

# Broads Authority

## Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2020

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## **Present**

Bill Dickson – in the Chair, Kelvin Allen, Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Matthew Bradbury, Andree Gee, Tristram Hilborn, Tim Jickells, Bruce Keith, James Knight, Simon Roberts, Matthew Shardlow, Simon Sparrow, Nicky Talbot, Vic Thomson, Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro.

## **In attendance**

John Packman – Chief Executive, Hilary Slater – Monitoring Officer, Andrea Kelly – Environment Policy Adviser, Emma Krelle – Chief Financial Officer, Natalie Beal – Planning Policy Officer, Rob Rogers – Director of Operations, Cally Smith – Head of Planning, Marie-Pierre Tighe – Director of Strategic Services, Maria Conti – Head of Governance (minute taker), Esmeralda Guds – Governance Officer (meeting moderator), Sarah Mullarney – Governance Officer (meeting moderator)

## **1. Welcome and apologies**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Apologies** were received from Gail Harris and Fran Whymark.

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

Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 and provisions of The Local Authorities Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings England and Wales) Regulations no. 392.

The Chairman reminded members that the meeting was being held under the provisions of the above regulations and in accordance with the Broads Authority's Standing Orders for remote meeting procedures agreed on 22 May 2020. The meeting was being live streamed and recorded and the Broads Authority retained the copyright. The minutes remained the record of the meeting.

### **Chairman's announcement**

The Chairman commented on the unprecedented challenges the Authority had been facing in recent months, and acknowledged all staff for adapting to a changing operating environment because of the Covid-19 situation. He paid tribute to the frontline officers involved in responding to the recent tragic events on the waterways, and said the Authority and the commercial sector must consider what additional safety measures could be put in place.

## **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 July 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be 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. The Chief Executive reported that the Government's latest Covid-19 guidelines would not affect most staff operations, other than in some public facing roles. All staff remained busy, dealing among other things with an extremely high number of visitors, incidents of antisocial behaviour on the waterways, unpaid tolls, and new Government initiatives such as the Green Recovery Challenge, Kickstart and the cycling and walking plan for England. He asked members to bear with staff during this intense period.

**The report was noted.**

## 8. Response to Covid-19 emergency and financial position of the Broads Authority and local businesses

The Chief Executive introduced the latest update on the financial impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on the Authority and the hire boat industry, and the proposed way forward. The recommendations in the report were endorsed by the Navigation Committee on 3 September. The overall financial position was continuing to improve, and the shortfall in the Authority's toll income was now c.£200k. Next year was likely to be more difficult; hire boat numbers had reduced this year and were likely to fall further next year, although hire boat bookings for next year were promising. The number of private boats had also gone down this year. The resultant loss of income would put pressure on the Authority's expenditure, which was rising due to a number of factors including the recent 2.75% staff pay award, and plans to upgrade the tolls system and replace the Breydon Water marker posts. There were also ongoing financial demands such as ranger launch replacements, increasing litter collection and safety management. Details and options would be presented for members' consideration at the Tolls Briefing on 5 October.

A member suggested that the Authority investigate the funding streams available for Covid-19 business recovery, and that members should inform officers of potential opportunities.

In response to a member's question, the Chief Executive reminded members of the recent agreement with Defra, which in extremis would allow the Authority to use funds from National Park reserves for Navigation expenditure, with Defra making up any funding deficit beyond that up to a maximum of £800k. At present it seemed these steps would not be needed, and the Chief Financial Officer was meeting with Defra officials shortly to discuss the Authority's latest position.

The Chief Executive reported that the Comprehensive Spending Review outcome was awaited, but the Authority was likely to receive a 'flat cash' National Park Grant (NPG) settlement. While better than a cut, this still amounted to a reduction in spending power because of inflation. Historically, the NPG to the English National Park Authorities (NPAs) and the Broads Authority collectively had fallen by around £20m if the NPG in 2004/5, with inflation added, was compared to the current NPG level, and the CEOs were lobbying MPs to highlight this matter. The Government's response to the Landscapes Review was also awaited. The English NPAs were gathering evidence on the pressures being faced by Ranger Services this year and potentially into the future, and the Broads Authority had also presented its own case for more Rangers directly to Defra. The UK NPAs were working together on a bid to the national Kickstart Scheme to get young people into employment, and the Authority was bidding for seven job placements.

A member asked how the Authority was dealing with the significant increase in paddle sports this season. The Chief Executive said many of these new users were local young people, and the Rangers were speaking to them about tolls and safety matters.

A member referred to Defra's recent Environment Bill update on the development of targets to tackle environment issues, and asked how this would impact resources. The Chief Executive replied that, while the Authority could not rule out the short term need to transfer funds from the National Park reserves to fund Navigation expenditure to deal with current pressures, it was also working within the National Park family to highlight biodiversity issues in protected landscapes and what measures were needed.

