

**Subscriber Text Service**  
Report by Director of Operations

**Summary:** This report sets out the current methods by which the Broads Authority disseminates information to the public, and identifies options for further developments. Members' views are sought on the options and proposed way forward.

**1 Background**

- 1.1 In February 2013, a member of the Navigation Committee suggested that the Broads Authority should consider the development of a subscriber text service to assist boaters particularly with crossing Breydon water.
- 1.2 As a first step officers have reviewed the current methods of communicating information to boat users, as well as carrying out a simple consultation exercise.

**2 Existing Communication Methods**

- 2.1 The Broads Authority currently uses a number of methods to communicate boating and other information to the public. These include hard copy publications as follows:
  - Broadsheet – newsletter sent to all toll payers annually in Feb with Toll account. It includes news and information about projects completed by the Authority and work planned for the forthcoming year as well as articles of wider interest.
  - Toll account – sent to all toll payers in February and provides an opportunity to order and pay for a copy of the annual tide table.
  - Broadcaster – visitor newspaper provided to all hire boat yards for provision to all hire boats. It includes navigation advice including tide tables, river distances and advice regarding crossing Breydon Water as well as general safety advice, and information regarding events and activities in the Broads and articles of wider interest.
  - Tide tables – produced annually and includes information relating to byelaws, Mutford Lock, bridge heights and demasting as well as predicted tide information and tables of river distances.
  - Notice to Mariners – these are published in the EDP, specifically relating to river closures or disruption to the navigation such as restricted air draft at bridges

- The hire vessels all have a skipper's manual containing low water Breydon tide times provided by the hire companies, and NSBA members receive a copy of the green Book which also contains this information.

## 2.2 Additionally, online services include:

- Broads Authority website – this includes hydrographic charts and navigation notes to assist with passage planning.
- Tide tables:
  - Urgent boating news is a quick link on the website to particular current boating issues; and
  - Notice to Mariners are also published on line, as well as being circulated via email to boatyards/ marinas and partner organisations.

## 2.3 Finally, the Authority also provides additional support through other mechanisms:

- Ranger patrols – Breydon and Wroxham are the two highest priority areas, and the Ranger rosta is managed to ensure seven day cover in these areas. Particularly on Breydon, tide work is arranged to ensure that rangers are on hand to advise vessels not to cross Breydon at high water when there is insufficient clearance at the bridges. The Breydon team reports less vessels approaching Great Yarmouth at the wrong time this season which they take to be better handovers by the yards.
- Yacht station staff – staff at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station provide advice and guidance regarding crossing Breydon both to boaters moored at the Yacht Station and by phone.
- Layby/ demasting moorings are provided for vessels to wait for appropriate conditions to cross Breydon.
- Bridge gauge boards are provided both at the bridges and also in advance, upstream and downstream of Breydon Water at moorings at Berney Arms and Burgh Castle.
- Broads Control is manned 9am – 6pm daily throughout the summer season, and will also give advice and guidance to boaters by telephone.

## 2.4 Additionally, the East Port website includes daily information for the Great Yarmouth Port as shown below:

### MARINE - TIDES / WEATHER

Tidal height for Great Yarmouth on 16 Aug 2013

Tidal Height (metres) above Chart Datum. See Notice to Mariners No 4 2008.

Times (local) of High and Low Water in metres.

High Tide:

Time: 04:34 Height: 2.3

Low Tide:

Time: 10:44 Height: 1.2

High Tide:

