

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 03 September 2020

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Present

Nicky Talbot – in the Chair, Kelvin Allen, John Ash, Linda Aspland, Mike Barnes, Harry Blathwayt, Leslie Mogford (from item 7), Greg Munford, Simon Sparrow, Paul Thomas, Alan Thomson.

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Environment, Bill Housden – Head of IT & Collector of Tolls, Linda Ibbitson-Elks – Head of Safety Management, Emma Krelle - Chief Financial Officer, John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Operations, Lewis Treloar – Waterways & Recreation Officer, Maria Conti (minutes), Sarah Mullarney (meeting moderator)

Also present

Matthew Haywood and Mike Auger (Norfolk County Council), Alex Crossley (Hudson Architects)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Matthew Bradbury and Andy Hamilton.

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. Declarations of interest

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

3. Matters of urgent business

No items were proposed as matters of urgent business.

4. Public question time

No public questions were raised.

5. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 11 June 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

6. Summary of actions and outstanding issues

Members noted the latest summary of actions and outstanding issues following discussions at previous meetings.

Referring to the Network Rail (NR) whole life strategy for swing bridges, the Director of Operations reported that NR had installed shorter rails at Somerleyton swing bridge to help prevent it locking in the heat, and were doing a full structure assessment with further works planned this winter. They had also repaired signal boxes on the line, which had melted in the recent very high temperatures, and had fabricated and installed new locking parts on Oulton Broad bridge, which was operational again.

The Chief Executive referred to serious faults with the electric equipment to raise and lower Haven Bridge, Great Yarmouth. He and the Head Ranger were in constant communication with Norfolk County Council, including writing officially to the Council Leader, to resolve this matter quickly. It was reported that contract work to get the bridge operational again might not be completed until next March, which would have a serious impact on hire boat operators and private boaters. The Authority had asked NCC if the bridge could be opened manually in the meantime, but had been told that the manual winding mechanism was unsafe. The Chief Executive assured members that officers would continue to monitor the situation and press for action.

The report was noted.

7. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members noted the Chief Executive's report on significant matters relating to the maintenance and management of the waterways.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the Authority's staff and volunteers who had reacted quickly and professionally to deal with the recent fatal accident at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station. The Authority was providing supporting statements to the Marine Accident Investigation Board and the Police. The Chair expressed the Navigation Committee's condolences to the bereaved family, and thanked the Authority's teams for all they had done.

The report was noted.

8. River Wensum missing link project

Representatives from Hudson Architects and Norfolk County Council gave a presentation on the proposed 'missing link' project along the Norwich Riverside Walk on the River Wensum between Duke's Palace Bridge and St George's Bridge. This project was within the River Wensum Strategy. Members' views were invited on the preferred approach presented in the architect's feasibility assessment.

Architectural drawings showed the proposed structure, which consisted of a ramp up from St George's Street onto a suspended walkway along the side of the NUA building and down a second ramp to Duke's Palace Wharf. No part of the structure would be in the water.

A member referred to the potential obstruction to sailing craft from the overhanging trees on the opposite bank (in front of the Norwich Playhouse) at a navigation pinch point, and asked if the trees could be cut back. The Waterways and Recreation Officer said this issue had already

been raised with the Council. The Chair asked if the design would take account of high tidal flooding, and the project team noted that the proposed structure would be no lower than the apex of Blackfriar's Bridge. Another member suggested that shoals in the Old Palace Yard area should be dredged.

It was recognised that there would be some temporary obstruction to navigation to allow the structure to be installed, although some elements would be preassembled off site. Concerns were raised about vessels navigating under the walkway. It was noted that the project team was getting expert advice from the Department of Transport, who had experience of building similar structures elsewhere in the UK. The Director of Operations added that the Navigation Committee had commented on similar proposals, and safety and navigation issues were always assessed on a case by case basis.

The report was noted. The Chair thanked the project team for their presentation, and said the Committee looked forward to seeing more detailed designs.

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

The Chief Executive introduced his update report on the financial impact of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions on the Broads Authority and hire boat companies, and sought the Committee's views on proposed recommendations to the full Authority as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report. It was noted that the two members who had declared an interest in this item would not express personal views in this discussion, but could answer any questions from other members.

The Chief Executive reported that the local tourism season was continuing to improve and the waterways were very busy. He thanked the tolls and ranger teams for dealing with large numbers of existing and new waterways users. He noted that, despite a pattern of decline in hire boat numbers since the 1980s, numbers had held up well in recent years. However, the pandemic had retriggered the decline to some extent, with a loss of more than 10% of hire boats this year. Some companies were restructuring or leaving the industry, and others were selling off older boats and investing in fewer, larger boats. A concern for the Authority was the impact of this reduction on toll income next year, as well as this year.

The Chair thanked hire boat operators who had responded to the survey, and invited members' comments.

