

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 08 June 2023

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Present

Alan Goodchild – in the Chair, Harry Bathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Mark Collins, Peter Dixon, Leslie Mogford, Bob Neate, Remus Sawyerr, Daniel Thwaites.

In attendance

Natalie Beal – Planning Policy Officer (item 14), Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Bill Housden – Head of IT and Collector of Tolls, Emma Krelle – Director of Finance, Rob Leigh – Head of Communications, John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Operations, Sara Utting – Senior Governance Officer, Lorraine Taylor – Governance Officer.

Also In attendance

Estelle Culligan – Monitoring Officer, Bill Clark for Item 4

1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Greg Munford, Michael Scott, Simon Sparrow, 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.

3. Matters of urgent business

No items were proposed as a matter of urgent business.

4. Public question time

An email had been received from Bill Clark with three questions. Mr Clark was invited to read out his letter and questions. The Chair provided the Authority's response as set out in Appendix 2 to these Minutes.

Mr Clark was invited to ask a further question following the statement that was read out by the Chair. Mr Clark said that it was important to draw the committee's attention to the history of the Broads and to look at past aerial views of the area, for example in 1999 where it shows large areas where there are no trees.

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) replied that woodland had increased over time and had been doing so in areas such as the River Ant since the 1920s. Trees were actively removed and managed in fen habitats under agri-environment schemes and on edges of rivers where they endanger or pose a significant obstruction to the navigation.

The Chair stated that the committee would take into consideration all of Mr Clark's points.

5. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 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.

A member asked whether there was there a deadline date for companies to achieve their QAB qualifications. The Director of Operations (DO) replied that a few companies were having to be reassessed and therefore they will have a grace period to achieve this. All other companies had complied.

7. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members received the report. The Chief Executive (CE) commented that all equipment had now been purchased from the capital funding from DEFRA, and the new water-plant harvester had proved to be invaluable.

The CE reported that, following the request from the Broads Local Access Forum (BLAF), all recommendations noted in the paper regarding risk to waterways users from water borne disease had been adopted by the Authority at their meeting in May 2023, and that the Broads Authority (BA) continued to work with the Environment Agency (EA) to support actions to improve water quality. It was decided by BA members that the BA should not start testing the water.

A member noted that the comments were mainly around sewage and faecal matter, however they wondered what happened in respect of farm effluent going into rivers and whether there were any controls in place. The CE replied that this was part of the issue debated by the BA because there was a combination of things that come off the land into the water, including nitrogenous fertiliser and other chemicals. These were issues but are not as significant as in other parts of the country, such as the River Wye, where phosphate pollution is problematic. The BA reinforced its view not to encourage people to swim in the rivers.

8. Water plant management

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) introduced his report and presented a few slides to update the members on water plant management, especially in Hickling Broad in relation to the stonewort cutting trial. He noted that staff time had steadily increased in maintaining the marked channels and river reaches. For example, there had already been 6 days' work for weed cutting on Hickling Broad this year so far, compared to a total of 12.5 in the whole of last year.

A member thanked the HCME and asked whether there was a connection between dredging and growth of stonewort in Hickling Broad. The HCME replied that in advance of dredging, any negative impact on plant growth had to be considered; therefore, water quality and ecological monitoring had been put in place. Removal of the loose sediment could have had a beneficial impact on the growth of stonewort in the area.

The member replied that they had spoken to landowners and businesses adversely affected by the growth of stonewort and that they would be open to more cutting. He had lobbied Natural England (NE) in this respect, and asked if landowners were to agree to a wider area of weed cutting, could the Broads Authority (BA) help? The HCME replied that those conversations were in train at present.

A member asked where the cuttings from this trial were stored and the HCME replied that all cuttings went onto Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) land and that they had been helpful in identifying which areas were suitable. The member then asked whether the cuttings were something that could be used in agriculture and the HCME confirmed that conversations were being had in relation to the potential for cuttings to be used for this purpose.

A member said that the results of the trial were positive, however, in trying to build biodiversity in freshwater, diversity was an important factor and created stability in an ecosystem, moving forward felt that the cutting regime was leading to a monoculture of stonewort and was not helpful from a biodiversity point of view. The member asked whether the current management could be reviewed to try and refine what was to be achieved and, in their mind, would mean an increase in the channel to allow sailing boat racing regattas to be held on the Broad and would seem to be at very little cost to the ecosystem.

