

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 04 September 2025

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Present

Alan Goodchild – in the Chair, Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Sue Cadamy, Mark Collins, Peter Dixon, Tony Grayling, Leslie Mogford, Bob Neate, Remus Sawyerr, Paul Thomas, and Daniel Thwaites.

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Emma Krelle – Director of Resources, John Packman - Chief Executive, Lorraine Taylor – Governance Officer, Daniel Wilken – Asset Officer.

1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

There were no apologies.

Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014

The Chair 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 formal 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.

2. Declarations of interest

Members expressed their declarations of interest as set out in Appendix 1 of these minutes.

3. Matters of urgent business

No items were proposed as a matter of urgent business.

4. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2025 were signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

5. 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 (CE) said that there were no further updates to the report. A Member asked whether there had been a direct response from Defra in relation to the letter sent regarding the funding the waterways. The CE said that there had

been no formal reply from the Minister, however, the process whereby Defra allocated funds had only just started.

6. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (CE). The CE said that following the tragic accident at Oulton Broad, East Suffolk Council were taking the lead in the investigation and the Broads Authority and the club were working with them. The CE envisaged that once the investigation was complete, a report on lessons to be learned from the incident would be brought to the Navigation Committee.

The CE said that he thought the Authority had considerable success in persuading Defra that, in terms of the National Park grant, the Authority could use the grant on items that would traditionally have been seen as navigation items on the basis that access to and from the water was consistent with the second purpose of promoting opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Broads by the public.

The CE said that he saw this as a big step forward. Table 1 of the report sets out the Capital Programme as agreed by the Board at its meeting on 25 July 2025. A further report would be tabled at the next Broads Authority meeting on 19 September which would seek some amendments to the agreed Capital Programme on which the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) could provide more information. The HCME referred to the 22-tonne long reach excavator listed in table 1 of the report and said that after looking at the Authority's current stock of those machines and the work lined up for the next two years, it was decided that it would not be necessary at this time to purchase another excavator and would, instead, look to purchase a new tug to enable the Authority to help with work such as movement of pontoons, removal of wrecks, marker post installation and other activities. On review it became clear that by swapping out the 22-tonne excavator for a new tug would be more beneficial.

7. Annual Income and Expenditure 2024/25

Members received the report of the Director of Resources (DR). The DR reported that the audit was still ongoing and there had been, to date, no significant changes to the report in front of Members had been found that would cause any amendments. However, as the audit was still ongoing, there could be some items that would need to be adjusted. The report would come back to the Broads Authority in November with the final amended Statement of Accounts.

The DR said that the pension figures would change in the final Statement of Accounts because the Authority had to apply the Pension Asset Ceiling which came into effect in 2023/24. This meant that all assets in the pension fund could not be fully recognised because they would need to be available to pay people's future pensions and that would reduce the assets that were in the balance sheet. The DR said that the balance sheet would reduce by £10m, however, that was an adjustment to the pension reserves and not to the figures in the report.

8. Navigation income and expenditure 1 April 2025 to 31 July 2025 and 2025/26 forecast outturn

Members received the report of the Director of Resources (DR). The DR said that the report in front of Members went up to 31 July 2025 but was able to provide a verbal update on income figures up to 31 August 2025. There had been some positive movement on toll income – private tolls had increased by £22,782 and hire craft tolls had increased by £1,968, this therefore meant that the deficit in the report had reduced to £39,533.

The DR said that one of the variances in the report was in relation to the delay in works at Mutford Lock, however, following the repairs to the gates that money was no longer needed and had been moved back to the earmarked reserves.

A Member asked about the transfer of interest to the reserves meant a 9.9% reserve balance which was slightly under the required 10%. The DR said that because the income position had improved, the forecast position was now 10.4%. The reason why it had dipped to 9.9% was because of the cost of removing the sunken vessel in April.

