

# Navigation Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2026

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## **Present**

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

## **In attendance**

Joseph Balaam – Governance Officer, Dan Hoare – Head of Operations, Emma Krelle – Director of Resources, Rob Leigh – Head of Communications, John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Delivery, Lorraine Taylor – Head of Governance.

## **1. Apologies and welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chair advised Joseph Balaam would be taking the minutes and welcomed the new Governance Officer.

**Apologies** were received from Sue Cadamy and Leslie Mogford

### **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 indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered.

## **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 6 November 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) advised the Authority had received advanced notice from Network Rail in relation to maintenance on the slew motor on Oulton Broad Swing Bridge. Consequently, the bridge would be out of action for some time in

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February. Confirmation on the exact dates were still outstanding. The CE commented this would be a useful time of year for works to take place as there would typically be reduced movement through Mutford Lock.

The CE said the Authority had been working with Birketts on the matter of Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) compliance who had advised amendments to the 1997 byelaws. The CE stated further work was needed before this was brought before the committee.

The report was noted.

## 6. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (CE). The CE said a number of issues had been raised in recent months that warranted the Committee's attention. First, the CE was delighted with the progress of upgrades to the washroom facilities at Acle bridge and Great Yarmouth. The CE emphasised this was funded by national park capital grant funds and hoped that the boating community would appreciate the improvements.

Second, an underwater drone had been purchased by the Authority following close work with Norwich University of the Arts. This had recently been deployed at Mutford Lock, and the CE was pleased with the quality of images produced by the drone and commented that it would be used regularly to assess the condition of the lock as well as other areas of the Broads. This would enable underwater assessment of obstructions, amongst other potential issues, without the need of divers. The CE expected this would reduce costs.

A Member asked if the drone had specific low visibility capabilities due to the limited underwater visibility in some areas. The CE was unaware of the drone's specifications but praised the drone's performance. The Director of Delivery (DD) advised the skill of the operator was essential to the clarity of images.

A Member asked if the drone could be used to aid the recovery of sunken vessels in order to prevent the need of divers and reduce expense. The DD stated the drone would have limited application for this purpose but could be used to assess how a sunken craft was positioned which could negate the need of divers in the first instance.

The third item related to sunken, abandoned and unserviceable vessels. The CE informed the Committee that Rangers had been busy in dealing with these vessels and so far, there had been forty such vessels this calendar year. The CE informed the Committee that his colleagues in both the Environment Agency (EA) and the Canal and River Trust (CRT) reported similar issues on a larger scale. A Member commented that it might be useful for the Authority to hire or purchase a high-resolution sonar system if the number of sunken vessels were to remain high.

A Member expressed concerns regarding the amount of time, energy and money spent on abandoned boats and questioned whether the position was sustainable, and believed this presented an issue for the National Park as well as navigation. The CE stated the Authority had

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handled the situation in the best way possible and reassured the Committee that staff were performing well and acting in accordance with established processes.

A Member suggested it might be useful to cooperate with EA and CRT to develop mutual long-term strategies to combat the issue and seek alternative sources of funds for vessel recovery. The Member also asked if the use of the drone would have an impact on insurance and liabilities assuming divers were not required. The DD advised five divers were required under current regulations. The CE said that use of the drone negated the need for divers in the first instance, which was an expensive process, and provided a safer means of initial assessment.

## 7. Proposed budget 2026/27 and financial strategy to 2028/29

Members received the report of the Director of Resources (DR). The DR advised that the report contained two items: actuals up to the end of November; and the draft budget. When the report was written, figures for December were not available and were thus shared with the committee. The DR referred to table 1 which showed a slight reduction in variance of £35,577. This means the total favourable variance at the end of December was £314,651.

The DR advised there was no further change to latest available budget, however, the forecast would increase slightly as interest rates remained higher than originally predicted. This improved the forecast by a further £15,000 to a forecast surplus of £40,621.

The DR drew the Committee's attention to the 2026/27 budget proposal which was based on the 3.5% toll increase recommended by the committee in November. Among paragraph 6.3 of the report, staff salary was now responsible for 67% of net expenditure due to pay increases. This was a similar figure to that of 2025/26 and represented 74% of expenditure on the consolidated budget. The DR said that staff costs were the main increases in expenditure across all three Directorates.

The DR highlighted an apparent reduction noted in section 7 of the report, however, this was due to the receipt of grant funds for electric pillars which was a one-off award in 2025/26 and as such was not brought forward in 2026/27.

Table 6 detailed the central cost forecast for 2025/26 and budget for 2026/27 up to 2028/29. In comparison 2025/26 appeared high due to the additional National Parks grant and no assumptions had been made about future capital from DEFRA.

Staff vacancies were highlighted under key assumptions as staff turnover, in which a gap in employment between a member of staff leaving and the employment of a replacement, would cause a variance in the budget. The DR assured the committee that all vacancies required Management Team justification to recruit.

The proposed expenditure from the earmarked reserves was presented under item 12 of the report.

