

Broads Local Access Forum

Agenda 07 June 2023

10.00am

This is a remote meeting held under the Broads Authority's [Standing Orders on Procedure Rules for Remote Meetings](#).

Participants: You will be sent a link to join the meeting. The room will open at 9.45am and we request that you **log in by 9.45am** to allow us to check connections and other technical details.

Members of the public: Please email BLAF@broads-authority.gov.uk with any queries about this meeting.

Introduction

1. Apologies for absence and welcome
2. Declarations of interest
3. **To receive and confirm the minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 8 March 2023 (Pages 5-11)**
4. **Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings- to note the schedule (Pages 16 -18)**

Items for discussion

5. **Campaigning for more public access in National Parks**
Presentation by Campaign for National Parks
6. **Waterways access (Pages 19 -23)**
Report by Head of Construction, Maintenance & Ecology
7. **Broads Local Access Forum Annual Report 2022/23 (Pages 24 -29)**
Report by Waterways and Recreation Officer
8. **Integrated Access Strategy and Boat Census update**
Verbal update by Waterways and Recreation Officer

Other matters

9. Any other business
10. To note the date of the next meeting – **Wednesday** 30 August 2023 at 10.00am

Broads Local Access Forum membership

Member	Address	Phone number	Email	Interest
Linda Aspland	Quercus 229 Norwich Road Wroxham NR12 8SL	01603 951814	linda.aspland@icloud.com	Waterborne recreational users / Paddle sports
Richard Atkins	Riverview Cottage Off Church Lane Surlingham NR14 7DF	01508 538083	richard.p.atkins@btinternet.com	Paddle sports/ Walking
Keith Bacon	Woodcroft Wood Street Catfield NR29 5DF	01692 581314	keithbacon@keme.co.uk keithbacon@broadland.net	Archaeology and landscape heritage
Harry Blathwayt	20 Broad Reaches Ludham NR29 5PD	01692 678644	Harry.blathwayt@north-norfolk.gov.uk	Broads Authority
Christine Cane	The Roundhouse 160 Tuttle Lane West Wymondham NR18 0JJ	01953 606019	christine.cane@bhsvolunteer.org.uk	Equestrian riding and driving
Peter Dixon	The Smea Hickling NR12 0YL	078509 30486	Peterjbdixon@hotmail.com	Waterborne recreational users
Tony Gibbons	19 Blithewood Gardens Sprowston NR7 8PS	01603 400973	tonygibbons.ndaa@gmail.com	Angling
Tim Harris	Catfield Hall Catfield NR29 5DB	01692 580220	tim@catfieldhall.com	Nature conservation / Archaeology and landscape heritage
Alison Holden-Standley	Homestead Beach Road Sea Palling	01692 598609	AlisonStandley@gmail.com	People with Disabilities/Access for all

Member	Address	Phone number	Email	Interest
Peter Mason	7 Brick Kiln Gardens Catfield Gt Yarmouth NR29 5DW	01692 583152	peter.mason51@sky.com	Walking/Tourism and local business
Steve Read	The Anchorage Broadview Road Oulton Broad Lowestoft NR32 3PL	07720 808715	stevereadcon@btinternet.com	Walking/water borne recreational users
Martin Rendle	62 South Hill Road Norwich NR7 ONG	01603 339133	adventure@norfolkoutdoor.co.uk	Paddle sports/Tourism and local business
Michael Scott	c/o Broads Authority Yare House 62-64 Thorpe Road Norwich NR1 1RY	01603 610734	michaeldorf@hotmail.com	Broads Authority
Christopher Yardley	Larkhill Cottage Priory Lane Ingworth NR116PG	01263 479691	Cj.yardley@tiscali.co.uk	Waterborne recreational users/ nature conservation

Kylie Moos – Broads Local Access Forum Secretary

Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich, NR1 1RY

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Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 08 March 2023

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Present

Keith Bacon – in the Chair, Linda Aspland, Harry Blathwayt, Christine Cane, Tony Gibbons, Tim Harris, Steve Read, Christopher Yardley.

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Kylie Moos – Administrative Officer, Andrew Walters – Waterways and Recreation Officer, Ken Hawkins- Norfolk Local Access Forum.

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies received from Richard Atkins, Katie Baxter, Peter Dixon, Peter Mason.

2. Declarations of interest

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

3. Minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 30 November 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings

Open water swimming

The Authority website was updated last summer after reviewing its position on open water swimming through a number of smaller working groups. The Authority does not promote open water swimming, other than for organised events. The Authority website highlights the hazards of open water swimming. The action has now been complete.

As part of a project funded by Anglian Water, The River Waveney Trust are currently undertaking 12 months of water quality monitoring at Bungay. The aim of the project is to test the feasibility of the site becoming an official designated inland bathing water.

Lost paths in the Broads

The Chair has previously written to Norfolk and Suffolk County council to identify paths “lost to the river”. Several members of the Forum were disappointed that there had not been a reply or acknowledgement and suggested specifying certain areas in the Broads in future correspondence to prompt a response.