A Member asked what proportion of income was coming from toll payers. The DR said that the proportion of the income was 50/50, however, this year the income from Defra included the capital grant. The Member asked what the trajectory was in relation to the income required from tolls. The DR said that budgets for 2026/27 were still being worked on in preparation for the tolls meeting in October, however, until the Authority received notification from Defra it was difficult to forecast. The Member asked whether the Navigation Committee could consider any reforms that could be made to make sure there was no increase in tolls. The DR said that the Authority was currently going through a restructuring process which was approved by the Broads Authority earlier in the year. Phase one had already been completed which had seen the directorates going from three to two, and phase two would be looking at other areas to reduce costs.

9. Construction, Maintenance and Ecology work programme – progress update

Members received the report of the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME). The HCME said that the report provided the year-end figures for 2024/25 and showed the total amount of time allocated and split between Navigation and National Park functions.

The HCME provided an update on the capital grant and the installation of pontoons on the Upper Thurne in between Heigham Sound and Hickling Broad where the existing vertical steel piling was failing. Pontoons would offer long-term security of moorings in this year and would be an easier structure to maintain, as well as being a cheaper per-metre cost to install. The HCME said that following the tender and procurement process, the Authority would be submitting a planning application in due course.

A Member asked whether the Authority had consulted with those who used the existing moorings as he was aware that there had been some discussion about the suitability of

pontoons in that area, the potential of narrowing the channel which could have an impact on the Three Rivers Race. The HCME said that those thoughts had been taken into consideration, however, consultation with various parties had been planned as part of the process, and added that at the planning application stage the public would have a chance to comment on the proposals.

A Member commented that the cost of plant cutting had grown exponentially in the last few years and asked whether the HCME had found that this trend had continued this year. The HCME said that plant growth had plateaued in the last three years, however, what was being seen was that the water plants were migrating further downstream as the water quality improved. This had resulted in additional cutting along the linear length of rivers. The Member asked whether this would be continued enhanced cost for the Authority. The HCME confirmed that this would be the case.

A Member commented that the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) had reported that Floating Pennywort had been seen further down on the River Ant and asked whether this was true, was the Broads Authority facing that threat, and was that threat growing. The HCME said that Floating Pennywort was on the River Ant. It had started at Honing Lock outside of the navigation area on the canal section, however, the Pennywort had self-spread and had now been found in Barton Broad. There was an ongoing effort with the Broads Authority, Environment Agency and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to manage each patch of growth as it was identified. The HCME said that there was constant monitoring of the situation by the Authority's Rangers, operations technicians and the ecologists.

A Member welcomed the work carried out on the Yare, and commented that Bargate Broad was becoming a problem for cruisers to moor. The Member asked whether the Authority could do anything about the water lily growth. The HCME said that he was familiar with the issues at Bargate Broad and had carried out surveys so understood the water depth issues, however, although the Broad wasn't the top priority, it was high on the list and the Authority was currently looking at the next five-year dredging programme. The Member asked whether it was possible to get the weed cutter into Bargate Broad. The HCME said that the water plant harvester did go through the two approach dykes and through the marked area, however, Broad was a SSSI site and the Authority only had consent from Natural England (NE) to manage the approach dykes and the marked area. The Authority had never sought permission from NE to manage the water plants within the Broad itself and that would need to be considered. The Member asked whether the Authority could look at the situation and seek permission as he was very concerned about the future for boats around the Brundall area and thought that the Authority should have a responsibility to ensure the navigation was actually a place where boaters can navigate on. The HCME said that he would look into cutting on Bargate Broad, however, there would be issues around staff time, where the cut material could be offloaded, and budget.

10. Water depth specifications

Members received the report of the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME). The HCME said that the report in front of Members was to propose a transparent process of a review of the waterways specifications, i.e. the dredge depths. The process outlined in the report was transparent and inclusive. The timeline for the process of the review would tie in with the next round of resetting of the objectives for the Waterways Management Strategy action plan.

A Member said that he welcomed the approach and suggested that one of the consultees in this process should be the local river cruiser class. The HCME noted this.

11. Management of Hickling Broad

Members received the report of the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME). The Chair said that there could be a lot of participation on this agenda item and so that everyone had a chance to speak, reminded Members to keep comments brief.

The HCME said that the report in front of Members set out where the Authority was in terms of investment that the Authority had put into Hickling Broad. The report provided an overview of the Authority's activities at Hickling Broad over the last ten years including dredging, habitat restoration, and water plant cutting. The report also included the ecological information available to date which supports any future management decisions the Authority might take.