#### **It was resolved by consensus**

- (i) To undertake a further survey of hire boat yard bookings and income at the beginning of October;
- (ii) To engage with individual yards to understand more fully their overall income position for this season and the prospects for 2021;
- (iii) To require yards to pay the third toll instalment of 30% by 30 September as already agreed; and
- (iv) To delay the date for the fourth and final toll payment of 30% to 30 November, to give time for the Navigation Committee and the Broads Authority to consider the results of the second survey and the level of charges for 2021/22.

## **9. Options for the use of the Capital Receipts Reserve funds**

Members received a report on whether the Authority should repay the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) early and a proposal to use the Capital Receipts Reserve to fund improvements to the facilities for the boating public at Acle Bridge. The recommendations in the report were endorsed by the Navigation Committee on 3 September.

The Chief Executive said there were a number of possible calls on the Authority's capital reserves, but officers would like to prepare a detailed proposal for refurbishment works at

Acle Bridge. Members asked to see a fully costed plan for approval in advance of any works. It was noted that grant funding may be available for the provision of accessible public toilets, and the member for Norfolk County Council agreed to investigate this with his Council.

**It was resolved by consensus**

- (i) That early repayment of the PWLB loan is not appropriate;
- (ii) That officers prepare costed plans for the improvement of the facilities at Acle Bridge for the Navigation Committee and the Authority to consider at future meetings; and
- (iii) To note that the Management Team has decided to use a PWLB loan to finance the replacement of an excavator as highlighted in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

## 10. Wetland demonstration project

The Environment Policy Adviser presented a proposal for the Authority to lead on the development of a wetland demonstration project in the Upper Thurne as part of the CANAPE programme, in collaboration with the Horsey Estate, the Internal Drainage Board and the Environment Agency.

The Chairman said this was a fantastic project and an example of what the Authority should be doing, and other members agreed.

A member referred to the shoreline management planning for this area of the coast, and that managed retreat would take the wetland demonstration project area back to salt marsh. The Environment Policy Advisor replied that shoreline management planning was a significant longer-term issue, but it was important to demonstrate that wetland could be managed in this way as part of the bigger land management picture. It was noted that this issue was discussed recently by the Broadland Catchment Partnership Steering Group.

Members asked if Anglian Water had been invited to contribute expertise or funding to this project, how this small-scale demonstration could be upscaled given the limited capacity in the Broads landscape, and how the project linked into the carbon reduction planning and the Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme Broads Test and Trial. A member said it was important to publicise the multiple benefits of the project, and asked about the viability of a larger market for sustainable products like reedmace.

The Environment Policy Adviser replied that Anglian Water was not a formal CANAPE partner, but was involved in the project and would be asked for advice on constructing the wetland. Authority officers were also getting advice from colleagues in Cambridgeshire, Germany and Denmark who had practical experience of this type of project, as well as keeping in touch with new products such as insulation boards from reedmace.

She went on to note that there was a need to map the many environmental land management initiatives and post-Brexit changes in a clear and simple way to help local farmers and land managers make decisions. Tier 3 in the ELMS Broads Test and Trial matched

Defra's national system for ambitious land use change such as creating wetlands on peatland, while Tier 2 was about delivering existing sustainable bespoke land practices such as grazing and fen management. The proposed demonstration project aimed to show farmers and land managers how this land use change worked in practice, and to keep in touch with others' work on testing the market viability of biomass products. While areas such as the Cambridgeshire fens may be better for large-scale reduction in carbon emissions from agriculture, the Broads site could act as a demonstration for other areas, particularly along the Thurne coastal drainage area and Waveney valley.

**It was resolved by consensus** to endorse a wetland demonstration project as part of the CANAPE programme in collaboration with the Horsey Estate, the Internal Drainage Board and the Environment Agency.

## 11. Joint position statement on Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Members received a report on a proposal to update the Joint Position Statement on Strategic Flood Risk Assessments, agreed by the Authority and the Environment Agency. The update was endorsed by the Planning Committee on 14 August 2020.

**It was resolved by consensus** to adopt the amended Joint Position Statement on Strategic Flood Risk Assessments.

## 12. Annual meeting arrangements

The Chairman introduced a report noting that this year's Annual Meeting scheduled in July had been postponed due to Covid-19, and invited members' views on whether to hold the meeting this year.

A member said that, although there may be some lost opportunity for oversight by other members, it was logical to defer the next Annual Meeting until July 2021. Other members supported this view. A member said the Covid-19 situation could last some time and, while he saw merits on both sides about when to hold the meeting, the Authority should try to adopt its usual processes as much as possible. It was noted that everyone had to get used to a 'new normal'.