Ken Hawkins suggested that the Chair raises the query at the Norfolk Local Access Forum Rights of Way subgroup meeting which is taking place next week.

The Authority and Norfolk Country Council was successful in a partnership bid to the Community Infrastructure Levy fund. The funding includes the restoration of footpaths on the Wherryman's Way including, Hardley Flood, Bramerton and Surlingham.

Staithe report

The Chair has previously written to the Environment Agency (EA) for their opinion on the Staithe report, no response has been received. There is a concern for staithe which have been previously inherited by the EA but for which the EA has not taken ownership. Dan Hoare suggested selecting two staithe of interest to the Forum and submitting a new request to the EA. Since the original request was submitted there has been a change in staff members at the EA and a targeted approach may produce a response.

The Chair agreed to select two staithe of interest to the Forum and contact the EA.

5. Proposal to renew the Dogs on Leads Public Space Protection Order for Herringfleet Hills

East Suffolk Council have contacted the Forum for their views on extending the current Dogs on Leads Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Herringfleet Hills. The area is Open Access land and would be in place for a further three years.

As Open Access land the Authority has a duty to carry out checks for any barriers to access. Any issues would be fed back to officers who could then inform the Forum.

Forum members agreed with the proposal to keep the PSPO in place for a further three years.

6. Water quality monitoring

At the previous Forum meeting there was a request for the EA to present results of bacterial water quality monitoring in the Broads. The EA were unable to attend the meeting however they have written a response for the Forum which has been included as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

Comments

Some of the Forum members were surprised that the EA does not carry out any bacteriological monitoring in a National Park which is based in and around water.

A Forum member commented that abstraction licenses are being granted on the lower Ant by the Environment Agency, which allows water to be extracted from the river without this type of data to support the decision.

The discharge of sewage into rivers is being reported on more frequently in the media and public interest is building. With the increase of open water swimming, now is the time for a proactive response.

Sea Palling has recently lost its Blue Flag status due to the levels of E. coli in the water.

There is a reedbed mitigation scheme planned for a site in North Norfolk. North Norfolk District Council have agreed to the site only if there is assurance from Anglian Water that they are able to deal with the additional waste and water supply. A Forum member added that offset arrangements are not a solution and the pollutants should be treated at source.

A Forum member asked if the Authority is required to undertake its own bacteriological water quality monitoring as a responsibility to the recreational users of the Broads. With its own data the Authority could challenge the EA and Anglian Water. The Authority promotes splash sports in the Broads, but there is a risk that users may become ill if they come in contact with contaminated water. Dan Hoare responded, the Authority does not replicate the statutory duties of other bodies. Working in partnership with other organisations was most likely. The inland bathing status which the River Waveney Trust are applying for in Bungay will provide the first indication on the faecal bacterial load in the rivers.

Dan Hoare suggested that the issue of water quality and human health in the Broads is raised with EA officers at an upcoming Broad Plan Partnership meeting this week. The Forum agreed that a formal request should be submitted to the Director of Strategic Services who oversees the Broads Plan, raising concerns for the absence of water quality data, hazards posed to human health and uncertainty about the level of risk to users.

The Chair agreed to send a letter to the Director of Strategic Services sharing the views of the Forum on water quality monitoring in the Broads.

7. Permissive access and ELMS

Norfolk Local Access Forum (NLAF) have recently written to the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and permissive access. NLAF have been concerned that over the last two years there has been no mention of public access in the scheme. On 26 January 2023 there was a policy announcement for ELMS and access was mentioned, NLAF made the following comments.

- Agreements that are being offered that last for 5 – 10 years have limited value and do not allow for much planning and certainty.
- Permissive access, particularly if it is short term, runs the likelihood of having friction again when those agreements come to an end just when people have got used to making use of them
- In previous stewardship schemes access was granted for landowner to allow access, but this often wasn't useful for all. NLAF have suggested a criteria for access:
 - provide access to areas which are otherwise difficult or impossible to reach, and/or
 - connect with existing access routes to provide enhanced route opportunities, and/or
 - provide routes where there are currently very few available, and/or

- provide safe routes enabling access without using or crossing major or busy roads, and/or
- are identified by local communities as of particular benefit.
- In addition
 - It should be a requirement for funded paths to be open to the public for most of the year, with very few exceptions (such as health and safety considerations during harvest times, for example).
 - Paths should be advertised in a common, easily accessible, format familiar to the public with use of online and mobile communication making this relatively straightforward.
 - NLAF also believes that there should be a requirement that landowners have to consult with their neighbours about proposed new routes, particularly if they involve any kind of landscaping that may alter the nature of the area. This will be especially important where any work may result in adverse impact on the existing access network and should be managed so that those responsible for the existing network are not put to additional cost.
 - Although we support the principle of encouragement and guidance, we do also believe that there has to be some penalty for persistent and deliberate flouting of the 'rules' under which funding is given and we consider that the previous system of cross compliance should be considered as a possible enforcement mechanism.
- Details of the scheme have been released over an extended period of time. It would be helpful for Defra to indicate a timescale so that people are prepared and have the opportunity to respond.