The HCME said that the Authority had listened to stakeholders and users of the Broad and understood that sailing in Hickling Broad was highly valued. The Authority's role was to take all the information and comments on board, and with the input from the Navigation Committee, and come to a management conclusion. The ecological information was needed in this situation as it was the major legal requirement in terms of having evidence to move forward with any management decision. The original aims of the Hickling Broad Enhancement Project were to protect the water depth in the marked channel, increasing the water clarity, stabilising water plant growth, and increasing the habitat around the end of the Broad for the wildlife and the HCME said that the Authority had achieved those aims.

In terms of the water quality, the HCME said that the latest environmental and ecological data had been provided in the report and this showed that the Broad's water quality and plant growth had gone up and down and the situation was not particularly stable and any actions taken in Hickling Broad could have a detrimental effect on what was a delicately balanced system. The report sets out what the Authority does in Hickling Broad which included the management of the marked channel, water plant cutting in the marked channel three or four times per season, monitoring the water plant growth through hydroacoustic surveys to map the underwater extent and height of the water plants. The Rangers regularly patrol the areas to ensure that the channel was kept clear so that users are able to access the channel right up to the village moorings.

The HCME said that the requests for increased water plant cutting in Hickling Broad had been listened to and confirmed that the committee's comments were welcome.

A Member thanked the HCME for the excellent report and the amount of work that had been put into it. The Member commented that he had recently checked on riparian responsibilities on landowners at Hickling and a resident thanked him for the excellent work that the Broads Authority was doing in respect of weed cutting on the north-west of the Broad.

A Member thanked the HCME for the report and commented that it was a complicated issue and it was a legitimate aspiration to want to be able to sail on the Broad, however, he had concerns about how the extent of additional cutting might not be compatible with the conservation objectives of the highly protected site which was something of a success story in terms of clarity of water and ecology and in particular the rare Stonewort unique to the Broads. The Member said that the evidence did suggest that some limited and localised cutting could be looked at, but there was a need to look at how that additional cutting would impact the balance of the plant life. In addition, there was a concern about the potential cost of additional plant cutting where money was tight and there were pressures on other parts of the Broads, and added that further work would need to be done before considering any extra cutting.

A Member thanked the HCME for the comprehensive paper which focused on the ecology of the Broad and said that it was clear that a lot of effort had been made in this area, however, the improvements had come at the expense of the local community which was not mentioned in the report. The Member referenced a recent report on boating on the Upper Thurne and Hickling Broad produced by the NSBA and the Broads Society, which had been circulated to all members of the Committee. The Member commented that the Authority must be careful not to exclude people from Hickling Broad unnecessarily, in particular for sailing and other water-related activities which was beneficial for well-being and the wellness of nature – if you cannot access the Broad properly, you cannot enjoy nature. It was time to encourage more sailing vessels to Hickling Broad and to find ways to do that and for many years sailors had complained about the state of the channel. The top priority should be to ensure the maintenance of the existing channel on Hickling Broad, however, the design of the channel was such that traditional triangular racing courses could no longer be set. The Member said that he believed that facilitating racing by cutting water plants over a larger area should be the second priority for the committee to recommend. The Member suggested that a way forward would be to make sure the existing channel was maintained effectively and that there were adequate resources to prevent excessive plant growth and a larger area of the Broad to the north-west be managed in order to allow safer access for sailing and racing.

A Member commented that in 1997 the Potter Heigham pilot took 13,000 boats through the bridge, however, in 2003 the pilot took three and in 2004 there were none taken through. This year, none have been taken through to date. The Member said that the only craft going through Potter Heigham bridge were day boats and sailing yachts, therefore, in relation to navigation tolls, 90% of boats were not going through Potter Heigham up to Hickling Broad.

