

# Navigation Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2020

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## **Present**

Nicky Talbot – in the Chair, Kelvin Allen, John Ash, Linda Aspland, Mike Barnes, Harry Blathwayt, Matthew Bradbury, Andrew Hamilton, Greg Munford, Simon Sparrow, Paul Thomas, Alan Thomson.

## **In attendance**

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Environment, Essie Guds – Governance Officer (moderator), Bill Housden – Collector of Tolls, Emma Krelle - Chief Financial Officer, Sarah Mullarney - Governance Officer (minute taker), John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Operations, Sara Utting – Governance Officer.

## **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from Leslie Mogford.

## **Remote meeting standing orders and recording**

The Chair welcomed everyone to this meeting of the Navigation Committee, which was being held remotely under the Standing Orders for remote meetings adopted by the Broads Authority on 22 May 2020. The meeting was being live streamed and recorded, with the live stream accessible from a link on the Authority's website. The Broads Authority retained the copyright of the recording and the minutes remained the formal record of the meeting.

## **2. Matters of urgent business**

No items were proposed as a matter of urgent business.

## **3. Declarations of interest**

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

## **4. Public question time**

No public questions were raised.

## **5. Minutes of last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

## **6. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following discussions at previous meetings**

Members received a report summarising the progress of issues recently presented to the Committee.

In response to a member's question about the status of Haven Bridge, it was explained that there had been problems with the electrics and a major overhaul of this was expected in the spring. Norfolk County Council, who owned the bridge, were seeking an interim solution to

allow manual operation to raise and lower the bridge. UK Power Networks was expected to make power available to the bridge soon to allow this solution to be tested.

**The report was noted.**

## 7. Improving safety on the Broads waterways

The Chief Executive (CEO) paid tribute to the work of the Ranger team and Quay Assistants who had been under additional pressures this year following the four tragic accidents, which were highly unusual for the Broads. They had also been responding to incidents of poor behaviour from the increased numbers of visitors and boats. He also thanked the Construction, Maintenance and Environment teams who had continued to work throughout the COVID restrictions.

The CEO outlined the proposed measures for improving safety on the Broads waterways, including development of an online training package for hirers. This was being explored with the Broads Hire Boat Federation and would be discussed at a meeting next week, along with handover procedures. A member said the visitor training needed to be targeted to highlight the hazards with boarding and disembarking vessels. Another member referred to the international regulations for preventing collisions at sea, and suggested this be included in the training as it applied to the Broads Authority. The importance of wearing lifejackets was also discussed, with one member suggesting this and other safety messages be incorporated into a mobile app such as Aweigh.

It was reported that an issue raised by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) inspectors was that of tidal conditions. Following discussions with the Broads Hire Boat Federation, training will be offered by the Broads Authority's Head of Ranger Services to hire boat yard staff who were not familiar with navigating difficult conditions on the Bure and Breydon Water.

In relation to Ranger Services, the CEO reported that there had been an increase in the time spent on navigation functions, as outlined in the Chief Executive's report (item 9) and Table 3 in Appendix 2, which shows that the current position for navigation/national park functions is a 83:17 split. Ordinarily, the divide is 60:40, with this time being funded, in proportion to the time spent, from Navigation income and National Park Grant respectively. The funding split would be amended at the end of the year to reflect the actual divide, projected as 70:30, and it was proposed to use this ratio for Ranger time and costs in future years.

The CEO said it was likely that the same level of intense activity and potentially poor behaviour would be present on the waterways next year, and the Authority had a responsibility to assess and reduce risk under the Port Marine Safety Code. It was acknowledged that other National Parks had encountered similar issues with antisocial behaviour. The CEO added that further messaging was required about the issues related to alcohol consumption on the water. Members discussed stricter measures for people under the influence of alcohol.

The consensus from members at the tolls briefing, held on 5 October 2020, was that they supported an increase in levels of patrolling. The proposal for additional Rangers was covered in agenda item 8. Some members commented that the high volume of visitors was to the National Park area and not just limited to navigation, and they suggested the National Park Grant fund more of the Ranger activities. The CEO explained that the costs were attributed to the activity, and the navigation element was inevitably more demanding.