NLAF encourages the Forum to send a response the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are similar access concerns in the Broads.

Comments

Forum members agreed that Broads Local Access Forum should send their own response to the Secretary of State for the Environment and copy in local MPs. A member of the Forum agreed to draft a letter and send to the Chair for review.

The Chair agreed to send a response to the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding ELMS and permissive access.

8. Current access projects by the Broads Authority

Andrew Walters provided an update to the Forum on some of the access projects that the Authority have been working on over the previous few months. The improvements have been

made possible by the Removing Barriers fund, a £79,000 uplift to the National Park grant from Defra which needed to be spent on capital items by the end of the financial year.

Three types of improvements

- Physical footpath improvements
- Real time signage
- Signage for partially-sighted walkers

Hoveton Riverside Park

Key issues

- Footpaths around park degraded
- Footpaths are muddy or under water for several months of the year

Improvements

- The improvements will see the footpath being raised 30cm and widened to 1.5 meters to ensure it is accessible for all.

Further improvements in 2023/2024

- The footpath to the Ra trip boat will also be improved to ensure it is accessible for all.
- New path to the canoe launch

Horse Windpump

The footpath from car park to café, Windpump and around to the view point is being widened, levelled and raised to make dry and useable year-round. Work began this week and will be completed soon after Easter.

Halvergate Marshes

Installation of two digital interpretation boards which include live, up to date information at point of use on the trail network in Halvergate. The boards can include weather, daylight hours, wildlife sightings, livestock notices, trail diversions and live train times.

The signs will be solar powered and there is no illumination so they will have little impact on the visual landscape. Installation will take place in the next month.

Tactile maps

A tactile map is soon to be installed at Whitlingham. RNIB are currently producing one for the Authority for Beccles Quay.

A further £82,000 of funding from Defra for 2024/2025 has been agreed. At the same time the Integrated Access Strategy will be reviewed and the criteria which is used to rank projects will be assessed.

9. Any other business

Somerton Parish Council footpath

Somerton Parish Council have contacted the Forum asking for support to reinstate Footpath No.8. The footpath used to follow the southern edge of the Hundred Stream from the Somerton to Horsey Road to the track immediately behind the dunes/sea defences.

The Forum agreed to support the aspiration of the parish council to reinstate Footpath No.8.

Potter Heigham Bridge

A hole appeared on Potter Heigham Bridge in December 2022 approximately 4 feet deep. Since then Norfolk County Council have been carrying out surveys and it has been used as a pedestrian bridge only. The bridge is a grade 2 listed building which is registered as a national monument. Potter Heigham Parish Council will be asking the residents their preferred option for the future of the bridge at an upcoming parish council meeting on the 21 March.

1. Remain as a pedestrian, cycling and horse riding use only
2. Access for all vehicles under 7.5 tonnes
3. Cars only

Comments

- Many of the businesses around the bridge are in favour of the pedestrianisation and the asset would be improved by removing the traffic lights.
- There is opposition from local residents who live on or close to Bridge Road, as the pedestrianisation has meant that all traffic is now diverted down Bridge Road.
- The bridge is a crossing point on the Weavers Way.

The Chair agreed to send a letter to Norfolk County Council supporting the permanent pedestrianisation of Potter Heigham Bridge with the inclusion of horse riding and cycling.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum would be held on Wednesday 7 June 2023 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.00pm

Signed by

Chairman

Appendix 2- Environment Agency response to bacterial water quality monitoring in the Broads

creating a better place
for people and wildlife



Overall, water quality in our rivers, estuaries and coastal waters has improved greatly over the last few decades, largely due to robust regulation by the Environment Agency and investment by the water companies. For example:

- Sewage treatment works now discharge 67% less phosphorus and 79% less ammonia into rivers than they did in 1995.
- The number of serious water pollution incidents caused by the water and sewerage companies has been reduced dramatically, from over 500 in the early 1990s down to just 62 in 2021.
- The bathing waters around our coasts are in the best state they have been for decades: in 2022, 72% of beaches and inland waters met the 'Excellent' standard, the highest since new stringent standards were introduced in 2015.

But we still have a long way to go. Getting to lasting solutions will take decades still, but we know what the problems are, and we know how to address most of them. Everyone should understand the scale of the challenges and the investment needed to put them right.