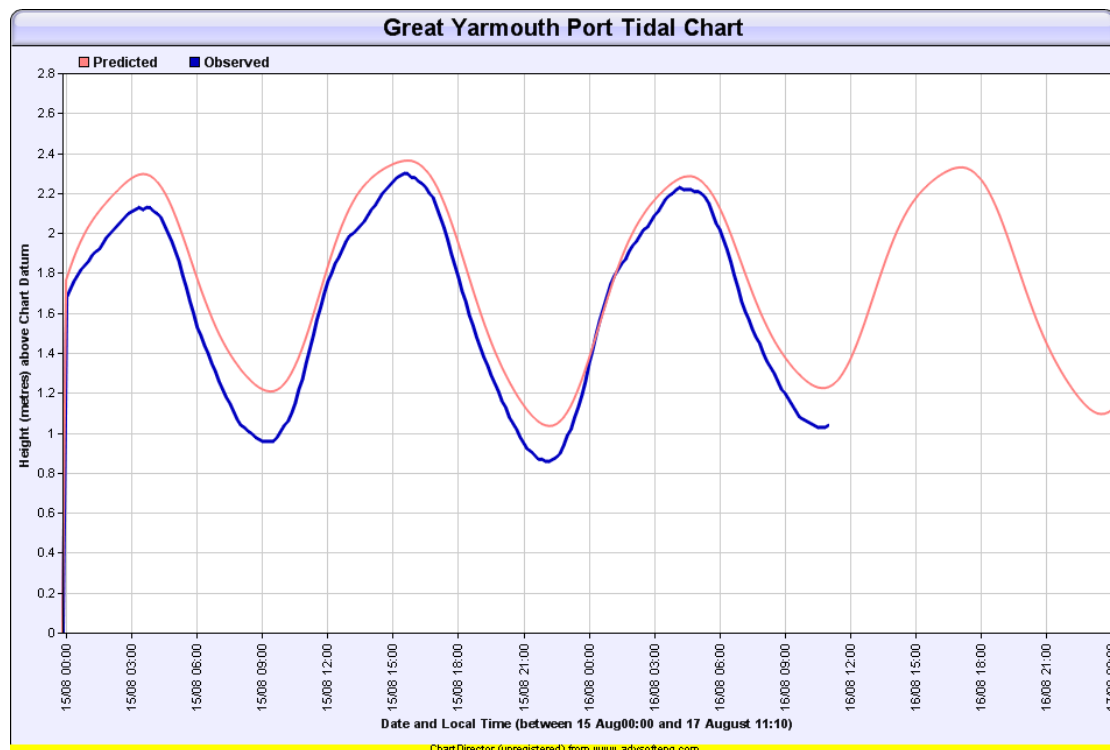
Time: 17:03 Height: 2.3

Low Tide:

Time: 23:31 Height: 1.1

Tidal Chart (Predicted and Observed) : [click here](#)

Latest Weather report and forecast from the Met Office: [click here](#)



### 3 Further Development Options

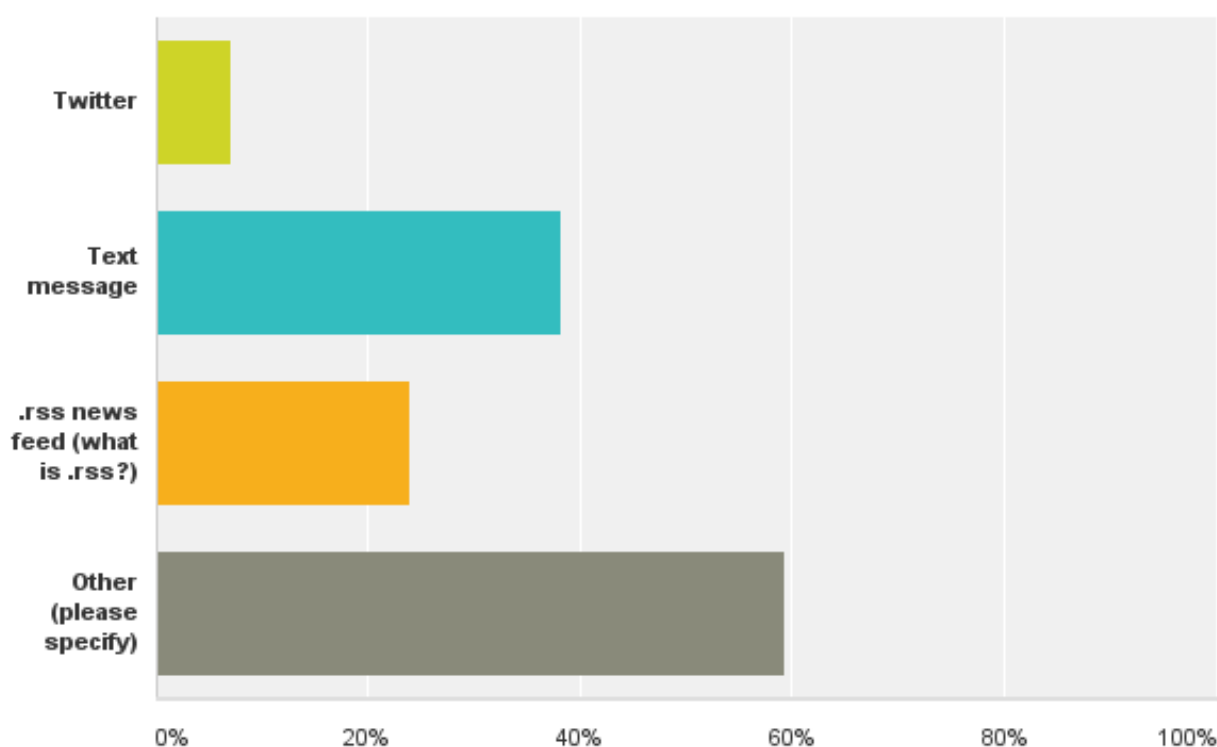
- 3.1 At the meeting of the Navigation Committee on 6 June 2013, members' initial views were sought on the development of a subscriber text service, and a number of other IT solutions were also identified. Additionally, views were sought at the Boat Safety Management Group and with NSBA/ BHBf.
- 3.2 Whilst members were supportive of providing as much assistance as possible to boaters, it was noted that this information was already freely supplied in a number of ways. There was a view that if boaters are not reading what is already provided, would any alternative method be any more effective? It was agreed that therefore any further methods should be at minimal cost and simple to use, and should be actively promoted by boatyards to be worthwhile.
- 3.3 In order to inform officers views a simple survey was added to the Broads Authority website, and the Survey Monkey questionnaire went to all those who use the Update Me facility on our website. The results are shown in the chart below. The results show not a great appetite for Twitter, although .rss news feeds fared quite well. These can both be used in conjunction with the Broads

Authority website with Twitter feeds appearing within web pages and news feeds to publish headlines and important information.