It was recognised that the Authority was facing difficult challenges over the next few months, and a member said it would be advantageous to maintain existing appointments at this time. The Chief Executive noted that an Annual Meeting in November would create a lot of work for officers already working under pressure, but it was for members to decide. A member said it was unnecessary to put this demand on officers, particularly as the national situation may be more settled by next year.

Nicky Talbot proposed, seconded by Bruce Keith, and

**It was resolved** by 17 votes for and 1 against to cancel the 2020 Annual Meeting and hold the next Annual Meeting in July 2021, with existing appointments effective until that time.

### 13. Planning policy – Residential Moorings Guide

Members received the revised draft Residential Moorings Guide, being produced to help implement the Broad Local Plan policies relating to residential moorings. The report outlined the consultation responses to the first draft guide, and arrangements for public consultation on the revised document, approved by the Planning Committee on 11 September.

**It was resolved by consensus** to endorse the revised draft Residential Moorings Guide for public consultation.

### 14. Planning policy – guide to understanding and addressing the impact of new developments on peat soil

Members received the draft Peat Guide, being produced to support the Broads Local Plan policy on reducing the amount of peat that is excavated. The Planning Committee endorsed the draft guide for public consultation at its meeting on 11 September.

**It was resolved by consensus** to endorse the draft Peat Guide for public consultation.

### 15. Annual safety audit 2019/20

Members received the annual health and safety report and the annual review of marine incidents for 2019/20.

**It was resolved by consensus**

- (i) To note the priorities for action on internal health and safety for the coming year, which are to:
  - (a) Continue the promotion of the safety reporting system to help influence a positive change in culture and to capture near miss events (Opportunity for Improvement);
  - (b) Focus on reducing the number of incidents resulting from driving; and
  - (c) Continue monthly health and wellbeing communications with staff and volunteers.
- (ii) To note the Annual Marine Incident Statistics.

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

The Chairman introduced this item by saying that experience this season suggested members had serious issues to consider as a Board around the issues of alcohol and navigation. The Chief Executive had rightly commented publicly on this. These were not easy issues, and the Boat Safety Management Group would be meeting on 5 October to discuss them.

The Director of Operations said he had to report, with great sadness, a boating related fatality on the River Bure on 15 September. The matter was currently subject to a police investigation. He also reported that a team from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch was in the

Broads today to investigate the fatal accident at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station on 19 August. As both cases were under investigation, it was inappropriate to comment further at this stage.

The Director of Operations reported that Rangers were dealing with a high incidence of antisocial behaviour on the waterways, and had issued numerous advisory notices and verbal warnings. The Chairman commented that members had to think carefully how to support officers in managing this behaviour and keeping everyone safe.

A member said his own hire boat operation had altered its handover procedures to give hirers more information, but that antisocial behaviour witnessed during the Covid-19 situation was not specific to the Broads. Another member said he was shocked by the poor conduct he had seen on the Broads and local beaches, and by the number of boaters not wearing life jackets. However, he felt the Authority must be careful not to make rules this year that may not be needed next year. A member asked the Board to acknowledge its support for the bereaved families, hire boat operators and Authority staff affected by the recent tragic events.

The Chief Executive replied that the pattern of visitor activity this season, both in volume and behaviour, was being experienced across the National Parks, and Rangers were facing extremely difficult conditions. While some local issues were outside the Authority's control, there were things that could be done to promote safer behaviour. While he was pleased to hear that some handover procedures had been increased, he suggested members should revisit the idea of hire boat operators having an online training system for hirers prior to arrival. Hire boat design could also be looked at.

The Chief Executive added that toll payer surveys always pointed out the shortage of Rangers, and this was highlighted in the submission to Defra. While the Authority could not restrict visitor numbers, managing capacity safely was an issue to consider with boating organisations and other stakeholders. A member suggested the Authority also work with sectors such as the drinks industry to support educational programmes. Another member noted the stress people were under during the Covid-19 situation, and the need to be kind and set a good example.

## **17. Minutes to be received**

Members received the minutes of the following meetings:

- Audit and Risk Committee – 3 March 2020
- Broads Local Access Forum – 3 June 2020
- Navigation Committee – 11 June 2020
- Planning Committee – 26 June 2020, 17 July 2020, 14 August 2020

## **18. Feedback from members appointed to outside bodies**

The member appointed to the How Hill Trust reported that, as the Trust's operations depended largely on school visits, it was effectively furloughed.

## 19. Formal questions

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

## 20. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Authority would be held on Friday 20 November 2020 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.07pm

Signed by

Chairman

## Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Broads Authority, 25 September 2020

<b>Member</b>	<b>Agenda/minute</b>	<b>Nature of interest</b>
Harry Blathwayt	10	Ward councillor
James Knight	8	Hire boat operator
Greg Munford	8	Hire boat operator
Simon Sparrow	8	Hire boat operator