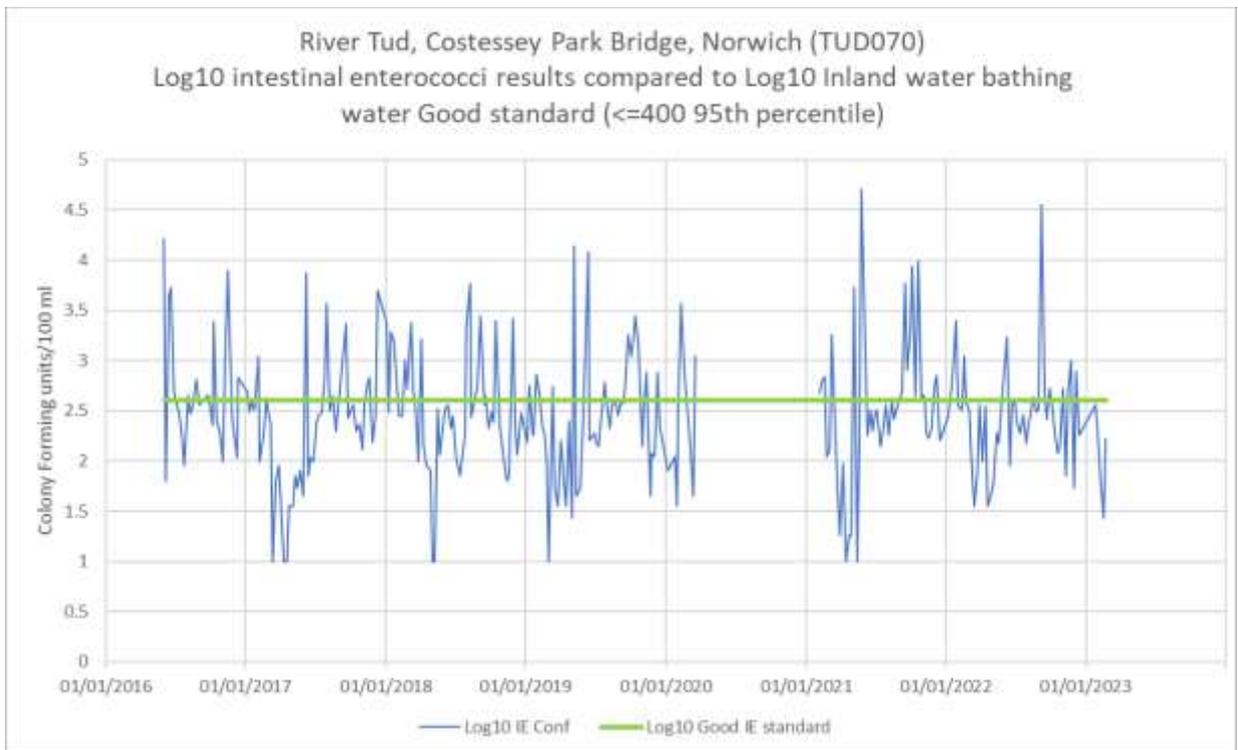
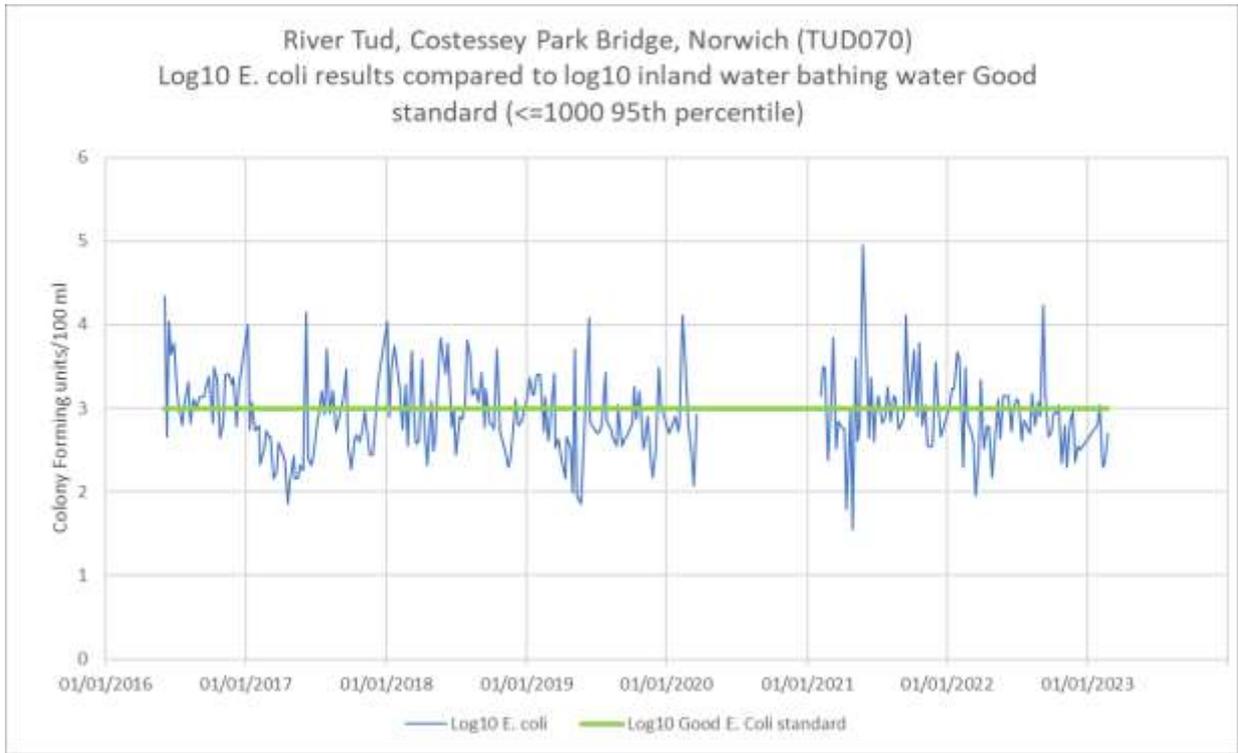
We will continue to collaborate with businesses to help them to make the best choices for water quality, but anyone caught breaching environmental laws faces enforcement action, up to and including prosecution.