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A surplus in the navigation budget of £69,496 was predicted. The Authority had previously committed to maintaining Navigation reserve funds at 10%, however, the predicted surplus would provide a cushion at 10.8% against future variations above the budgeted amounts. This provided a margin of around £38,000.

**Comments and questions on financial strategy:**

A Member asked if the Authority had received a response from the Norfolk pension scheme triannual evaluation and the impact this would have had on budget. The DR advised that the valuation had a good impact resulting in the reduction of Authority contributions by approximately 2%. This followed agreement from the fund and was due to the evaluation and performance of assets. This reduction would start April 2026 and had been calculated in the budget.

A Member highlighted underspending in water management and practical maintenance in the budget and queried whether the amount would be carried forward to the 2026/27 budget. The DR said that under normal circumstances any funds underspent would be placed in the navigation reserve funds. The DR further advised that budget holders could request carry forwards, under mitigating circumstances, to transfer the underspent funds into next year's budget.

A Member asked whether clarification could be provided as to how much of the £46,544, presented in table 2, could be attributed to sunken vessels. The DR advised the figure of £46,544 was a net figure as the actual amount for vessel recovery was £75,000.

A Member commented on the percentage of National Park and Navigation expenditure in section 10 of the report and noted a small percentage change and asked whether this would be reflected in spend and activity. The DR advised the only change made in the split between National Park and Navigation spending was a 1% increase which had been agreed in November. The Member noted a 41% to 59% split, with navigation being the higher of the figures, which varied from the equal 50% split in the current financial year. The DR advised this was because no assumptions had been made regarding capital grant funding from DEFRA.

A Member queried whether the new replacement tugboat was in addition to one purchased with the capital grant. The DR advised it had not been possible to purchase the tugboat using the capital grant as a spending deadline of 31 March was in place, and it was not possible to build the tugboat prior to this deadline.

A Member asked if there was any flexibility in the budget should toll income be lower than expected. The Chief Executive (CE) confirmed this was the case.

A Member sought clarification on the budget allocations of Buttles Barn as they believed this to be a National Park asset in addition to a Navigation asset due to the storage of environmental maintenance equipment. The DR confirmed there was a split in the earmarked reserve budget.

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A Member thanked the DR for the report and suggested that it might be useful to highlight the divisions of staff full time equivalents across Directorates. The Member commented they would be interested in viewing the numbers in Operations, support functions, and front line, and that it was important to protect front line expenditure. The CE said protecting front line expenditure had been one of the Authority's priorities this year and acknowledged that reductions had been made elsewhere, specifically communications.

## 8. Operations work programme – progress update

Members received the report of the Head of Operations (HO). The HO stated there had been several environmental challenges which had impacted the planned sediment management programme. The current progress had been summarised in appendix 1 of the report.

Water plant cutting presented similar challenges in that an increasing trend in growth had been highlighted which had required more staffing days to manage and commented that there was a drop in 2025 compared to the previous two years.

Winter 2025/26 presented the fourth year of the current five-year tree management programme and that during 2026 to the next five-year plan would be drafted. Factors that would be considered would be balancing safety and navigation as well as areas of importance to sailing.

The HO said that the Authority had been given the opportunity to change the electric pillars on 24- hour moorings. The pillars across the system varied in age and technology which created an issue for maintenance. It was planned to use the National Park grant to swap these pillars with updated technology in terms of metering and payment.

The HO said that a good response had been received through the survey regarding the proposed pillars, which looked to move payments to an app-based system. This should allow electrical credit to be transferred between pillars which was currently not available under the card payment system. The survey feedback received was used to guide the specifications in the project tender.

The HO said there was a limited number of suppliers that provided this technology but had received good engagement from some potential suppliers. The feedback from the survey raised the concern of coverage and reception from mobile phones at point of use, which was included in the tender so that suppliers could prepare solutions to this issue. The process was still underway with a deadline set for the tender of 23 January 2026.

The HO said that channel marker review was currently in progress. The work in Breydon to review markers and assess in relation to safety management had been completed. Work on this would continue upriver to the lower Bure, lower Yare and lower Waveney rivers. The markers at these points had a variety of shapes, colours and sizes which required standardising. This would be brought back to the committee at a later date to assess views on navigation safety management options.

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A Member expressed concerns that 5G coverage could be an issue in some areas which would cause issues for an app-based payment system when using electric pillars at moorings. The HO stated this was a challenge presented to potential providers who would need to lay out practical solutions for resolving this issue.

A Member commented that they had identified only a few areas with no emergency service coverage in North Norfolk, but the challenge would be to identify who was providing the coverage.

The HO added that the current payment card system was not a 24-hour system as the purchase of cards would depend on their availability in stores and the stores opening hours. It was hoped that an app payment system would provide increased flexibility to users.

A Member asked how many suppliers were likely to respond to the electric pillar tender. The HO said the number would be unknown until opening tenders, however, revealed the Authority engaged with two suppliers prior to releasing the tender but would be pleased to see additional response.

