The EA were unable to attend the meeting however they have written a response for the Forum which has been included as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

Comments

Some of the Forum members were surprised that the EA does not carry out any bacteriological monitoring in a National Park which is based in and around water.

A Forum member commented that abstraction licenses are being granted on the lower Ant by the Environment Agency, which allows water to be extracted from the river without this type of data to support the decision.

The discharge of sewage into rivers is being reported on more frequently in the media and public interest is building. With the increase of open water swimming, now is the time for a proactive response.

Sea Palling has recently lost its Blue Flag status due to the levels of E. coli in the water.

There is a reedbed mitigation scheme planned for a site in North Norfolk. North Norfolk District Council have agreed to the site only if there is assurance from Anglian Water that they are able to deal with the additional waste and water supply. A Forum member added that offset arrangements are not a solution and the pollutants should be treated at source.

A Forum member asked if the Authority is required to undertake its own bacteriological water quality monitoring as a responsibility to the recreational users of the Broads. With its own data the Authority could challenge the EA and Anglian Water. The Authority promotes splash sports in the Broads, but there is a risk that users may become ill if they come in contact with contaminated water. Dan Hoare responded, the Authority does not replicate the statutory duties of other bodies. Working in partnership with other organisations was most likely. The inland bathing status which the River Waveney Trust are applying for in Bungay will provide the first indication on the faecal bacterial load in the rivers.

Dan Hoare suggested that the issue of water quality and human health in the Broads is raised with EA officers at an upcoming Broad Plan Partnership meeting this week. The Forum agreed that a formal request should be submitted to the Director of Strategic Services who oversees the Broads Plan, raising concerns for the absence of water quality data, hazards posed to human health and uncertainty about the level of risk to users.

The Chair agreed to send a letter to the Director of Strategic Services sharing the views of the Forum on water quality monitoring in the Broads.

7. Permissive access and ELMS

Norfolk Local Access Forum (NLAF) have recently written to the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and permissive access. NLAF have been concerned that over the last two years there has been no mention of public access in the scheme. On 26 January 2023 there was a policy announcement for ELMS and access was mentioned, NLAF made the following comments.

- Agreements that are being offered that last for 5 – 10 years have limited value and do not allow for much planning and certainty.
- Permissive access, particularly if it is short term, runs the likelihood of having friction again when those agreements come to an end just when people have got used to making use of them
- In previous stewardship schemes access was granted for landowner to allow access, but this often wasn't useful for all. NLAF have suggested a criteria for access:
 - provide access to areas which are otherwise difficult or impossible to reach, and/or
 - connect with existing access routes to provide enhanced route opportunities, and/or
 - provide routes where there are currently very few available, and/or

- provide safe routes enabling access without using or crossing major or busy roads, and/or
- are identified by local communities as of particular benefit.
- In addition
 - It should be a requirement for funded paths to be open to the public for most of the year, with very few exceptions (such as health and safety considerations during harvest times, for example).
 - Paths should be advertised in a common, easily accessible, format familiar to the public with use of online and mobile communication making this relatively straightforward.
 - NLAF also believes that there should be a requirement that landowners have to consult with their neighbours about proposed new routes, particularly if they involve any kind of landscaping that may alter the nature of the area. This will be especially important where any work may result in adverse impact on the existing access network and should be managed so that those responsible for the existing network are not put to additional cost.
 - Although we support the principle of encouragement and guidance, we do also believe that there has to be some penalty for persistent and deliberate flouting of the 'rules' under which funding is given and we consider that the previous system of cross compliance should be considered as a possible enforcement mechanism.
- Details of the scheme have been released over an extended period of time. It would be helpful for Defra to indicate a timescale so that people are prepared and have the opportunity to respond.

NLAF encourages the Forum to send a response the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are similar access concerns in the Broads.

Comments

Forum members agreed that Broads Local Access Forum should send their own response to the Secretary of State for the Environment and copy in local MPs. A member of the Forum agreed to draft a letter and send to the Chair for review.

The Chair agreed to send a response to the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding ELMS and permissive access.

8. Current access projects by the Broads Authority

Andrew Walters provided an update to the Forum on some of the access projects that the Authority have been working on over the previous few months. The improvements have been

made possible by the Removing Barriers fund, a £79,000 uplift to the National Park grant from Defra which needed to be spent on capital items by the end of the financial year.