A member suggested that a repeat survey of hire boat operators should ask about their projected fleet size and bookings for next season. The Chief Executive noted that feedback from yards for this season was that September was fully booked, and some were booking through to November. Next year could be a bumper year, attracting holidaymakers who were nervous about travelling abroad, but conversely there was a risk of further C-19 lockdowns.

A member questioned if the Broads was near capacity in boat numbers, particularly in the northern rivers. The Chief Executive replied that the total number of boats remained relatively

static, with ex-hire boats tending to go into private ownership. A major constraint was the availability of permanent moorings, particularly with bigger boats coming into the system. The Authority had, for some years, been encouraging people to go to the southern rivers, and new projects such as the Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) Carlton Marshes visitor centre would hopefully be a draw. A noticeable difference this year was the number of new users, including more local people. There was also a 13% increase in the use of unpowered craft, including stand up paddle boards and inflatable canoes. A consideration here for the Authority was giving advice to these users on the best areas to navigate and get safely in and out of the water.

As this was a significant year for the Authority's finances, it was agreed to invite all members of the Authority and the Navigation Committee to the next Tolls Review Working Group meeting, which would be held on 5 or 6 October.

It was agreed to recommend to the Broads Authority that it:

- i. Undertakes a further survey of hire boat yard bookings and income at the beginning of October, and that the survey includes questions about projected fleet size and bookings for next year;
- ii. Engages with individual yards to understand more fully their overall income position for this season and the prospects for 2021;
- iii. Requires yards to pay the third toll instalment of 30% by 30 September as already agreed; and
- iv. Delays 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.

10. Potential use of Capital Receipts Reserve

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the report on options for the use of the Capital Receipts Reserve (CRR) to fund improvements to the public facilities at Acle Bridge. The first part of the report outlined the repayment of the Public Works Loan Board loan taken out to purchase the Dockyard from May Gurney in 2007. The CFO noted an error in para 2.3, line 6 which should read 'loss of £733.44' (due to early repayment fees) and not 'saving of £733.44'.

With regard to capital options to further improve the facilities offered to waterways users, visitors and local people at Acle Bridge, members agreed they would need to see a detailed business plan. In response to questions, the Director of Operations said it would be possible to reconfigure and increase the parking space within the existing boundary, and measures to improve access in and out of the site from the road had been considered. The Authority's ambition for the site was for a yacht station style facility, although it was noted that last year's trade for the seasonal café was mainly from road users. It was also noted that waste and recycling facilities in the area could be improved.

The report was noted.

11. CME work programme - progress update

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Environment (CME) introduced his report on the Authority's management activities to maintain the public navigation, develop mooring facilities for public use, and demonstrate the effective use of available resources.

He also noted the following updates:

- A Notice to Mariners would be issued shortly advising that Meadow Dyke would be closed to navigation in October (8-4 Mon-Fri, excluding half term) to enable dredging. Boats could still navigate through the system outside the closure times. A member referred to the issue of ochre when dredging at Waxham Dyke and Horsey. The Head of CME noted that the main impact was ochre leaching from soils, rather than from sediment, but the team monitored this.
- The CME apprentices were completing their 1-year apprenticeship and had been offered a new role as trainee Operation Technicians for a further year.
- The weed harvester had been employed at Bargate Broad, Surlingham, where water quality improvements had resulted in increased plant growth. The Authority was considering whether the site, a SSSI, would need to be included in future cutting schedules.
- The management of Mutford Lock was moving from Sentinel Leisure Trust to East Suffolk Council. The Broads Authority was going through the agreement details to get this reassigned.

The Chair thanked the CME teams for continuing to maintain the waterways throughout the Covid-19 lockdown period.

The report was noted.

12. Hire boat code – draft version

The Head of Safety Management presented the proposed changes to the Hire Boat Code following consultation with hire boat operators, navigation authorities and other interests.

The report was noted.

13. Annual safety audit

The Head of Safety Management presented the annual review of marine incidents reported during the period April 2019 to March 2020, including an analysis of deaths and personal injury since 1993.

A member asked if the Authority should consider a new byelaw for the mandatory wearing of life jackets between Six Mile House and Breydon Bridge. The Director of Operations said the Authority's core message was that people should wear a life jacket at all times when on the water, rather than just on certain parts of the system. This message was reiterated by hire

boat operators. The message might be diluted by such a byelaw, which could also be difficult to enforce. However, the Boat Safety Group could be asked to look at this suggestion.

The report was noted.

14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be on 22 October, starting at 2pm. The meeting would be held remotely.

15. Exclusion of the public

It was resolved that the public be excluded from the meeting under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for consideration of the item below on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act as amended, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public benefit in disclosing the information.

The public left the meeting and the live stream recording was suspended.

16. Exempt minutes

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 15.36pm.

Signed

Chairman

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Navigation Committee, 03 September 2020

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Greg Munford	9, 12	Hire boat operator
Simon Sparrow	9, 12	Hire boat operator