A Member said that at the moment, water levels were approximately 6” higher than normal which had an impact both on boats getting through the bridge and on boats getting in trouble with water plants as there was much more water on the system. This year, the Member noted that the water was very cloudy and yet there was prolific plant growth, therefore he did not think that the idea that clear water was required for good plant growth was correct. The Member commented that there was an historic right of navigation over the entire Broad and the channel was an artificial construct which was defined as the navigation. The evidence showed that this issue was both complicated and cyclical. With regard to the 2017-2019 trial, this showed that after three years there was no effect on the Stonewort and that conclusion, coupled with the suggestion from the Hickling Broad Lake Review – 1980-2024 that more could be done, was something that should be taken forward. Hickling Broad was the largest of the Broads with a history of boating and was part of the heritage of the landscape and was important to preserve.

A Member commented that if the Authority was going to look at extra cutting, there would need to be a sound business case for it if the majority of boats were unable to get under Potter Heigham bridge, this would need to be justified to the toll payers.

A Member commented that he did not recognise that 90% of boats could not get to Hickling Broad and was not sure where this figure came from, and added that he did not understand what this had to do with the enhancement of sailing regattas – many boats would get to Hickling on trailers.

A Member said that in an ideal world every part of the Broads would be free for everyone to use, however, in reality there were cost restraints and if there were a choice between dredging the rivers Bure or Yare where the majority of the boats could access, or Hickling where the majority of the boats could not access, the Authority had to bear in mind that a high percentage of those that pay toll fees could not access Hickling Broad.

The HCME said that table 3 of the report provided a breakdown of what it would take to deliver an expanded cutting programme at Hickling and the overall risk associated with it. It would be possible to work out the total cost of undertaking an expanded cutting programme but it would then come back to the resource reality within the Authority, i.e. the relative work in Hickling versus any other work carried out across the navigable system within the Broads. The HCME said that the operations team was currently working with reduced resources with two less operation technicians so any move to increase work in Hickling would mean that reciprocal work would not get done somewhere else on the system.

The Chief Executive (CE) thanked the HCME for an excellent report. He also thanked the Member who highlighted that this issue was a business case as this was, in part, about cost versus benefit. The CE said that officers had a useful meeting during the week with the NSBA and one of the things that came out of that meeting was that the number of people who would benefit from the proposal to widen the channel at Hickling Broad was relatively small. Therefore, what the Authority needed to look at was what was the benefit for that relatively small number of people against the significant costs, including the large preparatory costs of engaging with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England. The CE said that the Authority

had fewer staff than previously and would have to make some difficult choices, particularly bearing in mind the pressures on the hire boat industry, and officers would be talking to Members about where the balance laid.

A Member said that the committee had a duty over the navigation, and in particular the maintenance of that navigation. Hickling Broad was a very beautiful and important area and the only way that people could see Hickling would be from the water. The Member said what was important was being able to enable the Whispering Reeds boat yard to function. If people were not able to take day boats from Hickling, which they cannot do at present due to the weeds and it became uneconomic to run them, that was a problem. That was not about running regattas or races, it was purely about navigation in the channel. Therefore, the priority should be making sure that channel was clear enough so that small businesses could run and enable people to get out and see Hickling Broad.

A Member commented that a lot of this was down to finance and who pays and asked when the business case was put together would it be possible to look at third party funding or some form of external funding which would bolster those that benefited.

In response to a question on where the Authority went from here, the HCME said that fundamentally this would require a release of resources that the HCME did not currently have. It would therefore need a decision from the Broads Authority to change the work priorities and find money that was currently not in the budget. The question was where that money would come from – that was the type of choice that the Authority had. If the money was not available, then the Authority would have to stop doing work elsewhere to focus on Hickling.

A Member said that the risk analysis referred to in the report was very partial and quite narrow. What was needed was a risk analysis that took into account ensuring public access and ensuring local communities thrive. There had been a lot of discussion around business cases, but this was not mentioned in the report and the Member would welcome seeing a business case which did much more than simply look for a new budget within the Authority.

The Chair welcomed the thought of looking at outside funding opportunities and said that hopefully the HCME had enough to move forward on this issue.

A Member commented that a meeting about Hickling was held with Natural England in February 2025, to which Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the Broads Authority were invited but did not attend. The Member found the meeting very positive.