Three types of improvements

- Physical footpath improvements
- Real time signage
- Signage for partially-sighted walkers

Hoveton Riverside Park

Key issues

- Footpaths around park degraded
- Footpaths are muddy or under water for several months of the year

Improvements

- The improvements will see the footpath being raised 30cm and widened to 1.5 meters to ensure it is accessible for all.

Further improvements in 2023/2024

- The footpath to the Ra trip boat will also be improved to ensure it is accessible for all.
- New path to the canoe launch

Horse Windpump

The footpath from car park to café, Windpump and around to the view point is being widened, levelled and raised to make dry and useable year-round. Work began this week and will be completed soon after Easter.

Halvergate Marshes

Installation of two digital interpretation boards which include live, up to date information at point of use on the trail network in Halvergate. The boards can include weather, daylight hours, wildlife sightings, livestock notices, trail diversions and live train times.

The signs will be solar powered and there is no illumination so they will have little impact on the visual landscape. Installation will take place in the next month.

Tactile maps

A tactile map is soon to be installed at Whitlingham. RNIB are currently producing one for the Authority for Beccles Quay.

A further £82,000 of funding from Defra for 2024/2025 has been agreed. At the same time the Integrated Access Strategy will be reviewed and the criteria which is used to rank projects will be assessed.

9. Any other business

Somerton Parish Council footpath

Somerton Parish Council have contacted the Forum asking for support to reinstate Footpath No.8. The footpath used to follow the southern edge of the Hundred Stream from the Somerton to Horsey Road to the track immediately behind the dunes/sea defences.

The Forum agreed to support the aspiration of the parish council to reinstate Footpath No.8.

Potter Heigham Bridge

A hole appeared on Potter Heigham Bridge in December 2022 approximately 4 feet deep. Since then Norfolk County Council have been carrying out surveys and it has been used as a pedestrian bridge only. The bridge is a grade 2 listed building which is registered as a national monument. Potter Heigham Parish Council will be asking the residents their preferred option for the future of the bridge at an upcoming parish council meeting on the 21 March.

1. Remain as a pedestrian, cycling and horse riding use only
2. Access for all vehicles under 7.5 tonnes
3. Cars only

Comments

- Many of the businesses around the bridge are in favour of the pedestrianisation and the asset would be improved by removing the traffic lights.
- There is opposition from local residents who live on or close to Bridge Road, as the pedestrianisation has meant that all traffic is now diverted down Bridge Road.
- The bridge is a crossing point on the Weavers Way.

The Chair agreed to send a letter to Norfolk County Council supporting the permanent pedestrianisation of Potter Heigham Bridge with the inclusion of horse riding and cycling.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum would be held on Wednesday 7 June 2023 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.00pm

Signed by

Chairman

Appendix 2- Environment Agency response to bacterial water quality monitoring in the Broads

creating a better place
for people and wildlife



Overall, water quality in our rivers, estuaries and coastal waters has improved greatly over the last few decades, largely due to robust regulation by the Environment Agency and investment by the water companies. For example:

- Sewage treatment works now discharge 67% less phosphorus and 79% less ammonia into rivers than they did in 1995.
- The number of serious water pollution incidents caused by the water and sewerage companies has been reduced dramatically, from over 500 in the early 1990s down to just 62 in 2021.
- The bathing waters around our coasts are in the best state they have been for decades: in 2022, 72% of beaches and inland waters met the 'Excellent' standard, the highest since new stringent standards were introduced in 2015.

But we still have a long way to go. Getting to lasting solutions will take decades still, but we know what the problems are, and we know how to address most of them. Everyone should understand the scale of the challenges and the investment needed to put them right.