The HCME replied in that the designation of Hickling Broad in terms of its SSSI status was dependent on the stonewort beds, so increasing biodiversity in this particular case was a negative thing. Introduction of other plants makes the stonewort beds less viable, therefore increasing biodiversity in this case would not be something that anyone would look to achieve.

A member asked whether the increased amount of cutting and putting the arisings on the banks would lead to nutrients leaching back into the water, and had the BA looked at alternative uses. The HCME replied that they worked closely to the Environment Agency (EA) guidance regarding leaching, so there was no real impact at present as long as the cuttings were not heaped too high.

A member asked, in terms of navigation, whether there was an end goal or if the BA was just focusing the dredging on the marked channel as there were several users that wanted to go beyond this channel. The HCME replied that they were working toward the vision of less nutrients in the water which would result in plant growth of less strength. Therefore, this would be a positive in the accessibility beyond marked channels and smaller crafts would have access to more of the Broad.

A member suggested that a preliminary plan was made that showed what an improved and wider channel would look like and produce a map, which could be put on the table to NWT and NE. The Director of Operations (DO) replied that there were other issues at Hickling Broad including Prymnesium, for which costly mitigation measures must be taken. The widening of the channel, which was artificially deep, would create the problem of disposing the material. The BA has had to invest heavily in creating areas using European funding, where it is possible to dispose of this material. The issue was that the space is limited, therefore if the channel were to be widened there would be a significant cost and it would need to be looked at as to who is going to pay.

The Chair asked whether there was any data on the water depth in the 1950s where there was less growth, compared with now, to which the HCME responded that the BA did not have any apart from anecdotal data.

HCME summarised the discussion. In conclusion, Hickling was a test case and other Broads were following, with other areas of the Broads now beginning to experience similar issues. The BA needed to consider what the priorities were regarding water plant management across the whole of the Broads, and what could reasonably be done, and if there was more to be done, how this would be resourced.

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

The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HDME) summarised his report and gave a presentation giving a breakdown on time and resource allocation on various operational requirements such as dredging, water plant management, mooring maintenance, and repairs, etc.

A member asked a question regarding the rumoured loss of moorings at Langley Dyke and Loddon. The Director of Operations (DO) said that the lease for Langley Dyke was still under negotiation with the owner. The Chief Executive (CE) advised that as this topic was not on the agenda, it would not be appropriate to discuss today, without giving the required public notice. However, a report could be included on the agenda for the next Navigation Committee meeting.

A member asked a general question on moorings in respect of the Integrated Access Strategy and the provision of a mooring for every 30 minutes of cruising time. If this strategy, year by year, was achieved, would the cost of maintaining and purchasing moorings plateau? The CE said that this may not be the case as boats were becoming bigger and therefore taking up a

greater area of a mooring. Therefore, the need for moorings could increase as the boats get bigger. This would be a strategic issue to discuss at a future meeting. The HCME said that the scope of the Integrated Access Strategy was currently being reviewed and would be presented to the Navigation Committee in due course, it would also be circulated to stakeholders and user groups.

The Chair wanted to pass on his thanks regarding the quality of dredging, repairs and refurbishment on quay headings and congratulate the teams involved in this work.

10. New Tolls system

Members received the report concerning the functional capability of the proposed replacement toll system. The Head of ICT and Collector of Tolls (HICTCT) drew members' attention to the two elements on which he was seeking members' views. The first was the proposal to allow private boat owners to spread the cost of their tolls. Currently, only hire boat operators were able to do this as their costs were quite considerable.

The second issue was around the issue of toll payers selling their boat part way through the year after the toll had been purchased and the tolls not being transferrable or refundable.

About the first issue, the Broads Authority (BA) was looking for members views about the introduction of monthly payments, which was raised by some toll payers. It would impact cashflow and was likely to incur additional costs to the BA, including for handling missed payments. It was anticipated that it would require additional charges for those opting to spread their payment. The HICTCT said that views were also sought from the members on the minimum cost for eligibility for boat owners to spread the cost of their tolls. The initial idea was for the cost to be spread over four months, starting on 1st April each year.

