

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2013

Present:

Prof Richard Card (Chairman)

Mr Andrew Alston	Mr Tony Gibbons	Mr Simon Partridge
Dr Keith Bacon	Mr John Hiskett	Mr Bryan Read
Mr Brian Barker	Mr Brian Holt	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Henry Cator	Mr Peter Jermy	
Mr Mike Evans	Mr John Lurkins	
Mr Mike Flett	Mr Peter Medhurst	
Dr Martin George	Dr Philip Pearson	

In Attendance:

Mr T Adam – Head of Finance
Ms H Ayers – Administrative Officer
Ms N Beal – Planning Policy Officer (observing)
Mr A Clarke – Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer
Ms A Long – Director of Planning and Resources
Mr J Organ – Head of Governance and Executive Assistant
Dr J Packman – Chief Executive
Mr R Rogers – Head of Construction and Maintenance
Ms T Wakelin – Director of Operations

6/1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Toser, Mr J Barnwell, Ms B Greasley, Mr C Swan and Mr R Slatter.

6/2 Appointment of Chairman

The Chief Executive (JP) set out the procedure for the selection of the Chair which was agreed by members. .

JP advised that he had received a communication from Julian Barnwell proposing Richard Card (RC) as Chairman, which was seconded by Richard Starling (RS), and JP invited further nominations.

Mike Flett (MF) proposed Keith Bacon (KB) as Chairman, though it was noted that this proposal was for a single meeting only and for the Forum to establish a panel to select an independent Chair. This was seconded by Bryan Read (BR). Members agreed to partake in a secret ballot which resulted in the outcome of 12 votes for RC and 5 votes for KB. RC was therefore elected as Chair for a period of one year. Members congratulated RC on his new appointment and he took the Chair.

RC thanked members for his appointment as the new Chairman and made it clear that he was committed to operating with impartiality. He paid tribute to the fine example set by his predecessor, Stephen Johnson, who had acted as the Interim Chairman.

6/3 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RC requested members for proposals for the appointment of the Vice Chairman. Martin George (MG) proposed Keith Bacon (KB) which was seconded by Henry Cator (HC). Members agreed that KB would be the Forum's Vice-Chairman for a period of one year.

6/4 Chairman's announcements:

RC introduced and welcomed a new member, Simon Partridge, to the Forum representing the Education Interest Group. Members introduced themselves, and Philip Pearson (PP) recalled the previous suggestion that it would be useful for member profiles to be made available on the website. This was greeted by consensus by members and it was agreed that this information would be collated and would appear on the new Broads Forum website page on the Authority's website. Andrew Alston (AA) reminded those present that they should represent the interests of their Interest Group rather than personal interests.

6/5 To receive and confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2013

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to an amendment to reflect that Mike Evans (ME) was not present

6/6 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response Taken following Discussions at Previous Meetings

For the benefit of the new member, JP explained that the Summary of Progress was a running record of matters previously discussed by the Forum. RC asked if members had any questions. PP stated that he had requested a follow-up meeting with boatyards to further discuss matters surrounding high-speed boat trials adjacent to the RSPB reserve at Strumpshaw Fen.

6/7 Broads Forum Arrangements

Members noted that the revised Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Broads Forum had been adopted by the Broads Authority on 22 March 2013. RS raised a concern that the public could be deterred from asking questions of the Forum given the 5 working day advance notice required under the TORs. However, members considered that it would be more appropriate to review the TORs after one year to determine whether amendments might be necessary.

Members had already agreed during the Broads Forum on 7 February that they were content with the current categories of interest groups and had accepted the task of reviewing the list of organisations to be represented in each interest group represented at the Forum, as well as the appointment of Forum members (and their substitutes) to represent those groups.

Members considered that it would be necessary to undertake the task, of reviewing the list of organisations in each interest group and the appointment of Forum members (and their substitutes), outside the meeting. This task would need to be undertaken through the current members in consultation with the organisations within their interest group in advance of the next meeting to allow a report on Forum membership issues to be tabled. This task would also involve confirming the point of contact details for all organisations to facilitate effective communication. The member profiles, referred to in minute 6/4, would also be collected as part of this task.

6/8 A Future Strategy for Dredging

The Forum received a report that considered a future strategy for dredging and the opportunities for a significant increase in output, noting that since the adoption of the Sediment Management Strategy 2006 and the Broads Plan 2009, the Authority was committed to the target of sediment dredged from the navigation area to approximately 50,000 m³ per annum (Broads Plan NA1.1). It was noted that dredging and disposal was the largest cost faced by the Authority in the maintenance of the navigation area, with an estimated backlog of 1.17 million m³ of material. Members noted the current approach, funding arrangements and constraints, including the timings when dredging could be carried out to minimise the impact on the tourist industry, environmental conditions and special qualities of the Broads, and particularly the limited availability of suitable sites for disposal of sediment.

