

# Broads Authority

## Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2021

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## **Present**

Bill Dickson – in the Chair, Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Matthew Bradbury, Nigel Brennan, Andrée Gee (from item 11), Gail Harris, Paul Hayden, Tristram Hilborn, Tim Jickells, James Knight, Greg Munford, Simon Roberts, Matthew Shardlow, Simon Sparrow, Nicky Talbot, Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro and Fran Whymark

## **In attendance**

John Packman – Chief Executive, Natalie Beal – Planning Policy Officer (item 14), Jacqui Bullen – Deputy Monitoring Officer, Dan Hoare – Head of Construction (item 9), Bill Housden – Head of IT & Collector of Tolls; Emma Krelle – Chief Financial Officer, Rob Leigh – Head of Communications (item 8); Harry Mach – Carbon Reduction Project Manager (items 8 and 11), Rob Rogers – Director of Operations, Marie-Pierre Tighe – Director of Strategic Services and Sara Utting - Governance Officer.

## **1. Welcome and apologies**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Apologies** were received from Leslie Mogford, Michael Scott and Vic Thomson.

## **2. Chairman's announcements**

### **Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014**

The Chairman explained that the meeting was being audio-recorded. All recordings remained the copyright of the Broads Authority and anyone wishing to receive a copy should contact the Governance Team. The minutes remained the record of the meeting. He added that the law permitted any person to film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of public meetings of the Authority. This did not extend to live verbal commentary. The Chair needed to be informed if anyone intended to photograph, record or film so that any person under the age of 18 or members of the public not wishing to be filmed or photographed could be accommodated.

## **3. Introduction of members and declarations of interest**

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

## **4. Items of urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

## **5. Public question time**

No public questions had been received.

## 6. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 7. Summary of actions and outstanding issues

Members received the latest summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings. In terms of the Peatlands Discovery Grant, the Chief Executive reported that the decision on whether the bid had been successful was due to be announced on Monday (22 November). Should the bid be successful, Members would be advised, and an update would be provided at the January meeting.

**The report was noted.**

## 8. Responding to climate change

The Head of Communications (HC) introduced the report, which had been inspired by the COP26 meeting in Glasgow where a joint statement was signed by many protected and conserved areas (including National Park UK), and summarised the Authority's existing initiatives and discussed how the Authority, working with others, could encourage residents, visitors and local companies to help combat climate change and biodiversity loss.

[“Count Us In”](#) was a not for profit initiative, funded by philanthropic donations and set up by partners through pro bono work. Partners had to meet four essential criteria and the initiative was based on 16 steps for the most effective way to reduce carbon pollution, albeit not all were relevant to the Broads. The Broads Authority had the potential to influence 8 million visitors, 6,000 residents, 300 employees, volunteers and their families and numerous partner organisations. The report identified examples of relevant activity already undertaken by the Authority, against each of the 16 steps. The HC added that the new Tourism Plan was being developed over the next 12 months and these elements could be incorporated, with a shift from sustainable tourism to regenerative tourism, i.e. putting something back and not just mitigating the effects.

The comment was made by a member that the Authority owned very little land in its area and it would be beneficial for all the other land-holding bodies (such as charitable trusts) to work collectively to enable large scale initiatives, which would help promote what was being done, overall, to the wider public. An example of this could be through projects funded by the Nature Discovery Grant. The Chief Executive referred to the involvement of Palladium and the potential to access private funding to support the work of the National Parks. It was hoped to use the grant money to work with the National Trust on its land, something which the Authority had been trying to achieve for many years but in the past had not been a priority for the NT.

A member referred to the importance of engagement with parish councils on this subject and questioned if any future meetings were being proposed. The Chief Executive advised that a meeting had been held for parish councils at Yare House on this specific topic of climate

change but it had not been that well supported. Therefore, the intention was to work with the parishes to get the message out to their residents, and that it was also important to work with other bodies, such as the district and county councils as well as other partners and the local media. The framework within the report recognised that people, as individuals, could not change everything but gave them ideas of things they could do through little steps.

A member commended the National Parks on taking the lead role and endorsed all the actions taken to date, together with the proposals in the report. He referred to the electrification of boats on the Broads and how the Authority would need to take the lead in moving this forward over the next 2-3 years. Toll income would need to be used to drive forward change and put in place the required infrastructure to achieve a zero carbon fleet on the Broads. In response, the Chief Executive invited James Knight to update members on the “Electrifying the Broads” project, as a representative of one of the partner organisations. James informed members that the partners were approximately halfway into the project, with a six month feasibility study, looking at two elements: electrifying a hire boat (retro-fitting an existing boat and building a new boat) and the electrical infrastructure which would be required around the Broads, which was significant. Work was almost complete on identifying how much energy was required to completely electrify a boat to provide heating, cooking, charging capability etc (60-70kw hours per day). In three months’ time, the feasibility study would be complete and would include options and costings. If the costs were feasible, the next stage would be to install some infrastructure in certain locations and retrofit a boat.