12. Boat Safety Scheme – compliance

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (CE). The CE apologised for a rather complicated paper, however, the Broads Authority had its own Act of Parliament which was amended by the 2009 Act. One of the important things that provided was a focus on safety of users of the Broads and adopted the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) in line with the national scheme. Much of that had worked really well, but one of the things that had come to the Authority's attention was that if someone knowingly did not have a Boat Safety Certificate (BSC) required for their boat, the process for dealing with that was rather difficult, lengthy

and costly. Prior to the Act, the Authority had some Byelaws which were a stop-gap and were not related to the national scheme but they set out a requirement for people to have compliance with the national scheme. The CE said what he wished to consult on was whether the Committee thought it would be a sensible and wise thing to seek a change to our Registration Byelaws, such that it became an offence if someone was required to have a BSC but did not have one.

The CE said that this was an initial report to get the Committee's views and would need to do some more work with the Solicitor to detail it because, as suggested in the report, it would be done under the 2009 Act.

A Member asked what happened with boats that are moored but are clearly not compliant. The CE said that the Rangers have an app on their phone which shows whether a toll had or had not been paid and whether a BSC was up to date and in place, and would then be drawn to the attention of the boat owner. Most boat owners would then comply, however, there were an increasing number of people deliberately not complying and the process set out in the 2009 Act was long, difficult and complicated. We, therefore, want a more straightforward process.

A Member commented that reputable companies had to comply with the BSS, however, he was aware of lots of liveaboards that do not comply. It was frustrating that boats that did comply with the BSS were at risk from those who did not, and added that nothing was done about them, therefore, anything fully supported anything that could make it easier to ensure people complied with the BSS. The CE said that the Authority did take action on this issue, but it took a lot of time and cost under the present circumstances. The Authority saw sunken boats on a more regular basis and came at a cost of both time and money to the Authority. What the CE would like to do was to try and address an improvement in the process.

A Member said that there were large holes in the BSS in that hull and deck conditions, stability, through-hull fittings, general mechanical condition, life buoys, and automatic fire extinguishers in engine bays were all not checked on private boats. There were huge differences in the BSS between private boats and hire boats. The CE said that he thought that it would be expected that hire boats would have higher level of certification.

A Member commented that the BSS had its faults but it was better than nothing and a hire boat had to comply with a far greater requirement and asked what the Authority would do where there was a boat which did not have a BSC, was not in good condition, and the owner did not have the funds to comply. The CE said that this was not an easy area of operation for the Authority, and it was getting more difficult. However, the Rangers did a fantastic job in dealing with individuals who were not easy to deal with, but ultimately the Authority would take these people to court and this was what the report was about. If a person was required to have a BSC and refused to do so, then the Authority could more quickly act and take people to court.

A member commented that this was about safety and fully supported anything that the Authority could do to make the process quicker and easier to ensure compliance.

A Member asked if a boat owner did not have a BSC could they still get insured. A Member replied that it was possible to get insured without a BSC but it would not be possible to get tolled.

A Member asked whether the Harbour Authority element provided any additional support on this issue. The CE said that this was the Broads Authority's Act of Parliament and an amendment to the Byelaw would need to be made to make it faster to deal with these issues.

The Chair said that there was not a requirement for a vote on this, however, asked Members for a show of hands for those in favour of the approach set out by the CE. The Members unanimously supported this approach.

13. Other items of business

There were no other items of business.

14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on 6 November 2025 at the King's Centre, 63-75 King Street, Norwich, NR1 1PH commencing at 10am.

15. Exclusion of the public

Tony Grayling proposed, and Stephen Bolt seconded.

It was resolved unanimously that the press and public be excluded from the meeting under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for consideration of the item below on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Paragraph 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act as amended, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public benefit in disclosing the information.

The public left the meeting and the recording was suspended.

16. Insurance requirements

Members received the exempt report from the Chief Executive. A summary of the discussion was contained in the exempt minutes.

17. Mooring negotiations - update

Members received the report from the Chief Executive and Asset Officer. A summary of the discussion was contained in the exempt minutes.

The meeting ended at 11:44am

Signed

Chairman

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Navigation Committee, 04 September 2025

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Mark Collins and Peter Dixon	11	Membership of Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association and the Broads Society. Other Registerable Interest. Granted a dispensation by MO to participate and vote.