- 3.4 The breakdown of answers for 'Other' is mainly email but also some saying they'll visit the website directly. Interestingly, a sizable number of people (18 of 272) would use Facebook.

**Q1 Which of the following would you consider using to keep up to date with news and additions to information on the Broads Authority's website? Please select all that apply.**

Answered: 460 Skipped: 0



- 3.5 The options are considered in more detail in the table below:

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Subscriber text service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good signal across most of Broads</li> <li>• Accessible via any mobile (no need for internet-enabled device like smart phone/tablet/laptop)</li> <li>• Can choose which updates to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost to user</li> <li>• Initial set up cost to BA (max £2,000)</li> <li>• Resource intensive to manage the system. This really needs teasing out in terms of what input it needs from BA in terms of initial set up</li> </ul>

	receive?	and for different daily alerts
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No cost to BA for actual use of site</li> <li>• Free to user assuming part of usual internet costs</li> <li>• Openly public and accessible</li> <li>• Will highlight everyday work greater public profile promotion</li> <li>• Feed can be implemented into website</li> <li>• Not too time-intensive</li> <li>• Can link back to website for more info if 140 characters is not enough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will incorporate a range of different kinds of updates with no easy means for the user to choose which to have (although hashtags can be utilised to highlight different themes and/or Broads Control could have a separate account for their updates)</li> <li>• Connectivity dead-spots across Broads</li> <li>• Need internet-enabled device</li> <li>• 140-character limit can be dependent on links for more info</li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No cost to BA for actual use of site</li> <li>• Free to user assuming part of usual internet costs</li> <li>• Openly public and accessible</li> <li>• No need for users to set up account</li> <li>• Feed possible</li> <li>• All BA info in one place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users would have to actively look for info instead of them registering to have it flagged up for them, so would need to work with other method like Twitter or RSS feed</li> <li>• Connectivity dead-spots across Broads</li> <li>• Need internet-enabled device</li> </ul>
RSS feed (Flags up website updates to users, option to have them emailed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No cost to BA</li> <li>• Free to user assuming part of usual internet costs</li> <li>• Automatically updated, no extra work</li> <li>• Integral with website</li> <li>• Users can specify the different types of updates they want</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectivity dead-spots across Broads</li> <li>• Need internet-enabled device</li> </ul>

## 4 Limitations

- 4.1 The danger of broadcasting only daily information is the limit to what information that is imparted. If only low water and slack water times are broadcast in isolation this could be seen to encourage users to aim for those time slots without due regard to journey times and daylight hours. A daily service of today's low water at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station (GYYS) may be of little value to a hirer moored in the upper reaches who does not understand passage planning and how long it will take to get to Breydon. The daily formation may only be of use to those who already understand the tides and have engaged in passage planning for the forthcoming days.
- 4.2 Text messages are limited to 160 characters including spaces as such a typical message within these limits is shown below:

*29/8/13 Today's predicted slack water at GYYS is 0930 and 2203, sunset is 1948hrs, tomorrow predicted slack water at GYYS is 1055 and 2314, sunset is 1946hrs*  
(total 156 characters).

- 4.3 It may also be considered useful to provide information about weather conditions on Breydon Water, however weather can be very local and timely e.g. Patchy fog and wind against tide on Breydon and so to provide accurate information will be a considerable burden to keep it correct and up to date. For instance, staff at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station cannot always tell what is happening on Breydon and there would also be times when there are no members of staff at work to update the information.
- 4.4 Further advice will need to be sought to identify whether any liabilities are picked up through the provision of this service once the principle, content and format has been agreed.

## **5 Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Authority needs to be promoting forward passage planning using a range of information already published in a variety of forms.  
It is the officers' view that, to be most effective, we need to look at a combination of methods. The simplest and free solution is to further develop the website and to work with the Twitter or RSS feed for proactive prompts rather than stand alone for the reasons above. However, given the results of the sample survey it is clear that there is a demand for a text service. Hurdles with the text option are seen as being the content of the message, officer time and resources, and cost to both the user and the Authority.

Background papers:	Nil
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Broads Plan Objectives:	None
Appendices:	None