The Carbon Reduction Project Manager (CRPM) advised that the Government had indicated there would be a consultation on a phase-out date for new, non-zero emission boats, like there had been for cars, and the Authority would be holding a workshop on sustainable boating in the Broads in the future.

A member referred to the increasing cost of diesel and questioned if this meant that bio-fuel was now more economically viable than it previously had been. The CRPM commented that he had not specifically looked at price tracking but prices were linked, and so it was unlikely that it would be much more viable. Hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) was only a stop-gap, as there was a limit on the amount of recycled cooking oil available. Heavy plant machinery needed to be replaced with other sources of power and so the focus should not be on HVO as an economic case but on using electric or hydrogen powered vehicles.

In conclusion, members acknowledged how the Authority was making progress in reducing its carbon footprint and the “[Count Us In](#)” initiative would provide a big opportunity to engage with residents and visitors. Working with the local media, local authorities in Norfolk and Suffolk, and Broads tourism sector was supported to make the campaign more effective.

Matthew Shardlow proposed, seconded by Tim Jickells, and

**It was resolved unanimously to:**

- (i) note the content of the joint statement of protected and conserved areas around the world on climate change and biodiversity; and**

- (ii) **in principle, to support the National Parks' involvement as a hub in the 'Count Us In' initiative and work with local media, local authorities, Broads Tourism (Visit the Broads) and partners to promote the development of 'Broads specific' actions, linked to the 16 'Count us in' themes, to residents and visitors to help tackle climate change and biodiversity loss in the Broads in order to develop behaviour change messaging.**

## **9. Public Sector Cooperation Agreement with the Environment Agency**

The Head of Construction, Maintenance & Ecology (HCME) introduced the report, which proposed a five year partnership between the Broads Authority and the Environment Agency (EA) to co-operate to achieve common purposes relating to the carrying out of flood risk maintenance and similar works and activities where the Broads Authority was a delivery party. The overall objective of the Agreement would be to provide the EA and BA with a framework for delivery of their common needs; to secure efficient local working arrangements which would achieve value for money, and to take advantage of local skills, experience and operational practices. One potential area to explore through the Agreement was the usage, with prior agreement, for using EA piled edges (i.e. sheet piled areas used as a flood defence assets) as Broads Authority 24 hour moorings.

In response to a question on legal responsibility for flood prevention, the HCME advised that there would be no transfer of legal responsibility under the proposed Agreement for flood risk management. The Authority would be using its functions as a Navigation Authority to enter into the Agreement, and there would be no obligations for either party to carry out any work. In terms of an example of proposed work in the short term, the HCME reported that 8,000 cubic metres of material had been dredged from the River Waveney by the Authority and fortunately the EA required that amount of sediment to top up some flood banks. The Agreement would also provide the opportunity to share equipment etc as well as work in partnership on getting the necessary licenses and permits.

A member questioned if there would be regular meetings to provide an opportunity for the BA and EA to compare their work programmes. The HCME advised that six monthly meetings were already held and there was a good working relationship between the various officers which benefitted working towards shared goals. He agreed to report annually to the Authority on progress with the various projects under the Agreement, together with the benefits.

Stephen Bolt proposed, seconded by Paul Hayden, and

**It was resolved unanimously to support the principle of the Authority entering in a Public Sector Co-operation Agreement with the Environment Agency to enable selected projects and tasks to be carried out for mutual benefit, and delegate authority to the Chief Executive to negotiate the details of the final agreement.**

## 10. Financial performance and direction

The Chief Financial Officer presented the report, which provided a strategic overview of current key financial issues, including the consolidated income and expenditure from 1 April to 30 September 2021. She reported that it was not possible to provide a verbal update on the figures from the end of September to date, as the finance team was still experiencing staff shortages. However, she could advise that the forecast for tolls income remained the same as within the report.

**The income and expenditure figures for 1 April to 30 September 2021 were noted.**

Having declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, Greg Munford, James Knight and Simon Sparrow left the meeting for item 11.

## 11. Proposed navigation charges for 2022/2023 in the navigation area and adjacent waters

The Chief Executive (CE) introduced the report, which reviewed income and expenditure for 2021/22; the challenges for the coming year; the need to replace the Authority's online tolls system; the repayment to National Park Reserves of the funding provided earlier that year; a proposed increase in the officer time to hire boat licensing; and resources for tolls collection and finance, and recommendations on the charges for 2022/23. The report also included the unanimous recommendations of the Navigation Committee which had met on 21 October 2021.