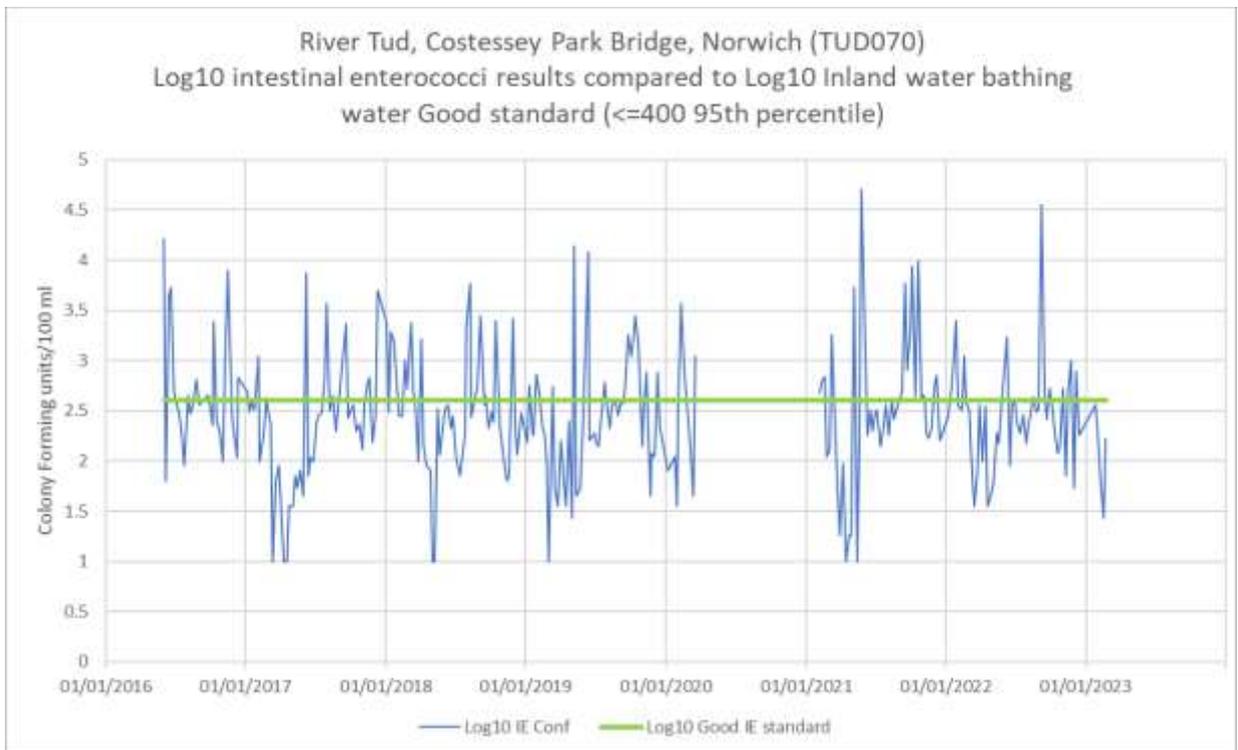
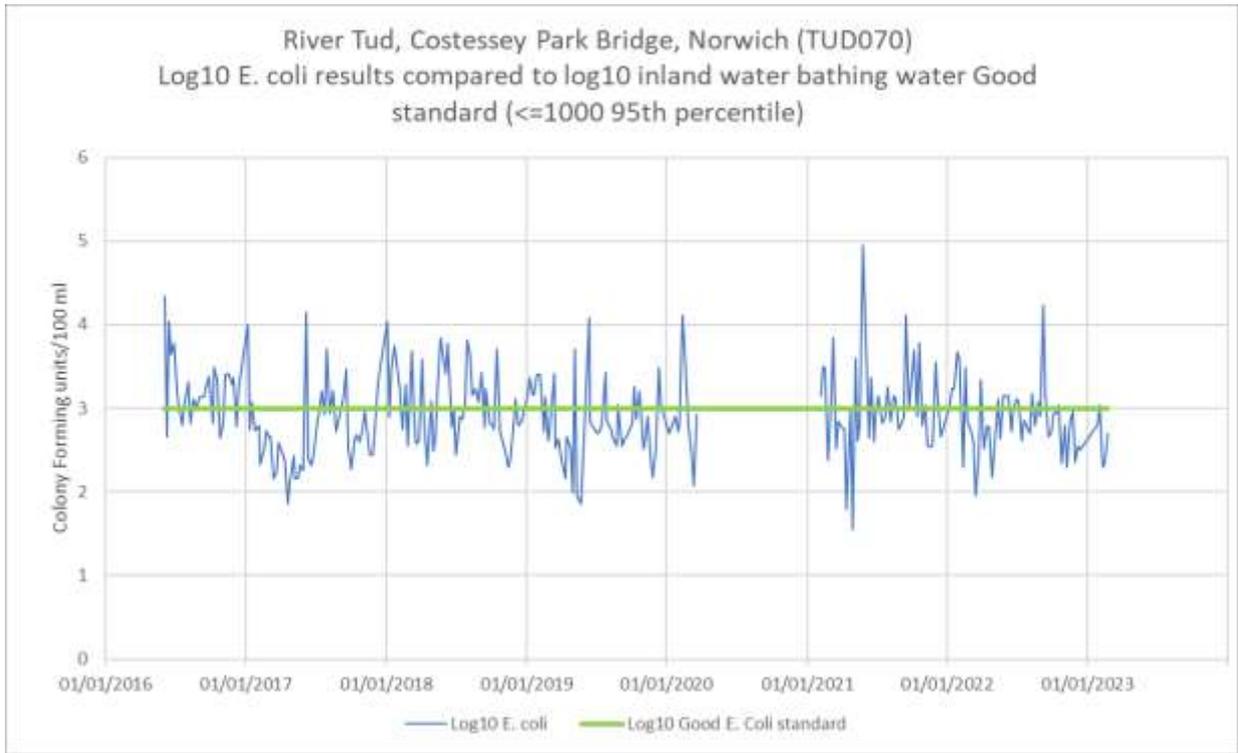
We will continue to collaborate with businesses to help them to make the best choices for water quality, but anyone caught breaching environmental laws faces enforcement action, up to and including prosecution.