The Chair reiterated thanks to the Rangers and Yacht Station staff for their response to the recent tragedies, and offered condolences to the families affected. The Vice Chair of the Authority said it was important not to forget the impact of the incidents on staff and members, highlighting the issues around mental health. He added that the safety measures had the support of the Broads Authority Chair. Members were also in support of the initiative to promote safety on the Broads, and asked to be updated on discussions regarding an online training package. The CEO concluded that any additional safety measures implemented before the publication of the MAIB investigation could be included in their final report.

**The report was noted.**

## **8. Proposed navigation charges for 2021-2022 in the navigation area and adjacent waters**

The Chief Executive presented members with an update on the second survey of hire boat businesses. Responses indicated that companies were in a better position than originally predicted in June, and had benefited from local authority grants, the Job Retention Scheme, and relief on VAT. However, there has been a decrease in weekly hire boat numbers this year and the trend was expected to continue in future years, but not at the same rate.

As of 30 September, hire boat numbers were down 10.5% (a loss of 154 hire boats). The most significant loss was from the weekly hire cruisers, which accounted for approximately 85% of the hire boat toll income. Private motor cruisers were also down by 3%, whereas rowing craft, including stand up paddle boards, small dinghies, and kayaks, were up 16%. The CEO added that the huge growth in small vessels was positive for the future of the Broads.

It was reported that using the latest figures, toll income up to 20 October, the forecast had been adjusted to a potential shortfall of £143,000, which was much less than previously forecast at the beginning of the pandemic. It was noted that payments were not being made to the earmarked reserves, attributing to the reduction in expenditure outweighing the reduction in income. Expenditure had also been revised to take account of the additional time Rangers had spent on navigation activities. The closing reserves were now predicted to be approximately 15% of expenditure, above the minimum level required.

Priorities for the forthcoming year were ongoing maintenance for moorings and dredging, public safety and a replacement of the computer software for the tolls system. The proposed safety measures included an online training package for hirers, as outlined in the previous item, and an increase in Ranger patrols, with the introduction of a dedicated prosecution and

Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) Ranger and four additional seasonal Rangers to cover the extended patrol time.

The intention for the online training was that it would be industry led, with the Broads Authority providing support and a contribution of £20,000. An overall cost for the training package was to be determined. The additional Ranger posts would allow the team to cover the system seven days a week and into the evenings. A specification for the tolls system would need to be developed next year for initial work to commence in 2022/23. The Authority would need to explore the benefits of capitalising the costs of the replacement system and borrowing from the Public Work Loans Board.

To maintain the current levels of service, a 3% toll increase across the board would be required, whereas the inclusion of all additional safety measures, supported at the Members' Briefing, would need a 7.5% increase. The Chief Executive proposed that the Authority seek approval from Defra, on a once only basis, to use £250,000 from the National Park reserves to fund the navigation safety package (i.e. online training and one full time and four seasonal Ranger posts) for the first two years, at a cost of £130,000 in 2021/22 and £120,000 in 2022/23. With this funding, only a 4% toll increase would be required for 2021/2022. This would provide the Authority with the opportunity to fund the safety package in 2023/24 from tolls if it was still required.

Members were presented with sample toll increases for the most common size boats. The percentage of private boats paying less than £10 extra for the year was 45% with a 7.5% toll increase, and 67% with a 4% toll increase.

Members discussed the cause of an increase in visitors to the Broads this year, and how new visitors could be retained in the future. The Chief Executive said it was a pattern seen across the National Park family. The NPUK Communications team would be launching a variety of campaigns on the new [National Parks website](#), encouraging people to enjoy the National Parks in a safe and appropriate manner.

A member commented on the need to manage the trend of a decreasing number of hire boats and the loss in toll income this would incur, and whether private payers would subsidise a smaller fleet of hire boats. He added that private tolls were good value compared to other inland waterways; however, another member said it was difficult to make comparisons. A member questioned whether hire boat trends would revert to smaller craft given the current Covid-19 restrictions, but it was noted that it was difficult to predict demands and that everything remained uncertain at this time.

A member observed that there had been fewer boats in the water this season, but visitor numbers in August appeared not to differ greatly from the same period last year. He added that forward bookings were ahead of where they were forecast, and that visitors were receptive to digital content with the pre-arrival information sent by hire boat operators being accessed by more visitors. However, the increase in new visitors had also brought new challenges, which had also been witnessed by other National Parks.

