

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 07 September 2023

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Present

Alan Goodchild – in the Chair, Harry Bathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Mark Collins, Peter Dixon, Leslie Mogford (items 1-10), Bob Neate, Remus Sawyerr, Michael Scott, Simon Sparrow, Daniel Thwaites

In attendance

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Bill Housden – Head of IT and Collector of Tolls, Emma Krelle – Director of Finance, Angie O'Connor – Asset Officer (items 14 and 15), John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Operations, Sara Utting – Senior Governance Officer, Lorraine Taylor – Governance Officer

Others in attendance

Bill Dickson – Chair of the Broads Authority, and Bill Clark for item 4.

1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Greg Munford and Paul Thomas.

Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014

The Chair explained that the meeting was being audio-recorded. All recordings remained the copyright of the Broads Authority and anyone wishing to receive a copy should contact the Governance Team. The minutes remained the formal record of the meeting. He added that the law permitted any person to film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of public meetings of the Authority. This did not extend to live verbal commentary. The Chair needed to be informed if anyone intended to photograph, record or film so that any person under the age of 18 or Members of the public not wishing to be filmed or photographed could be accommodated.

2. Declarations of interest

Members expressed their declarations of interest as set out in Appendix 1 of these minutes and in addition to those already registered.

3. Matters of urgent business

No items were proposed as a matter of urgent business.

4. Public question time

A question had been received from Bill Clark from the Yare Sailing Club and Mr Clark was invited to read out his question. The Chair provided the Authority's response as set out in Appendix 2 to these Minutes.

Mr Clark asked a supplementary question on whether there was a general concern that the reed habitat was being steadily lost and evolving into woodland habitat in many locations on our river system.

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) responded that, in terms of the habitat of the particular example that Mr Clark had identified, this was not in any of the priorities within the biodiversity and water strategy. However, where there are opportunities to enhance that reed edge habitat, some of the safety work that the Broads Authority undertakes achieves that.

The Chair re-iterated that item 10 of the agenda explained the Broads Authority's approach in relation to bankside management in greater detail.

5. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 08 June 2023 were signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

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

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

7. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members received the report on significant matters relating to the maintenance and management of the waterways from the Chief Executive (CE).

In response to a question on who was responsible for abandoned vessels on Wroxham Broad, the CE advised that in this case, it would be the landowner. The CE explained that sunken and abandoned vessels was an issue that the Broads Authority dealt with on a weekly basis and if the vessel was not causing an immediate pollution risk and was not a hazard to the navigation, the Authority would not attempt to lift them at that point but contact the vessel's owner in the first instance.

A Member questioned item 1.2 of the CE's report in relation to the Authority's five strategic policies for 2024/25 and said that apart from the tolls system replacement, none seemed to be related to navigation. The CE replied that a number of the strategic priorities had an implication for navigation, such as responding to climate change or the Local Plan for the Broads. The strategic priorities were not the only elements of what the Authority was doing, as items such as the operational priorities were not included, which were heavily navigation focused. The CE said that it did not mean that navigation was not a high priority for the Authority.

In response to a request for further information on the Race to Zero campaign and the general direction the Authority would approach the campaign, the CE advised that one of the things was what the Broads Authority could do about its own carbon footprint, such as working on a tender process to put solar panels on the Dockyard buildings. There were practical things that the Authority could do to have a positive benefit, but in a wider society

role was trying to influence outside bodies such as the Authority's District and County Council colleagues.

There was a discussion around several untidy vessels on the rivers, including questions on whether the boats held Boat Safety Certificates and were tolled. The CE responded that the Authority had an obligation to ensure that the boats were fit for purpose and that they were tolled. However, the Authority had no powers over how vessels looked. He added that living on a boat was becoming more common as the cost-of-living rose, and he commended the Rangers for their sensitivity and care in this regard.

The Director of Operations (DO) advised that the Broads Authority did check that boats were tolled and held the Boat Safety Certificate and performed random checks on insurance. If the owner did not comply then the Authority would take action to enforce this. The DO added that the Authority worked with social housing authorities and the Police.

A Member asked whether the Authority had seen an increase in boats being used for homes and the DO replied that this was not data that was collected by the Authority.

The report was noted.

8. Navigation Committee priorities

The Chief Executive (CE) presented the reporting outlining the key strategic priorities which needed to be addressed at future committee meetings. Eight priorities were identified following the meeting on 8 June 2023, and these were presented as a draft programme for the Committee to consider.