The EA carries out around 90,000 water quality sampling visits a year from 13,000 different locations so we can see what is happening in England's waters.

However, we don't currently do any monitoring for FIOs (Faecal Indicator Organisms) in the Broads. FIOs give us an understanding of the level of bacterial pollution in surface or marine environments that would assist us in understanding the level of pollution from sewage and other sources. FIOs are usually monitored in areas designated as Bathing Waters, both coastal and inland, and in Shellfish Protected Areas.

We have monitoring data from other rivers - rivers Tud, Deben, Alde and Ore which is collected as part of the Catchment Sensitive Farming monitoring programme which shows what sort of levels and trends are found in freshwater rivers.

The below plot shows E. coli and intestinal enterococci levels in the River Tud. The inland bathing waters Good standard has been overlaid for comparison only – as it is a standard that only applies to designated inland bathing waters – and the results have been logged to better enable the data to be visualised.



The data from the Tud shows that E.coli and intestinal enterococci levels are variable and at times reach very high levels. Similar levels and trends are likely to be found in the Broadland rivers.

Sewage pollution can be devastating to human health, local biodiversity and our environment. Storm overflows must only be used under strict permitted conditions that control their environmental impact. The EA is holding the industry to account on a scale never seen before. We have significantly driven up monitoring and transparency from water companies in recent years, so that everyone can see what is going on. This includes Event Duration Monitoring: This measures how often and for how long storm overflows are used. Through the EA's requirement of water companies, the number of storm overflows monitored across the network has increased from 10% in 2015 to almost 90% now monitored, and we will reach 100% cover by the end of the year. All the data is published [online](#).

Recreational water users on the Broads can use this data to get an idea of historic spills in the area they are interested. However, this data is not live. Water Companies are being pushed to provide live or nearly live data on their websites which will enable the public to make an informed judgement about whether or not to get into the water. Publishing accessible data is an important step to reversing the overuse of storm overflows, but disclosure is only ever the beginning. People want to see tangible progress.

The evidence from EDM clearly shows there is no room for complacency and water companies have a very long way to go. They need to invest more in tackling storm overflow pollution. Any water companies in breach of their permits are acting illegally and must act urgently address any non-compliance.

Only wider action through water company investment, better farming practices and simple steps taken in the home to prevent sewer misuse will help ensure we have healthier sewers, cleaner rivers and a better environment for all.

The EA continues to work with government, the water industry, farmers and others to improve water quality in our rivers and we are making the case for the funding we need to protect the environment in England. We also need more investment from the farming and water industries and for local catchment partnerships to do their part.