

Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 07 June 2023

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Present

Keith Bacon – in the Chair, Richard Atkins, Peter Dixon, Peter Mason, 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, Ruth Bradshaw- Campaign for National Parks.

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies received from Linda Aspland, Harry Blathwayt, Tony Gibbons, Tim Harris, Alison Holden-Standley, Michael Scott.

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 8 March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

Lost paths in the Broads

The Chair raised the query at the Norfolk Local Access Forum Rights of Way subgroup meeting but there has been no response from Norfolk County Council officers. The Chair agreed to raise the item again at next week's Norfolk Local Access Forum Rights of Way subgroup meeting.

Staithe report

Dan Hoare reported that the Authority are making progress on 24 hour moorings and are negotiating a public staithe with the Environment Agency (EA).

Water quality monitoring

The Chair sent a letter to the Director of Strategic Services (DoSS) sharing the views of the Forum on water quality monitoring in the Broads and raised the issue at the Broads Plan Partnership meeting. The DoSS responded to the BLAF Chair asking for more details about the request from the Forum.

Following the recommendation from BLAF, officers presented the report [Risk to waterways users from water-borne disease in the Broads](#) to the Broads Authority in May. At the meeting it was suggested that the Authority should be conducting its own monitoring trails. Members

voted against this as the results would be extremely variable and the Authority is not set up to conduct monitoring. The monitoring should remain with the EA and the Broads Authority should continue raising awareness and putting pressure on the water companies through the Broadland Catchment Partnership and storm overflow discharge reduction plans, which are now legally binding. The Broads Authority website will also be updated to include the risk of water borne diseases for paddle sports users and open water swimming, and what steps users can take to reduce the hazards.

The Waterways and Recreation Officer agreed to update the BA website to include the risk of water borne diseases for paddle sports users and open water swimming.

The meeting today is not quorate therefore a recommendation cannot be made however, several Forum members would still like to see the Authority conduct its own water quality monitoring so that the data can be presented to the EA and Anglian Water. A Blue Flag scheme which applies to inland waterways was suggested and would be an asset to the tourism of the Broads and raise the status of rivers.

Ken Hawkins reminded the Forum that that the topic could be raised at a future Norfolk Local Access Forum meeting.

Permissive access and ELMS

A letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and permissive access, a response has not yet been received. The Norfolk Local Access Forum have received a response from their letter and there was an indication that stakeholders will be consulted on this matter in more detail in the future.

Potter Heigham bridge

A letter was sent to Norfolk County Council supporting the permanent pedestrianisation of Potter Heigham Bridge with the inclusion of horse riding and cycling. The bridge has since reopened to motorised traffic again. Potter Heigham Parish Council have been consulting residents on their preferred option for the future of the bridge.

Somerton Parish Council footpath

The Chair has written to Somerton Parish Council, supporting the aspiration of reinstating Footpath No.8. The Ramblers have also offered their support.

5. Campaigning for more public access in National Parks

Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager for Campaign for National Parks (CNP) joined the meeting to present the current campaign, more public access in National Parks. CNP is an independent voice of National Parks in England and Wales and is the campaigning collective of over 40 local and national NGOs including The Broads Society. The organisation receives no Government funding and relies on donations from its members.

Proportion of open access land in each National Park

Last November the Guardian published an article looking at the proportion of open access land in each of the National Parks which generated a lot of enquires for CNP. The article was based on a small analysis that CNP carried out comparing the amount of open access land against the size of the National Park. The data was taken from each of the National Park Authority websites however the information was not available for all. The Broads had the lowest percentage of open access land available, but it was noted that the make up of the Broads and its reason for designation is different to other National Parks.

More public access in National Parks

Current CNP aspirations:

- Natural England must review the open access maps they issued in 2004 and 2005. The current deadline for this review is 2024 to 2025. CNP would like to see more areas designated and a revision to the definition of open access. The Ramblers have started a campaign to extend the definition to include woodlands.
- An increase in the number of Rangers in the National Parks as set out in the Glover review.
- Trails to extend backpack camping and overturn the legal ruling which removed long established rights to wild camping on Dartmoor.
- Change the purposes of National Parks as a much stronger emphasis on ensuring that people from all parts of society can visit, and changes to the National Park Authority boards to ensure there's better representation of the people making the decisions about National Parks.
- Better transport options to the National Parks.

CNP campaigning

Over recent months CNP have been working on securing amendments to the levelling up and regeneration bill that is currently going through Parliament. Changes include, increased access, support for nature recovery and stronger duties on other bodies such as the Highways Agency to deliver those purposes.

Looking forward to the general election, CNP are developing a series of manifesto asks and talking to the individual parties, the parliamentarians and candidates asking them to commit to the manifesto.

Comments and answers to questions

A local paper reported on the statistics for open access land in the Broads but did not investigate the reasons why the percentage was so low. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 defined 'open country' (mountain, moor, heath and down) or registered common land as open access, most of which are not in the Broads. The CROW act does not include water. Areas such as Hickling Broad have a public right of navigation but would not be

legally defined as open access. Reviewing the definition of open access land would be welcomed.

British Canoeing have been pushing for more access to the water as part of the changes to the open access definition.

Access to land owned by trusts such as the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts is permissive only and cannot be included as open access land. The public may also be excluded at certain times of the year for conservation reasons.