The EA carries out around 90,000 water quality sampling visits a year from 13,000 different locations so we can see what is happening in England's waters.

However, we don't currently do any monitoring for FIOs (Faecal Indicator Organisms) in the Broads. FIOs give us an understanding of the level of bacterial pollution in surface or marine environments that would assist us in understanding the level of pollution from sewage and other sources. FIOs are usually monitored in areas designated as Bathing Waters, both coastal and inland, and in Shellfish Protected Areas.

We have monitoring data from other rivers - rivers Tud, Deben, Alde and Ore which is collected as part of the Catchment Sensitive Farming monitoring programme which shows what sort of levels and trends are found in freshwater rivers.

The below plot shows E. coli and intestinal enterococci levels in the River Tud. The inland bathing waters Good standard has been overlaid for comparison only – as it is a standard that only applies to designated inland bathing waters – and the results have been logged to better enable the data to be visualised.



Broads Local Access Forum minutes, 08 March 2023, author Kylie Moos

The data from the Tud shows that E.coli and intestinal enterococci levels are variable and at times reach very high levels. Similar levels and trends are likely to be found in the Broadland rivers.

Sewage pollution can be devastating to human health, local biodiversity and our environment. Storm overflows must only be used under strict permitted conditions that control their environmental impact. The EA is holding the industry to account on a scale never seen before. We have significantly driven up monitoring and transparency from water companies in recent years, so that everyone can see what is going on. This includes Event Duration Monitoring: This measures how often and for how long storm overflows are used. Through the EA's requirement of water companies, the number of storm overflows monitored across the network has increased from 10% in 2015 to almost 90% now monitored, and we will reach 100% cover by the end of the year. All the data is published [online](#).

Recreational water users on the Broads can use this data to get an idea of historic spills in the area they are interested. However, this data is not live. Water Companies are being pushed to provide live or nearly live data on their websites which will enable the public to make an informed judgement about whether or not to get into the water. Publishing accessible data is an important step to reversing the overuse of storm overflows, but disclosure is only ever the beginning. People want to see tangible progress.

The evidence from EDM clearly shows there is no room for complacency and water companies have a very long way to go. They need to invest more in tackling storm overflow pollution. Any water companies in breach of their permits are acting illegally and must act urgently address any non-compliance.

Only wider action through water company investment, better farming practices and simple steps taken in the home to prevent sewer misuse will help ensure we have healthier sewers, cleaner rivers and a better environment for all.

The EA continues to work with government, the water industry, farmers and others to improve water quality in our rivers and we are making the case for the funding we need to protect the environment in England. We also need more investment from the farming and water industries and for local catchment partnerships to do their part.

Broads Local Access Forum

07 June 2023

Agenda item number 4

Summary of progress 07.06.2023

Title	Meeting date	Lead officer	Summary of actions	Progress so far	Status
Lost Paths in the Broads	09/06/2021		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify 'Lost Paths' to the river Contact NCC and SCC to identify 'Lost Paths' 	<p>September 2021 Norfolk LAF representative agreed to raise this item at a future meeting.</p> <p>December 2021: Norfolk LAF representative agreed that 'Lost Paths' will be raised at the January 2022 Norfolk Local Access Forum meeting.</p> <p>August 2022: The Chair has written to Norfolk County Council and Suffolk Council and requested a list of all of the paths that have been lost to the river.</p> <p>March 2023: The Chair agreed to raise this item at the upcoming NLAFF Rights of Way subgroup meeting.</p>	In progress

Title	Meeting date	Lead officer	Summary of actions	Progress so far	Status
Staithes Report	04/12/2019		Contact the Environment Agency asking their opinion as a follow-up from the publication of the staithes report.	<p>September 2021 The Chair has written to the Environment Agency but has yet to receive a response. A follow up phone call will take place with David Horsfall.</p> <p>March 2023: The Chair agreed to select two staithes of interest to the Forum and contact the EA.</p>	In progress
Water quality monitoring in the Broads	30/11/2022	Waterways and Recreation Officer	Invite the Environment Agency to a future meeting to discuss water quality monitoring in the Broads.	<p>February 2023: Written update to be provided in advance of the meeting on 8 March 2023.</p> <p>March 2023: The Chair sent letter to the Director of Strategic Services (DoSS) sharing the views of the Forum on water quality monitoring in the Broads on 09/03/2023, The views were also discussed the March Broads Partnership meeting.</p> <p>April 2023: DoSS responded to the BLAF Chair requesting more details about the request from the Forum.</p>	In progress