A member questioned whether the Authority was considering a lower increase in the tolls to the proposed 3.6% for the electric fleet, to reflect the emphasis towards sustainable boating and climate change. The CE advised that the report to the Navigation Committee had included a specific option for electric day boats, with non-electric fleets paying more and electric fleet paying less. However, this had not found favour with the Committee, as it would prefer to see the change in a broader context of sustainable boating and recommended a workshop be held in the coming months, once the project on Electrifying the Broads was complete. Therefore, the proposal was to defer any decision on increasing the differential in tolls for electric boats for one year. It was accepted that the hours allocated to licensing of hired craft needed to be increased to a more realistic level and with that, a concern had been highlighted that boat hirers could incur a significant increase in charge if licensing and tolls were increased; therefore, the recommendation to the Authority was considered a more reasonable way forward, leading into next year's toll setting. A member commented that at the time of announcing the new tolls, the Authority should coincide this with the announcement of its climate change policy, particularly in terms of electrifying the Broads. Another member concurred that small differentials would not send out the right message, in terms of the Authority's policy on climate change, and there needed to be positive incentives to both private owners and commercial boat operators. The CE drew members' attention to paragraph 7.2 in the report which included an option for increasing the toll for day boat hire

to £54.30 and reducing the charges for electric day boats to £26, although this was not the recommendation proposed in the report.

A member referred to the potential risks with new IT systems, both financially and reputationally. The Head of IT & Collector of Tolls (HITCT) acknowledged the concerns but stated that the biggest threats now related to cyber security and data protection. He added that the current software did not meet customers' demands, such as online registration, online payment of short-stay tolls etc plus it had to ensure data security. In response to a question on the likely timescales, the HITCT advised that the IT department had experienced staffing shortages in recent months which meant that it had not been possible to produce a specification for the new system. However, he assured members that the current system did provide for data protection and had a continued lifespan for approximately two more years. The specification would set out what could be achieved with the allocated costs and with maximum benefit.

A member was pleased to note that boat numbers had not actually declined but had returned to pre-Covid figures and he supported the increase in tolls fee to meet the Authority's increasing costs. At the current time, the Authority should express its intention and commitment to sustainable boating and look to the future with financial incentives for boat owners for making the change, but taking account of fluctuating costs, and set a realistic deadline. Once the fleet had changed towards more electric, the Authority needed to acknowledge the potential future risk of reduced income, so it was important to manage tolls related incentives. This process should also include profiling and reprofiling of charges over a long period of time and account for the effects of changes in inflation. The CE advised that the system was very sensitive and only a very few changes in the number of boats would have a significant effect and so the HITCT monitored tolls income weekly, over a five year profiling period.

Nicky Talbot proposed, seconded by Stephen Bolt, and

**It was resolved by 15 members for and one abstention to:**

- (i) increase Navigation Charges for 2022/23 in the navigation area and adjacent waters by 3.6%;**
- (ii) transfer £88,000 of the additional navigation income to the IT Computer Software Reserve as a contribution towards the replacement of the tolls on-line system. The navigation share of the capital receipt from the sale of the Ludham Field Base will be ringfenced towards the replacement of the tolls on-line system;**
- (iii) repay the £250,000 transferred from National Park Reserves last year to fund safety measures, at a rate of £50,000 per annum over 5 years;**
- (iv) increase Hire Boat Licence charges to £25 per operator and £17 per vessel to increase the time of a Licensing Officer from one day to three days a week; and,**
- (v) hold a workshop in 2022 on the theme of sustainable boating on the Broads.**

James Knight, Greg Munford and Simon Sparrow re-joined the meeting.



## 12. Decision to opt into the national scheme for Auditor Appointments managed by the PSAA as the “Appointing Person”

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) introduced the report, which set out proposals for appointing the external auditor to the Authority for the accounts for the five year period from 2023/24. The Authority had previously opted into the “appointing person” national auditor arrangements established by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) for the period covering the accounts for 2018/19 to 2022/23.

A member expressed his support for the proposal, commenting that the Authority should take every opportunity to feed back its experiences of audits and particularly the fact that its audit requirements were disproportionate for an Authority of its size and was not a good use of public money.

The CFO acknowledged that there had been issues with Ernest Young but the PSAA determined who the Authority’s auditor would be. However, the PSSA had taken on board comments made by the Authority in terms of the audit fees – EY had requested additional fees for the audit of the 2019/20 accounts but this had been reduced significantly by the PSAA. Retention of audit staff had also been highlighted as an issue and this had affected the capacity of auditors to deliver audits within timescales.