Members gave consideration to the three options for the future:

- Option 1 – maintaining the status quo of 50,000m³ but without PRISMA funding.
- Option 2 – increasing the annual dredge volume to 60,000m³.
- Option 3 – achieving a target of 100,000m³ of sediment removal.

All options took account of the staff costs, the operational plant and additional equipment and possible sites required as well as the feasibility of delivering these alongside other navigation management work, priorities and navigational responsibilities. They also took into account budgetary allocations re: Navigation/National Park Grant.

It was noted that there was scope for shifting the balance to increase time spent on dredging but that this would impact on other activities such as the maintenance of moorings.

Richard Starling (RS) asked about the cutter suction dredge technique to which Rob Rogers (RR) explained that at certain locations, e.g. Heigham

Sound, there were compacted areas where the cutter suction was effective in agitating the material to draw it into the pump.

Martin George (MG) expressed his view and unease that the Authority was dealing with the symptoms and not the cause of the deposit of sediment. MG explained that the Authority's waterways were suffering from hyperfertility which if addressed, would result in a drop in the rate of sedimentation. MG explained he had been in communication with Natural England and had been advised that the River Bure levels of fertility were dropping as was the level of sediment. MG was also heartened by the actions taken by farmers in the River Wensum catchment to improve practices (e.g. nitrogen and phosphorus reduction) and improve the flood plain and hence a reduction of sediment levels in rivers. MG urged that other main rivers be managed in this manner and stated that the Broads Authority's role in this regard was to apply pressure to the Environment Agency. MG referred to Brian Moss' research which indicated phosphorus released from the sediment into the water column, which suggested that if the sediment could be removed (perhaps by suction dredging), then it could prevent a proportion of nutrient enrichment. Trudi Wakelin's (TW) responded indicating that the Authority's Sediment Management Plan (co-developed with Cranfield University) estimated an average of 24,000m³ of sediment per annum is deposited via headwaters and bank erosion as well as a variable amount from algal input. The issue of hyperfertility had been raised at the Navigation Committee and whilst the Authority has source control measures in the plan, river and broad response times mean that deposits continue and the backlog remains to be captured by dredging. It was therefore necessary to determine whether more sediment should be removed and if so, was this sustainable. MG expressed the view that TW's explanation could not account for the Hickling sedimentation and that the key strategy long-term, should be to reduce fertility of waters caused by nitrogen and phosphorus.

Brian Barker (BB) was concerned that if dredging was not increased, this would discourage sailing and leave the waterways only suitable for flat bottomed boats. RR reiterated that for the Authority to increase dredging there would be an associated expenditure. Tony Gibbons (TB) raising a safety concern by asking whether the Authority was responsible for side-casting of dredged material, to which RR confirmed the Authority had used side-casting on the banks of the Chet in November 2012, although when side-casting nowadays the Authority restored the site to an agreed level.

MF enquired whether the Authority was keeping pace with the current dredging target or falling behind. TW confirmed that the Authority was keeping pace with the target and RR confirmed that the Authority's strategy identified (via regular surveys) the priority areas.

Mike Evans (ME) asked those present to note that the NSBA were appreciative of the work done by the Authority. However, the NSBA would not consider anything other than option 1. This view was supported by BR. ME did not support increasing Tolls to increase dredging output.

Members pointed out that unit of measure in m³ can often be hard to understand and visualize. It was suggested that it would be better to know how much of the waterways had been dredged to meet the required specifications. JP advised that the Authority had a compliance measure it used to understand how much is meeting specification, but that in comparison to May Gurney, the Authority was removing 25% more material for the same money. With the Authority's current resources 50,000m³ was the maximum achievable. A target of 60,000m³ with the same resource, would result in a drastic reduction to maintenance of the Authority's 24 hour moorings, reducing facilities and raising concerns about public health and safety.

KB commended that we would all like to see more dredging done but not at the cost of what we would stand to lose. RR added that moorings would suffer as they are in heavy use and frequently are subject to damage which cannot be left, although, some could be closed-off until resource becomes available to repair. The other option would be to interrupt dredging plans to fix moorings.

RS suggested asking toll payers if they would support an increase to their Tolls to allow more dredging and also put forward the idea to share equipment with European counterparts. RR responded that consultations had already taken place, however, it was found that this was not viable due to these operators charging premium rates and very often stipulating that their own employees operated the equipment.

Phil Pearson (PP) enquired whether the Authority's conservation budget would be adversely affected to which RR confirmed that this would not be impacted. PP reminded members that the EU Water Framework Directive had set targets to improve water quality which PP and Simon Hooton were consulting with Anglian Water on to explore opportunities on how they could allocate a greater proportion of their budget to conservation matters.