Title	Meeting date	Lead officer	Summary of actions	Progress so far	Status
				May 2023: A report of water quality will be presented at the Broads Authority meeting on the 12/05/2023.	
Permissive access and ELMS	08/03/2023		Send a response to the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding ELMS and permissive access.	April 2023: Letter was sent to the Secretary of State for the Environment on 26/04/2023.	In progress
Potter Heigham Bridge	08/03/2023		Send a letter to Norfolk County Council supporting the permanent pedestrianisation of Potter Heigham Bridge with the inclusion of horse riding and cycling.	March 2023: A letter was sent to NCC stating the support of the permanent pedestrianisation of Potter Heigham Bridge. The Bridge Team Manager has since retired, and the post is vacant. May 2023: Forwarded letter on to interim Team Leader at NCC.	In progress

Date of report: 22 May 2023

Broads Local Access Forum

07 June 2023

Agenda item number 6

Waterways access

Report by Head of Construction, Maintenance & Ecology

Summary

Where water-based recreational activities occur outside of the marked and actively managed channels, the more natural environmental conditions of the Broads, with vegetation such as trees, shrubs, emergent wetland plants like reed and water plants on or below the surface, pose a challenge to the more adventurous navigator. However, most of the more complex wetland habitats in the Broads are protected by national legislation, being home to some of the UK's rarest and most vulnerable species. The role of the Broads Authority in facilitating water-based recreation has to be balanced and proportional to the demand, the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, and the economic well-being of the area. This report outlines some of these challenges, the constraints on management activities and the current approach taken by the Broads Authority.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report should be read in conjunction with the report the Broads Authority Navigation Committee (Water plant management, agenda item 12, [Navigation Committee 8 June 2023 \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk)). The report to Navigation Committee covers the Authority's approach the water plant management which, for resourcing and biodiversity considerations, is exclusively in river reaches and areas of marked channels in some open broads. This report to BLAF is an opportunity for discussion of the challenges faced by waterways users and the options for facilitating

safe and enjoyable recreation outside of the main areas traditionally managed for motorboats and larger sailing vessels.

- 1.2. Increased appreciation and direct engagement with the local environment have been positive changes observed in outdoor recreation since the ease of restrictions following the COVID pandemic. The rise in the popularity and number of people actively participating in paddleboarding, canoeing/kayaking and wild swimming in the Broads has become more frequent and noticeable. Lower capital outlay, ability to take quick or flexible opportunities for such water based recreation and greater access possibilities from land are all appealing factors for many people. This is in comparison to the greater investment and time commitment required if owning or hiring motor or sailing vessels. The number of people recreating in the Broads for the first time by these more accessible means has also been reported by canoe/paddleboard hirers and the ranger team who check users for possession of the relevant navigation tolls.
- 1.3. The more mobile forms of waterways use can access greater areas of the Broads that motor or sailing vessels physically cannot. Water depth, channel width, vegetation, private landownership and riparian rights all being constraints for larger vessels, where there are navigation rights to do so. With the additional access opportunities afforded to paddled craft, the Authority guidance [Canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](#) is that users also have a responsibility to ensure they know where they can access without trespassing and that disturbance to wildlife is avoided, especially during bird breeding season (April to July).

2. Broads Authority facilitation of waterways access

- 2.1. The location of publicly accessible slipways and launch points are promoted on the Authority's website [Slipways and launching points \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](#) along with a zoomable map to locate these points. Last year a new canoe launching pontoon has been installed at Geldeston Lock on the River Waveney, adjacent to the Authority's 24 hour mooring.
- 2.2. As outlined in the Navigation Committee water plant management report, water plant cutting in the growing season generates sufficient under keel clearance for motor and sailing vessels, which is crucial for maintaining access along and across the navigable waterways. See the [Waterways Management Strategy & Action-Plan 2022-27 \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](#), section 4.2 for the general approach taken by the Authority for water plant management. The cost and staff resource available to carrying out water plant cutting is balanced across all other waterways maintenance tasks through the year. As the staff resource is finite, increased allocation in one maintenance task means a reciprocal decrease at some point in the year for another area of waterways management.
- 2.3. The responsibility for water plant management in the zones outside the actively managed marked channels and river reaches is the topic for debate. Private boat dykes,

mooring cuts, marinas, boatyards and other adjacent waters, are outside the scope of the Authority's responsibility for navigation management. The areas of publicly accessible waterbodies, which have an active right of navigation, as per [Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#), part 2, paragraph 8, are then in realm of what is deemed appropriate management, prioritised according to demand, resource availability and ecological considerations. In terms of the functions of the Authority in relation to the maintenance of the navigation area, Part II, section 10 of the 1988 Act states that:-

(1)The Authority shall—

(a) maintain the navigation area for the purposes of navigation to such standard as appears to it to be reasonably required; and

(b) take such steps to improve and develop it as it thinks fit.