The members discussed this topic at length and there were several suggestions on how the facility of spreading the costs could work, including working with a factoring company which would remove risk to the BA and ensure that the money was received at the start of the boating season.

A member said that the current system worked and did not think that there was any need to change it, and that if the proposed scheme required additional administration, existing toll payers would end up having to pay more.

A number of questions were asked around whether it would be possible that when a boat is sold, the owner gets a refund or the toll could be transferred to their new boat. The view was that when a boat was sold, the toll went with the boat, and that was part of the negotiation. For boat owners, April being the biggest outlay as all payments were due, including moorings, boat yard costs, tolls etc. another question was raised whether the BA could change the toll year.

Following the discussions, the Chief Executive (CE) said that the members had given the BA a lot to think about, and summarised members feedback that the reasoning behind sticking

with the existing system that was in place was because it was cheap and efficient, and moving away from that could result in an increase in charges.

Action: The HICTCT to investigate whether it is possible to use a factoring company and will report back to the Navigation Committee in due course.

11. Safety at Great Yarmouth

Members received the report, and the Director of Operations (DO) reiterated that safety was a key priority and a standing item on both the Broads Authority (BA) and Navigation committees' agendas.

The vice-Chair said that he had read the MAIB report in detail, and as a volunteer ranger and someone who navigated the Broads, he has seen first-hand what changes had been made following the report by the Broads Authority (BA). He stated that he was very impressed with the changes made by the BA to improve safety.

The Chair thanked the DO for the report.

A member commented that the BA should keep an eye on developments with the railway bridge at Great Yarmouth. The bridge was one of the biggest issues river users had and it might be worth presenting the case of raising the bridge about 1ft as a safety feature. The Chair replied that he thought that this was an excellent point and should be noted.

12. Annual income and expenditure

Members received the report of the Director of Finance (DF). The DF commented that the figures were draft on the basis that they were subject of a forthcoming audit, however, the Broads Authority (BA) were still waiting to hear when the audit would be.

A member asked the DF whether the navigation reserve noted in point 4.3 of the report was an entirely separate thing from the navigation earmarked reserves. The DF confirmed that they were separate.

The DF said that the BA were going to hold a training session for all members on 18 July, an invite would go out in due course. Although the training is focused on the Statement of Accounts, it also covers how the finances worked and how the reports members received throughout the year turned into the statement of accounts.

13. Progress report on charging at Ranworth moorings

Members received the report. The Head of Communications (HC) gave an update on the mooring charges and said that in general the introduction of charges had been successful. As of 7 June 2023, after just 9 and half weeks, the Broads Authority (BA) had collected 2,431 mooring fees totalling just under £14,000. This indicated that income for this year would be higher than first thought. The HC said that there had been a higher turnover of boats, freeing up spaces for overnight mooring, and in turn had benefited businesses in Ranworth. Visitors

had been particularly appreciative of the help with mooring and the HC thanked all the staff working at Ranworth.

In response to questions, the HC confirmed that no fees would be levied in the winter months, and the BA would look to publicising later in the year the success and benefits brought to the community. Regarding any knock-on effect for adjacent quays and moorings further up the Broad, the HC advised that that he was not aware of any issues.

A member commented that from a hire boat perspective, the charging at Ranworth had been reasonably well received, especially because of the availability of moorings and the help with mooring.

A member commented that there was a clear success at Ranworth, and asked if the BA were considering bringing forward charging at Reedham. The Chief Executive (CE) replied that the BA was waiting to finalise the arrangements with Broadland District Council.

The vice-Chair commented that the BA should be pursuing those boatowners who had not paid the mooring fees. The HC confirmed that this was the case.

14. Local plan issues and options consultation – responses

The Planning Policy Officer (PPO) summarised the report advising that the topics that were of particular interest to the Navigation Committee are highlighted.

Regarding item 2.1 in the report, there was some discussion on replacement quay headings and putting new quay headings in front of existing versus in line or behind due to the encroachment into the navigation area over time. A member commented that it would be difficult to write a policy on every situation and that it may need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

15. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on 7 September 2023, venue to be confirmed, commencing at 10am.