In relation to the fourth priority, the future of the hire boat industry, the CE said that since the report was written, he had taken part in a meeting with the Hire Boat Federation and British Marine, and they were both very supportive of the Authority's approach. Following the meeting, the CE had tracked down a 2005 report about the Boat Hire Project and circulated it to the Hire Boat Federation and British Marine. He suggested that the Broads Authority hold a workshop to discuss and plan the future of the industry. Members welcomed the proposal. A Member asked whether the Authority would take any outcome of a workshop forward and the CE replied that the Authority would produce a plan and was something that the Authority could work with British Marine on.

The CE then asked the committee to consider adding an additional priority of plant growth and the challenges that it presented to both the Broads Authority and those who used the Broads. He added that the Head of Ranger Services had raised the issue of plant growth and how it was affecting dinghy sailing and paddle boarding and the effect it was having on the future of young people in using the Broads. He said that it was the intention to engage with all who sailed, not just young people; however, this was a way to get their views about what the future of sailing looked like. The CE suggested also adding a further priority about engaging with sailing clubs.

The Chair added that the sailing club he belonged to had recognised the importance of young people in sailing and had adopted a committee specifically for young sailors and he welcomed the Broads Authority's approach in looking to engage with young sailors as they were part of the future of the Broads.

A Member asked why salinisation was not on the list of priorities, and the CE replied that it was the responsibility of the Environment Agency. Although salinisation was a big issue for the Broads, there was little action that the Authority could take. However, this was a question for the Broadland Futures Initiative to debate in relation to how the Authority responded to climate change and particularly rising sea levels in one of the lowest parts of Britain. He added that the area faced one of the biggest challenges of all the National Parks as it was unknown what climate change would do for the driest part of the country already, so he did not doubt that increase in salt was an issue, but it was part of a much bigger debate.

A Member said that the climate crisis was not reflected in the plan and was it possible to have this as a cross-cutting theme in the priorities. The CE confirmed that this would be a sensible approach.

A Member commented on the sustainable boating priority and asked whether it was much more than putting in charging points. The CE confirmed that it would be a much larger activity than that and the timetable in the report was an initial work programme for the coming year. The Authority would like to bring a report to a future committee meeting with more information on this priority.

There was then a discussion on the use of paddleboards within the Broads and the safety aspect surrounding their use. The CE suggested that this subject was something that should be brought to the committee at a future meeting with a written report.

9. Construction, Maintenance and Ecology work programme – progress update

The Head of Construction, Maintenance & Ecology (HCME) presented his report and gave an overview of some of the key items. He confirmed that the proposals for 2024/25 work priorities had been drafted and included less dredging and more of other activities.

In relation to items 2.4 and 2.5 on the report, a Member asked whether piling would be discussed at a future meeting or was it something to be discussed at this meeting. The HCME replied that the consultation on mooring provision and the structural elements would be brought back to committee at a later date.

There was discussion on mooring and a number of suggestions were put forward including more masting and demasting pontoons being made available, including on Breydon Water, which could be relocated/moved over winter. The Chair added that pontoons were a good safety feature for getting in and out of canoes.

The Chair welcomed new channel marking at Breydon and asked whether the new posts could be numbered to ensure easy identification in an emergency situation. The HCME noted this and said that this should be raised as part of the Hazard Review.

The report was noted.

10. Riverside tree management

Members received the report from the Head of Construction, Maintenance & Ecology (HCME) regarding navigational issues posed by riverside trees and scrub to waterways users, the prioritisation of management actions by the Broads Authority, the consenting and permitting processes involved and how riverside trees are managed. The purpose of the report was to provide clarity on the scope of work on the management of trees close to the rivers' edge and seek Members' views on what were the priorities and what they wished to achieve.

A Member said that it would be good to identify the areas of reed beds that were turning into carr woodlands in order to understand where management was needed. The HCME replied that there were tools available to identify these areas and that the Broads Authority had the necessary data. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Authority would look at engaging with local sailing clubs which would enable the Authority to focus on particular areas of bankside management and added that there may be consents to be obtained before any work was carried out.

A Member commented that there were many areas where overhanging trees was an issue as these could cause damage to boats. The HCME confirmed that the Rangers monitored any protruding branches and anything that was coming over the edge of the water, and these individual hazards were tackled during the winter months. The Member asked whether the Rangers could look at higher branches as they were an issue for the sailing community. The HCME noted this.

The Chair commented that he welcomed the report, and it showed that the Authority was listening to the sailing community.

The CE asked whether this report should be taken to the next Broads Authority meeting for endorsement by the Authority Members, and the meeting agreed.

The report was noted.