2.4. Equally, Part I, section 13 of the 1988 Act also states:-

“(1) The Authority may, for the purpose of conserving the natural beauty of any area—

(a) close to navigation any area at the edge of any waterway within the navigation area; or

(b) restrict navigation in any such area to specified classes of vessel.”

The inherent conflict of multiple management objectives within the navigation area, particularly around the edges of sites, and the legislative backing to enable such decision making, requires an evidence led approach to ensure management choices are fair, transparent and take a wider view across the Broads as a whole.

3. Hickling Broad case study

3.1. Hickling Broad is an example where these access and water plant management discussions have been taking place since the initial “clear water” period in 1998-2000 with vigorous water plant growth. This ecological recovery and the impacts felt by waterways users, came after several decades of relatively unimpeded navigation over the whole broad. The evidence base for decision-making and continued ecological monitoring was subsequently developed. The Upper Thurne Working Group (UTWG) was established in January 2001 with a wide group of local and statutory stakeholders with the overall aim:

‘to develop by consensus a common vision and plan for sustainably managing the rivers and broads of the Upper Thurne, based on a sound understanding of the functioning of the hydrological and ecological catchment area, its importance for natural and cultural heritage, navigation and other forms of recreation, social and economic activities, and on the promotion of best environmental practice in its management.’

3.2. As developed and reported to the UTWG, a trial of cutting water plants within a dense stonewort bed was performed, with subsequent monitoring over three seasons. The

final report for this experiment is attached as an appendix to the report on water plant management, agenda item 12, [Navigation Committee 8 June 2023 \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk).

- 3.3. Over the past three years, the abundance of water plants, particularly the mixed community of stoneworts, including several nationally scarce species, has again reached particularly high growth levels. See [Broads Annual Water Plant Monitoring Report 2022.pdf \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk). Access for vessels outside the marked channel is difficult, if not impossible in some areas, during the peak growth season (May-October). The most recent hydroacoustic survey of Hickling Broad (May 2023) has shown that 83% of the bed of the broad is covered by water plants. This is 15% greater than the same time last year.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1. The financial implications for Broads Authority navigation budgets are outlined in the water plant management report, agenda item 12, [Navigation Committee 8 June 2023 \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk).
- 4.2. Locally, the waterside businesses in Hickling are reporting impacts from loss of trade and reduced offer of activities, in part due to the conditions in the broad not meeting all users expectations. The closure of the Pleasureboat Inn in 2020 coincided with the COVID pandemic and remains closed. Anecdotally, the Hickling Broad Sailing Club has had some members not renew and would-be participants in particular races not attend.

5. Risk implications

- 5.1. The risk implications for the Broads Authority operations are outlined in the water plant management report, agenda item 12, [Navigation Committee 8 June 2023 \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk).
- 5.2. From a public safety perspective, the risk of paddleboarders, windsurfers and canoers/kayakers getting into difficulty in areas of dense water plant growth has increased. Presence of water plants restricts movement if people are immersed in water and could also make righting vessels or getting back into vessel more of a challenge.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. In conclusion, the aquatic environment of the Broads has undergone a recent shift in water quality and abundance of water plant growth. This is a success story in terms of the improvement in water treatment, sensitive agricultural practices in the catchment and general reduction in the negative impacts of eutrophication. Where the resultant increase in water plants has impacted on users ability to make the most of their experience of being out on the water, or to gain access to a desired location, this has caused conflict between access and conservation objectives. The Authority's response

has been to invest more time, effort and budget into managing this challenge, over the whole of the Broads area, for the benefit of as many users as possible. With the ecological recovery having been the result of multi-million pound investments from numerous stakeholders over the past few decades, the “new normal” for environmental quality and recreational users is apparent. Where the Authority can make balanced and affordable management decisions to facilitate waterways users’ access, it shall do so. This needs active involvement and engagement from all stakeholders.

Author: Dan Hoare

Date of report: 22 May 2023

Background papers: Water plant management, agenda item 12, [Navigation Committee 8 June 2023 \(www.broads-authority.gov.uk\)](#)

[Broads Plan](#) objectives: **C3** - Manage water plants and riverside trees and scrub, and seek resources to increase operational targets

Broads Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2022/23

May 2023

Broads Authority
Yare House
62-64 Thorpe Road
Norwich NR1 1RY

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Statutory purpose

The Broads Local Access Forum is an independent advisory body established by the Broads Authority in 2003, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Act states that the purpose of the Forum is to be a statutory advisory body to provide guidance and advice to the Broads Authority and other organisations on the improvement of public access within the Broads, and to contribute to opportunities for open air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. In providing advice, the Forum will have regard to:

- The needs of land management
- The conservation of the natural beauty of the area
- The management and maintenance of recreational access whilst balancing this against the needs of nature conservation, agriculture, the interests of landowners and managers, navigation and countryside management projects within the Broads.

The Forum's Vision

The Broads is an unrivalled wetland of natural diversity, heritage and special character. It is a place where people come to explore, enjoy and find spiritual refreshment. Access to the Broads should be clear and easy to use, respectful of wildlife and land management, meet users' needs and promote responsible and harmonious behaviour. The Broads Local Access Forum will champion access improvements and management, represent a wide range of interests and contribute to sustainability for the environment, communities and the economy.