A Member was happy to see mention of the next five-year tree management plan in the report, however, wanted to point out that during the current plan the emphasis was focused on safety. Under this plan boating clubs, the Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association (NSBA) and the Broads Society had collaborated to identify areas where tree growth had impacted navigation and presented challenges for sailing boats in traditional sailing areas. The Member queried how these organisations could share details to the Authority for consideration in the next five-year plan. The HO stated he would welcome this input for consideration in the next five-year plan.

A Member raised a concern regarding safety issues at Breydon water and said that they had heard of multiple instances where people had fallen into the water whilst attempting to demast. The Member strongly believed a demasting pontoon was necessary on Breydon Water for safety reasons. The HO noted this and emphasised that any such incidents and near misses should be reported as the Authority relied on this information to address such issues of safety.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to place removable pontoons on the old commercial jetty at Breydon. Enquiries had been previously made; however, the Chief Executive (CE) stated the Department of Transport had refused consent for this. The CE assured the Committee that this safety concern was being addressed but said this would take time as a substantial consultation would be required. The CE hoped an agreement could be arranged between all interested parties to provide the most sensible solution. The HO said the Department of Transport were last approached on this matter approximately two years ago. The Director of Delivery added that responses from Rangers indicated the discussed jetty would not be the most preferable solution due to safety concerns.

A Member sought clarification on the monitoring activities of Natural England (NE) and queried whether grants were provided by NE. The HO said NE conducted their own

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monitoring activities, on SSSIs and other environmental factors that went beyond the scope of the Broads Authority. However, the Broads Authority had previously worked alongside them. NE have previously utilised the expertise of the Authority's ecologists on matters such as water plants.

## 9. Castle Marsh 24-hour mooring

Members received the report of the Head of Operations (HO). The HO said the report set out the intention to spend some of the National Park capital grant to fill a gap in the system's 24-hour moorings in part of the lower Waveney. This would enable greater access to remote marshes located in the lower Waveney valley. After partnering with Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the proposed location had been deemed suitable for a floating pontoon with a ramp providing connection from the flood bank. The HO brought this report to seek the views of the committee on the potential impact the structure might have on navigation.

A Member welcomed the proposed inclusion of the new mooring in an area that was otherwise lacking such facilities but queried why the walkway was on the right end of the platform and not central. The HO said this was the design recommended by the supplier.

A Member welcomed the proposal but queried whether it would be possible to install an additional pontoon to increase mooring potential and questioned the length of the ramp. The HO advised the pontoons were modular and could therefore be added to in future. The HO advised adding additional pontoons would not be an option at present due to the timescale of the project. Modification of the procurement process would delay the project, and it was necessary to spend the grant funds allocated to the Authority by 31 March 2026. The HO said the proposed pontoon was almost identical to an existing pontoon at Peto's Marsh of which Rangers reported few accessibility issues in terms of navigation.

A Member queried if it would be possible to moor boats side by side at the proposed location. The HO advised double and stern mooring would be inappropriate at this location due to its impact on available navigation width.

## 10. Other items of business

There were no other items of business.

## 11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on 16 April 2026 at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich NR1 1RY commencing at 10am. The Head of Governance said that at the April meeting, Members would be electing the Chair and Vice-Chair and that details would be sent to members in due course.

## 12. Exclusion of the public

Stephen Bolt proposed, and Bob Neate seconded.

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It was resolved that the 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 Paragraphs 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.

### 13. Insurance Requirements

The Chief Executive (CE) advised the Committee that legal advice was sought as to whether it could be made compulsory to require boats on the Broads to obtain wreck removal insurance under existing legislation. The CE stated the legal opinion was clear and at present the Broads Authority did not have this power. The CE suggested that it might be possible to include this requirement when any changes to the legislation were made in the future.

A Member suggested it might be beneficial to contact insurance companies regarding wreck removal insurance as it might help to clarify whether comprehensive insurance would cover vessel recovery. The CE said that this could be useful as the Authority possessed limited knowledge on insurance.

A Member asked whether it would be possible for the Authority to obtain insurance to protect against the expense of recovering vessels. The Director of Resources advised this was not something provided under the current policy and discussion indicated any premiums covering this would likely be too costly, if it were to be provided at all. Provision of such insurance appeared difficult as the sunken crafts were not the property of the Broads Authority. The Director of Delivery (DD) said the Authority would always seek to recover costs incurred through vessel recovery.

A Member asked whether The Port of London Authority (PLA) or the Canal and River Trust (CRT) had sought similar insurance clauses. A Member commented that he believed that neither organisation was seeking such clauses to his knowledge. It was acknowledged that sunken crafts were becoming a large issue across all inland waterways. The CE advised that the Authority was a member of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) and had good contact with other member authorities and added that the Authority had received correspondence from CRT and the Environment Agency (EA) to request advice regarding the Authority's approach to non-compliant boats. The DD said Authority was taking a proactive approach and advised vessel owners on the need of craft maintenance should the advice be deemed necessary.

The meeting ended at 11:15am

Signed

Chairman