The meeting ended at 12.40pm.

Signed

Chairman

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Navigation Committee, 08 June 2023

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Harry Blathwayt	8	Ward member for Hickling
Peter Dixon	8	Resident of Hickling and Member of River Cruiser Class Committee. "Other Registerable Interest". Report was for information only.

Appendix 2 – Public Question Time, Navigation Committee, 08 June 2023

Question: Regarding the state of the Navigation on the River Waveney

Following the Ray Perryman Memorial Race held on May 27th 2023, a number of people have raised concerns over the desperate condition of the River Waveney.

This was the 40th running of the race. Originally it was held at the end of Oulton Regatta however because of the proliferation of SCRUB and WOODLAND particularly above Burgh St Peter it was moved in the early 2000s to a date and time when the tide would assist the boats because it had become impossible to navigate the river under sail against any flow of tide.

This year, 27th of May, it was found that despite a moderate breeze the river Waveney has become so badly degraded by trees and scrub that it is practically impossible to sail from Somerleyton to Beccles even with a fair tide. The race was won by Farthing. Farthing is one of the largest yachts on the Broads with a sail area of over a thousand sq ft. Not a normal sailing boat by any stretch of the imagination. Other sailing boats were limited to drifting through the woodland on the tide.

I wrote to Dr Packman in September 2020 raising my concern over the rate at which this area of navigation was deteriorating.

My Question is. 1. Is the committee aware of the condition of the Waveney?

2. Is the committee concerned to maintain this river as a navigation for sailing boats?

I understand that this area has been the subject of a succession of 5-year plans. Given that it is evident to all that these plans have comprehensively failed to conserve the river and its environs,

3. Will the committee recommend that in future the plans will include an input from members of the sailing community?

Response by the Chair on behalf of the Authority:

Thank you, Mr Clark, for your three questions.

The management of trees and scrub adjacent to the waterways is an important safety issue for navigation and an activity on which the Authority expends considerable resources, both in Ranger time and the Maintenance Team. In recent years we have increased the length of riverbank managed through mechanisation and the purchase of tree shears.

The Authority does not recognise your description of the River Waveney. We continue to maintain and where possible add to the network of free 24-hour moorings, dredge to the specification agreed with the Navigation Committee and remove trees that are a hazard to navigation. It is well managed but as with the Broads as a whole there are conflicting views amongst stakeholders regarding the importance and value of that vegetation.

In response to your specific questions.

1. Is the committee aware of the condition of the Waveney?

The Navigation Committee receives regular reports on a range of parameters for the waterways and details of the work undertaken to maintain the rivers including the Waveney.

2. Is the committee concerned to maintain this river as a navigation for sailing boats?

The Authority maintains the river Waveney for navigation by all boats but this has to be undertaken in a wider context and the wholesale removal of trees and scrub from the landscape, implied in the question, to facilitate sailing would not only be inappropriate and create an adverse public reaction, but the Authority doesn't have the powers, agreements and consents or the resources to carry it out.

Tree and scrub growth within the Broads Authority executive area is largely a matter for private landowners, on whose land the trees are growing. Where the Authority has a statutory role to act, as defined in the [Broads Act 2009](#), Part 3, section 39 (1), the Authority may remove overhanging or dead trees where they endanger or pose a significant obstruction to the navigation.

Trees and scrub along the river valleys are important corridors for wildlife, provide shelter for spawning fish and are appreciated by the boating community.

One of the potential reports for a future meeting of the Committee is to brief new Members on the Authority's agreed policy on the management of vegetation adjacent to the river.

3. Will the committee recommend that in future the plans will include an input from members of the sailing community?

The Navigation Committee, which represents all users, is consulted on plans, policies and strategies that have a significant impact on the enjoyment of the navigable rivers. Public consultation is undertaken on major policy documents such as the Broads Plan and the Broads Local Plan. Officers would be happy to meet with the representatives of the River Cruiser Class to discuss this matter or any other concerns they have.

Officers will provide you with a written briefing on the Authority's approach to managing tree and scrub across the whole of the Broads, a copy of which has also been sent to the Vice-Captain of the River Cruiser Class.