Matthew Bradbury proposed, seconded by Greg Munford, and

**It was resolved unanimously that the Authority uses Public Sector Appointments for the appointment of external auditors for the five financial years from 1 April 2023.**

## 13. Strategic priorities – update

The Director of Strategic Services introduced the report, setting out the latest progress in implementing the Broads Authority’s set of annual strategic priorities, which were mostly on track. She drew members’ attention to two priorities which had been the subject of delays:

- (1) Broads Plan review – the original timescale was now considered too optimistic, as more time was needed for the consultation and delays with some procurement. Unfortunately, the Habitats Regulation Assessment bid had been unsuccessful which had caused a delay in appointing a consultant. It was likely the first draft of the plan would be before members in March next year; it was still expected to adopt the updated Broads Plan before the end of 2022.
- (2) Climate Change action plan – Smallworld Consulting Ltd had taken longer than anticipated to gather the required data and so the report was delayed.

**The report was noted.**

## 14. Marketing and Viability Guide for adoption

The Planning Policy Officer introduced the report, which proposed a revised Marketing and Viability Guide for adoption, following three rounds of consultation. At its meeting on 5 November, the Planning Committee had recommended the Authority adopt the Guide.

Tim Jickells proposed, seconded by Matthew Bradbury, and

**It was resolved unanimously to note the comments, endorse the responses and adopt the final Marketing and Viability Guide.**

## 15. Remote meetings

The Chief Executive introduced the report, seeking members' views on whether it would be appropriate for the Broads Authority's advisory, non-decision making committees (Navigation Committee and Audit & Risk Committee) to have the option to hold meetings virtually. Legal advice had been sought on the proposal and this was included within the committee report.

Members supported the proposals in principle, recognising that they provided a good option. Members also noted that there would need to be some investment in the future for facilities/equipment to facilitate hybrid meetings.

Tim Jickells proposed, seconded by Gail Harris, and

**It was resolved unanimously, that subject to consultation with the Chairs of Audit & Risk Committee and Navigation Committee once the agendas have been prepared, meetings of these committees be permitted to meet virtually, and that Standing Orders be amended accordingly.**

## 16. Corporate partnerships register

The Chief Executive introduced the report reviewing the register of key partnerships with external organisations. The register had been endorsed by the Audit & Risk Committee on 21 September 2021.

**The updated corporate partnerships register was noted.**

## 17. Items of business raised by the Designated Person in respect of the Port Marine Safety Code

There were no matters to report under this item.

## 17A Minutes to be received

Members received the minutes of the following meetings:

Audit & Risk Committee – 20 July 2021

Navigation Committee – 2 September 2021

Planning Committee – 10 September 2021

Planning Committee – 8 October 2021

## 18. Other items of business

None.

## 19. Formal questions

There were no formal questions of which notice had been given.

## 20. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Authority would be held on Friday 28 January 2022 at 10.00am.

## 21. Exclusion of the public

Matthew Bradbury proposed, seconded by Greg Munford, and

**It was resolved by consensus to exclude the public from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act as amended, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public benefit in disclosing the information.**

There were no members of the public present and the recording was suspended.

## 22. Yare House Lease Arrangements

The Director of Operations introduced the report, which informed members of the introduction of a trial for “agile working” arrangements for members of staff, which brought about the potential to review the Broads Authority occupancy of Yare House, if the trial was successful. He emphasised that agile working was not being considered as a pure cost saving exercise; its benefits were in staff well-being, retention and home/life balance areas but it was hoped that, if the trial was successful, cost reductions could be realised. The trial had commenced on 15 November and a period of 12 months would be needed for the trial as staff numbers fluctuated throughout the seasons. The costs related to Yare House were included in the paper, hence the agenda item being exempt.

The current lease for Yare House included a break clause in November 2022 and a six month notice period was required to instigate the break clause, i.e. by May 2022. Therefore, by moving the break clause date back to May 2023, this would allow time for the agile working trial to conclude and any findings relating to office accommodation being assessed.

Simon Sparrow proposed, seconded by Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro, and

**It was resolved unanimously, by agreement with the Authority’s landlord, to push back the break clause in the lease for Yare House to March 2023 to allow time for the assessment of the agile working arrangements.**

The meeting ended at 11:46am

Signed by

Chairman

## **Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Broads Authority, 19 November 2021**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Agenda/minute</b>	<b>Nature of interest</b>
James Knight, Greg Munford and Simon Sparrow	11	Hire boat operators. Disclosable pecuniary interest.
Harry Blathwayt, Matthew Bradbury, Stephen Bolt, Bill Dickson and Nicky Talbot	11	Private boat owners and toll payers – non-registerable interest. Code of Conduct enabled them to attend and vote.