11. Income and expenditure

The Director of Finance (DF) presented the report detailing the actual Navigation income and expenditure for the four-month period to 31 July 2023, and provided a forecast of the projected expenditure at the end of the financial year (31 March 2024).

The DF reiterated that the report was to the end of July and that at the end of August the forecast on toll income remained the same. She also pointed out that the performance on interest was doing better than expected.

A member asked for clarification on the reduction in income on tolls and what was driving this, and whether it was the tolls increase or were there less boats on the water.

The Chief Executive (CE) replied that it was thought that it was not the tolls increase that was driving this, but looking at the larger picture it seemed as if many of the smaller boats were not on the water this year as the weather had not been favourable. There was then some discussion on the number of boats on the water this year and how it would have a knock-on effect for 2024. Although it was mentioned that it had not been a good season for the hire boat industry this year, it was noted that September was looking better than August. A Member asked whether there was any data on the demographics of small boat owners.

The CE summarised by saying that this was a complex issue and that it was something to be discussed in greater detail at the tolls workshop and briefing in October.

The DF said that the Collector of Tolls had undertaken some analysis on the number of Broads boat users. At the end of July private crafts was down by 400, but the biggest class was outboard dinghies and rowing boats. Hire boats were up by 180.

A Member asked what information would be helpful to gather before the tolls workshop and briefing and should boat owners be asked what they needed in order to start the discussions on a sensible basis. The CE replied that the critical thing was to understand what would happen with the hire boat industry. The CE suggested that one item that could be looked at was of the boats that had gone, to what extent they were in the ownership of people who owned other boats.

The report was noted.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on Thursday 02 November 2023 at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich, NR1 1RY commencing at 10am.

13. Exclusion of the public

Harry Blathwayt proposed, and Michael Scott seconded.

It was resolved unanimously that the public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the consideration of the item below on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Paragraph 3 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public benefit in disclosing the information.

The press and public left the meeting.

14. Bridge Broad lease

Members received the report of the Director of Operations and Asset Officer seeking their views on the renewal of the lease for Bridge Broad.

A summary of the discussion is contained in the exempt minutes.

15. Update on mooring leases

Members received the report of the Director of Operations and Asset Officer providing an update on mooring leases.

A summary of the discussion is contained in the exempt minutes.

The meeting ended at 12:25.

Signed

Chairman

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Navigation Committee, 07 September 2023

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Peter Dixon	4 and 10	Owner of a river cruiser and a Member of the river cruiser class. Non-registerable interest and the items under discussion did not directly relate.
Mark Collins	4	Commodore of a Sailing Club. Disclosable interest but the item under discussion did not directly relate to his finances or wellbeing.

Appendix 2 – Public Question Time: Navigation Committee, 7 September 2023

Question submitted by Bill Clark and response from Alan Goodchild, Chair on behalf of the Authority

Following the questions regarding bankside management that I posed to the Navigation Committee at the meeting on 8th June, I am pleased to report that with the assistance of NavComm member Dr Mark Collins, I have now reached an agreement with the Mid Yare RSPB for a schedule of bankside scrub removal on their reserve. The work will be supported by a volunteer force from Coldham Hall sailing club. Importantly, the RSPB has also agreed that several trees on the north bank opposite Langley Dyke should indeed be felled, and we are together seeking additional support to deal with this, including from the Broads Authority.

These are heartening developments, and I believe that with a group of volunteers from Coldham Hall Sailing Club and the Yare Sailing Club along with the active support of the RSPB, the River Yare below Coldham Hall may, in time, once again become a practical sailing area.

I appreciate that funds are limited, but as a member of the local sailing community I am also aware of the potential volunteer force available for this type of work. Like many of my friends, I am concerned and motivated to protect and preserve the character and charm of Broadland, and I would be pleased to help build up the voluntary support required right across the navigation.

My question to the Navigation Committee is this:

Does the committee agree that maintaining the navigation should include protecting the rivers and broads from bankside ecological succession that makes the navigation unsuitable for sailing vessels?

Unfortunately, I cannot attend the Navigation Committee meeting on 7th September as that day is scheduled for bankside management! I expect to be hard at work protecting and supporting the reed environment on the Yare below Coldham Hall.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the Navigation Committee for your support, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Response:

The management of bankside vegetation, especially those trees that present a hazard to those on the water, is an essential part of maintaining the navigation. Item 10 on the agenda sets out the Authority's approach.

A 5-year bankside management plan, consented by Natural England, sets the parameters for the management of 2,000m of river edge vegetation per year.