The coverage of open access land in National Parks does not consider footpaths. Often there are plenty of other places which the public can access so long as they remain on a path. Dan Hoare added, as part of a reporting exercise to Defra it was noted that the Access for All footpaths were often not public rights of way but were permissive footpaths. These footpaths are open to the public but do not get captured in the metrics.

CNP is undertaking a research project titled the National Parks Health Check. The project will look at a range of indicators including water quality, to see how the National Parks compare to each other and what needs to change to try and ensure that they are delivering on improvements. The results will be published in the autumn.

CNP are not in favour of direct elections to National Park Authorities. Direct elections could start politicising the authorities, there is a large expense associated with the campaigns for a potential low turn out, and it would be difficult to manage who should be able vote in the elections.

Footpaths being eroded inland and becoming lost to the river has not been picked up by CNP. The Ramblers would be more appropriate to start a campaign on this issue.

Up to date information on the campaigns that CNP are working on can be found on their website and on social media. CNP also work with The Broads Society.

6. Waterways access

Dan Hoare presented their report which outlines some of the challenges and constraints on management activities for waterway access and the current approach taken by the Broads Authority. The report captures some of the water access issues that are not traditionally picked up within Navigation Committee such as paddle sports and open water swimming which often take place outside of the main areas traditionally managed for motorboats and larger sailing vessels.

A list of publicly accessible slipways and launching points can be found on the Authority's website: [Slipways and launching points \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/slipways-and-launching-points). The site also includes an interactive map which includes access points for canoes and paddleboards.

The ecological water quality in the Broads has improved year on year over the last five years. As the clarity has increased, so has the growth of water plants. A hydroacoustic survey carried

out in May 2023 on Hickling Broad showed that there were water plants on 83% of the bed of the Broad. This is 15% greater than the same time last year.

Vessels are advised to stay within the marked channels which are regularly cut by one of three water plant cutting vessels. Permissions and permits for water plant cutting are for marked channels only. Outside of the marked channels there is a risk of vessels becoming stuck and paddleboarders, windsurfers and canoers/kayakers getting into difficulty in areas of dense water plant growth.

Comments and answers to questions

Sailboats require wider channels to be cut as they need the width to tack and move out of the way of motorboats. Dan Hoare invited members to attend the Navigation Committee tomorrow where water plant management and navigation will be discussed. [Water Plant Management \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](https://broads-authority.gov.uk)

A member suggested adding launching points from riverside pubs to the interactive map. Pubs should also be encouraged to install a safety ladder to become a paddle friendly location. The Authority can share the standard design details and specifications for the safety ladders.

7. Broads Local Access Forum Annual Report 2022/23

Andrew Walters presented the Broads Local Access Forum Annual Report 2022/23 and reported the number of members fell to 14 this year. Recruitment will commence over the summer for new members to ensure that all interest groups are represented on the Forum.

8. Integrated Access Strategy and Boat Census update

Andrew Walters provided an update on the Integrated Access Strategy (IAS) and Boat Census. The most recent IAS edition was in 2019, and it is now due for an update. The IAS is used alongside the Broads Plan, Waterways and Management Strategy, Broads Local Plan and Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

The updated IAS will incorporate the Mooring Strategy, a budget forecast to help with the decision making process and a prioritisation index. The seven aspirations of the IAS will also be reviewed to ensure that they are still relevant.

There will be two rounds of consultation with key stakeholders. The scoping paper which will include the aims and objectives of the IAS will be shared with stakeholders in the coming weeks. The draft strategy is due to be complete by the end of October 2023.

Boat Census

The boat census takes place every five years and provides data which feeds into various areas of the Authority's work including the IAS. The census is now due to take place again and the survey is being reviewed. Previously the data was collected manually by a large group of volunteers set up in various locations across the Broads. This method meant that the data was a snapshot of the Broads for the day of the census.

The next census will ask:

1. What is the density of boat usage across the system?
2. What is the percentage occupancy of moorings?
3. How busy are the protected/sensitive sites?

The previous method of collecting data would not be sufficient for the questions which are being asked in the census. The data will be collected by ActiveXchange, a data platform which gathers information from 45,000 different mobile apps. The platform can identify how many people are at a certain location at any time based on a 100m x 100m grid. The data will show the volume of boat traffic and mooring occupancy on any given day.

Comments

Suffolk County Council should be included as key stakeholders for the IAS update. It was also recommended that The Broads Society, District, and Parish Councils were included in the consultation.

Large day trip vessels may distort the data being collected due to the volume of people and mobile phones onboard. Rangers have a good understanding of the Broads, and their knowledge should be used alongside the data collected.

Information hubs to signpost moorings, bridge heights and public toilets in busy locations was suggest for the IAS.

9. Any other business

None.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum will be held on Wednesday 30 August 2023 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.10pm.

Signed by

Chair

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests Broads Local Access Forum, 07 June 2023

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Keith Bacon	4. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings	Occupier of land immediately adjoining the bridge
Keith Bacon	5. Campaigning for more public access in National Parks	Member and Trustee of Broads Society
Keith Bacon	6. Waterways access	Chair/Trustee of Catfield staithe on Hickling Broad
Peter Dixon	5. Campaigning for more public access in National Parks	Trustee of UK National Parks Foundation
Peter Dixon	6. Waterways access	Resident of Hickling
Peter Mason	5. Campaigning for more public access in National Parks	Member and Trustee of Broads Society
Christopher Yardley	6. Waterways access	Member of Hickling sailing club