Henry Cator (HC) asked whether PRISMA funding be used on capital purchase to which RR confirmed that it could and had supported the purchase of geotextile bags, which had been expensive. It was noted that European funding required match funding from the applicant. Furthermore, developing re-use techniques, under PRISMA, has seen a small reduction in the volumes dredged.

MG and PP commented on the change in water colour along the Bure and proposed that the Authority raised this with Anglian Water to improve tertiary treatments.

John Lurkins (JL) suggested that if Toll payers were asked to consider an increase in their tolls to cover more dredging, they should also be asked to indicate (on a map provided) which areas they considered needed to be navigable for sail boats, to provide the Authority with a view of where to dredge.

The chairman summarised the following points on this issue:

- The Forum had had a very healthy discussion on dredging and the causes of sediment.
- In addition to discussing the removal of sedimentation by dredging, the Forum had considered the effect that hyperfertility was having on the sedimentation of the rivers, as its cause, and noted that if this could be addressed, the rate of sedimentation would decline. The Forum had been heartened by the actions taken in the River Wensum catchment to improve practices (eg nitrogen and phosphorus reduction). It supported the Authority in taking steps to encourage those responsible to reduce sediment levels on the other waterways by improving effluent water quality standards.
- Members were concerned that there should be no reduction in the dredging carried out by the Authority, to allow for the backlog to be continually addressed. Members supported the view that in the current economic climate tolls should not be raised to increase the level of dredging, and that other navigation maintenance activity should not be reduced to fund more dredging. The Forum therefore supported Option 1 in the report, whilst encouraging the Authority to seek efficiencies in the dredging programme wherever possible to increase quantities and to seek external funding (including European funding) to support this where possible.

The Forum also supported a move away from a volume measurement to measure waterways compliance, to a more representative indication of the navigability of the waterways.

- Finally, the Forum considered that the Authority could consult Toll Payers in the next questionnaire as to whether they would be prepared to pay more for increased dredging.

6/9 Update on Broadland Flood Alleviation Project and Flood Risk Management Proposals for the River Chet

Adrian Clarke (AC) reported that the construction phase for the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project (BFAP) was nearing completion, with the exception of piling removal in a small number of compartments. The project was moving into its maintenance phase.

AC explained the proposals for the true right bank of the River Chet between Loddon and Nogdam End. BESL had submitted a planning application for comprehensive flood risk management works in Compartment 22 to carry out a limited rollback of the floodbanks by constructing a new bank from material sourced from newly dug soke dykes. The Authority was confident that reed could establish to assist in the bank's stabilisation, upon which the piling could be removed which would enhance the navigation experience.

Maintenance will potentially be handed over to the landowner once the EA's management goes to review in 2021. John Lurkins (JL) expressed satisfaction that landowners had not been given the responsibility to manage maintenance immediately following the completion of the proposed works and stated that if this had not been the case, a precedent could be set for the rest of the Broads. MF asked what potential maintenance would landowners be required to do, to which AC stated that the banks currently had no public right of way but this would be subject to review and the outcome of which would bring clarity on this matter.

AC explained that officers considered this plan desirable for navigation and dredging (e.g. a benefit being that a full channel dredge would be possible as opposed to just the current centre third) and would like to agree a trial to drive in the piles and noted there were a variety of conditions of piling subject to a planning condition for these works. Further, AC stated the Authority was seeking a method statement as to how this would be carried-out. In combination with works to replace the weir, the Authority was anticipating much improved channel depth upstream.

Peter Medhurst (PM) welcomed the plan for the area which he believed to be well overdue. AC confirmed that if the application was approved, earthworks would commence this summer followed by navigation works from summer 2014 onwards. John Lurkins (JL) was concerned that this area would potentially not be dredged for another 18 months (once weir replaced). AC stressed that the Authority recognised this as a priority area but that dredging the navigation channel could not take place until the BESL works were complete.

PP queried whether any of the ground works would impact birds. AC confirmed that an assessment concluded no impact. Andrew Alston (AA) enquired of impacts to farmland behind the site which AC assured would be subject to liability up to catastrophic failure.

The chairman summarised the following points on this issue:

- The Forum congratulated the Authority on its efforts in encouraging the EA to move the project forward.
- The Forum welcomed the fact that the EA had come forward with a comprehensive flood risk management scheme for the south bank of the Chet, which would include dealing with navigation hazards resulting from failing piling, and which was likely to result in improved channel depths and tidal flow upstream to Loddon in conjunction with the work being undertaken to replace the weir at the entrance to Hardley Flood.
- The Forum was concerned, however, that full width dredging would potentially not be able to be commenced for another 18 months.