In response to member concerns about the certainty of Defra agreeing to the safety package funding, the Chief Executive said he hoped to have a formal response to the proposal before the November Broads Authority meeting. It was explained that the Authority would need to agree a Change Control Notice as a formal amendment to the Authority's grant agreement with Defra. If unsuccessful, an alternative recommendation would need to be made to the Broads Authority. Navigation Committee members would be kept up to date.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive explained that additional funding from the Treasury was unlikely at this time given the financial position of the country. He noted that, of the four major UK inland waterway authorities, the Broads Authority was the only one that did not receive any public funding. The CEO said Defra had not ruled out the possibility of additional funding, and officers would pursue this in the future.

Members welcomed the one-off deal with Defra and supported the 4% toll increase with the proviso that Defra fund the safety package over the next two years. Members discussed the importance of clear and positive messaging with a toll increase.

**It was proposed by Matthew Bradbury and seconded by Linda Aspland to make the following recommendations to the Broads Authority:**

- 1. In view of the recovery of the industry it is not appropriate to offer hire boat companies a reduction in this year's tolls. The deadline for the collection of the final instalment of Hire Boat tolls is the end of November.**
- 2. To seek permission from Defra to fund the navigation safety package in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 from National Park Reserves.**
- 3. To raise tolls across the board by +4% to maintain services and provide for funding the safety package in 2023/2024.**

**The first recommendation received nine votes in favour with three abstentions, and members were unanimous in supporting the second and third recommendations.**

The three recommendations would be presented to the Broads Authority at the 20 November 2020 meeting.

## **9. Chief Executive's report and current issues**

Members received an update report on matters relating to the maintenance and management of the waterways.

**The report was noted.**

## **10. Construction, maintenance and environment work programme - progress update**

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Environment (CME) gave an update on the work programme.

A member referred to issues with high water levels in the Northern broads and asked what mitigation measures were being taken to avoid vessels becoming stuck under bridges. The Head of CME acknowledged the difficulties faced by businesses and residents and said the longer-term effects of rising water levels were starting to become apparent. He explained that dredging deeper and increasing river depths was not a solution for a tidal system such as the Broads, as dredging specifically removes accumulated sediments so would not manage rivers in terms of water flow. He added that the Broadland Futures Initiative focused on longer and wider term interaction of river depth, width and placement of flood banks.

The Head of CME said the immediate response was to look at water level trends and whether there had been a recent increase. Water level data from the Environment Agency could be used to look at the frequency of impact of high water levels. A member commented that the Broads Internal Drainage Board (BIDB) had been pumping out floodplains into over topping rivers on rising tides, and he said he would be raising the issue at the BIDB meeting on Monday.

A report on the results of the experimental cutting of stoneworts in Hickling Broad would be shared with the Upper Thurne Working Group as part of the next stage of consultation. The final output would be presented at a future Navigation Committee meeting.

**The report was noted.**

## **11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on Thursday 14 January 2021, starting at 2pm.

The meeting ended at

Signed

Chairman

## Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Navigation Committee, 22 October 2020

| <b>Member</b>    | <b>Agenda/minute</b> | <b>Nature of interest</b>                                 |
|------------------|----------------------|---|
| Kelvin Allen     | 8                    | Broads Angling Services Group, Chairman                   |
| John Ash         | 8                    | Toll payer, Trustee Wherry Yacht Charter Charitable Trust |
| Linda Aspland    | 8                    | Toll payer  |
| Mike Barnes      | 8                    | Toll payer  |
| Harry Blathwayt  | 8                    | Toll payer  |
| Matthew Bradbury | 8                    | Toll payer – Canoe England                                |
| Andy Hamilton    | 8 & 9                | Private and commercial toll payer                         |
| Greg Munford     | 8 & 9                | Director of boating holiday business                      |
| Simon Sparrow    | 8 & 9                | Private and commercial toll payer                         |
| Nicky Talbot     | 8                    | Toll payer  |
| Paul Thomas      | 8                    | Toll payer  |
| Alan Thomson     | 8                    | Toll payer  |