What has happened during the year?

The Forum at work

The Forum delivered its purpose in a number of ways between April 2022 and March 2023:

- (i) Three public meetings held to agree its advice to the Broads Authority and other organisations. Two meetings were held online and one in-person which included a site visit to a new all-access footpath at Rockland Staithe.
- (ii) The Forum discussed the lack of reference to public access in DEFRA's Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment highlighting their concerns.
- (iii) The Forum contacted Anglian Water and the Environment Agency and had reports and presentations from both on the issue of water quality and its potential impact on the health of water users (in particular for paddlesports). The Forum subsequently advised the Broads Authority on the issue.
- (iv) The Forum provided representation and guidance to the Norfolk Local Access Forum.

- (v) The Forum gave suggestions and advice on a number of projects being delivered by the Broads Authority.

Challenges faced by the Forum

As previously reported, there is a continuing need to increase the diversity of representation on the Forum and work will continue to recruit and hear more diverse voices.

Advising the Broads Authority and other bodies

The Forum has given advice to a number of bodies over the year:

- Norfolk County Council, general Public Rights of Way (PROW) improvements and recommendations.

The Forum has also advised the Broads Authority on:

- Water quality and its potential impact on human health.

Access reports and presentations

The Forum received the following access reports and presentations:

- Russell Wilson from the Trails team at Norfolk County Council presented phase 1 of the Wherryman's Way access improvements to the Forum. Norfolk Country Council and the Broads Authority are working together for key strategic improvements on the Wherryman's Way.
- Russell Wilson from the Trails team at Norfolk County Council presented the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Norfolk. The purpose of the plan is to create a proposed cycling and walking network across the county, and to identify and prioritise improvement schemes which can be delivered over the short, medium and long term.
- Emily Chittenden, Broads Authority Project Officer "Rails, Sails & Trails", presented Generation Green to the Forum. The project had a national target of connecting 100,000 young people with nature and Protected Landscapes.
- 'Safety of splash sports in the Broads: Anglian Water's responsibilities, challenges and future plans for water quality improvement'. Grant Tuff, Natasha Kenny, Tom Balfour and Emily Linsdell from Anglian Water presented Get River Positive, an initiative to improve river health and river quality.
- Jason Beck from the Policy department at East Suffolk Council presented the East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to create safe, coherent, direct, comfortable, and attractive cycling, walking and wheeling environments that lead to improvements in health and wellbeing, facilitate greater social interaction and play, encourage more environmentally sustainable lifestyles, reduce road congestion, and support economic growth.

- ‘Environment Agency response to bacterial water quality monitoring in the Broads’ - this report was provided to the Forum following a request to the Environment Agency.
- Andrew Walters, Waterways and Recreation Officer, Broads Authority, provided an update to the Forum on some of the access projects that the Broads Authority have been working on over the previous few months. The improvements have been made possible by the Removing Barriers fund, a £79,000 uplift to the National Park grant from Defra which needed to be spent on capital items by the end of the financial year.

Working in partnership

The Forum worked with the following partner organisations:

- Norfolk County Council
- Norfolk LAF
- Environment Agency
- Norfolk Trails

Observers and advisors to the Forum

- Russell Wilson, Norfolk County Council
- Emily Chittenden, Broads Authority Project Officer “Rails, Sails & Trails”
- Jason Beck, Policy department at East Suffolk Council
- Grant Tuff, Natasha Kenny, Tom Balfour and Emily Linsdell from Anglian Water

Who makes up the Broads Local Access Forum?

Chair and Vice Chair

In August 2022, the Forum re-appointed Keith Bacon as Chair. The Forum agreed that the appointment of Vice Chair was not required at this time. If the Chair is unable to attend a future meeting than an interim Vice Chair will be appointed for the duration of the meeting.

Members and representation

Chairman: Keith Bacon – Catfield

Representing archaeology and landscape heritage

Vice Chair: Peter Dixon - Hickling

Representing waterborne recreational users

Linda Aspland – Wroxham

Representing waterborne recreational users and paddle sports

Richard Atkins - Surlingham

Representing paddle sports and walking

Louis Baugh – Neatishead

Representing landowners and managers

Katie Baxter - Wroxham

Representing paddle sports, tourism and local business

Harry Blathwayt – Ludham

Broads Authority member

Christine Cane - Wymondham

Representing equestrian riding and driving

Tony Gibbons – Norwich

Representing angling

Tim Harris – Catfield

Representing nature conservation, archaeology and landscape heritage

Alison Holden-Standley

People with Disabilities/Access for all

Peter Mason - Catfield

Representing walking, tourism and local business

Stephen Read – Oulton Broad

Representing walking and waterborne recreational users

Martin Rendle – Norwich

Representing paddle sports, tourism and local business

Michael Scott

Broads Authority member

Richard Webb – Norwich

Representing walking and sailing

Christopher Yardley – Burnham Thorpe

Representing waterborne recreational users and nature conservation