6/10 Broads Angling Strategy Consultation

Members received (for their views and comments) a consultation draft of the Broads Angling Strategy recently published by the Environment Agency which also sets out the Broads Authority's approach to angling. The EA was the lead body on angling with the BA in support focusing particularly on access issues. The draft strategy was effectively a revised and updated version of the original Broads Fisheries Action Plan (FAP) published in 2003, the aims and objectives of which built on a local 1997 initiative jointly funded by the BA and EA. The draft strategy is not only more focussed and succinct, but concentrates on three main themes:

- Access to angling in the Broads
- Communication and education
- Environments for fish

Tony Gibbons (TG) commented that access to banks should be to everyone, not just to attract local fishermen, but those from other parts of the UK (who constitute an increasingly large proportion of those who fish on the Broads). TG explained that 75% of Hoseasons advertisements involved angling and reported that angling on the Broads is on the decline in this region and increasing elsewhere and stressed that the annual current income is £80m in the Broads region so it was important to encourage this as a holiday activity. Brian Barker (BB) agreed encouragement was required and would have liked his Parish Council to be consulted with regards to access, parking and slipway for Somerton.

Richard Starling (RS) commented that pike stocks had seen a decline in the Upper Thurne over the last 5 years and that licence purchases were down 25%. RS stated he had noticed fishermen from the Midlands would frequently come to the Broads to angle on holiday which had all but ceased which he suggested could be a result of falling fish stocks and rising costs. However, another Forum member posed whether this decline in anglers from the Midlands could be as a result of the changing industry, culture, and workforce in the region and hence holiday preferences. TG did not support the view that pike were generally in decline in the Broads and reported that water quality and wildlife were all improving and to his knowledge fishing events in the region were fully subscribed.

Forum members expressed concern on the use of language such as "Feel..." in the draft strategy which implied information stemmed from anecdote rather than fact.

Brian Barker (BB) expressed concern over the increased usage of some slipways and facilities, when the maintenance costs of these facilities were met by parishioners and that maintenance costs could increase considerably if wider usage was made. This would lead to further debate as to how such maintenance costs should be met.

RG raised the question of whether the increase in the otter population would impact fish stocks. In response, TG believed it was a problem, however,

without fully understanding their diet (outside of captivity), the impact was unclear.

The chairman summarised the following points on this issue:

- The Forum provided a broad welcome for the strategy, recognising that this would be important to tourism in the area, including the hire boat industry.
- Members raised concerns over levels of access, which was recognised as a problem for other small boats as well as anglers, and stressed that the implementation for the strategy would need to address the access issues, including who should pay for increasing access, and how.
- 6/11 Chief Executive's Report.

Members received a report which detailed the recent activities of the Broads Authority.

The Chief Executive (JP) brought members' attention to the Climate Change Adaptation Study and reported that good progress was being made in developing plans to engage local residents on the topic. JP also drew attention to the bid for resources under the Department for Transport's initiative for cycling in National Parks.

PP raised an issue regarding the Breydon Water Ski Zone Designation. PP was concerned about the way that the Authority could potentially interpret the process for assessing the level of historic waterskiing use, specifically Stage 2; special care should be given to this Stage. PP also stated that the terminology of "significant adverse affect" used in section 4.2 of this report was no longer used and stressed that any assessment under Article 6.3 of the EU Habitats Directive has to consider the entire site.

In response, JP confirmed that since taking responsibility for Breydon Water from the Great Yarmouth Port Authority, the Broads Authority was committed to improving the safety (which was welcomed by HC) of our visitors and conservation (including birds) and assured members that the proposed Waterspace Management Plan would address both of these responsibilities. JP confirmed that waterskiing had taken place for a number of years, but certainly in recent years at a relatively low level. The Authority was working closely with Natural England the public body with responsibility for the Habitats Directive and had now agreed appropriate restrictions giving the confidence that there would not be a significant adverse impact on wildlife.

PP recognised the above but reiterated that the due process (beyond skiing) needs to be followed and properly documented.

At this point The Chairman suggested that further discussion should cease, given that the EC Habitats Directive was not to-hand for members and that consequently they would not be informed of its detailed terms.

6/12 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business

No urgent items were proposed.

6/13 Matters for Chairman to raise at next Broads Authority meeting

Electric boating was suggested, but as this issue had not been discussed by the forum it would be taken forward as an item for discussion at the next Broads Forum meeting. No items were therefore raised.

6/14 To note the date of the next meeting

Thursday 25 July 2013, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich commencing at 2.00pm

6/15 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

- Electric Boating.
- EA/NE Presentation on Water Quality on Barton Broad.
- Update on the Joint Core Strategy.