

Broads Forum Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2017

Present:

Keith Bacon (Chairman)

Andrew Alston
Brian Barker
Julian Barnwell
Michael Flett
Tony Gibbons

Robin Godber
Peter Jermy
John Lurkins
Peter Mason
Philip Pearson

Paul Savage
Richard Starling
Charles Swan
John Tibbenham
Peter Wall

In Attendance:

Ms N Beal – Planning Policy Officer
Ms E Guds – Administrative Officer (Governance)
Mr S Hooton – Head of Strategy and Projects
Ms A Kelly – Senior Ecologist
Ms A Long – Director of Planning and Resources
Miss S Mullarney – Administrative Officer (Governance)
Mr J Packman – Chief Executive
Mr R Rogers – Director of Operations
Mrs C Smith – Head of Planning
Ms S Stephenson – Senior Environment Officer

Also In Attendance:

Mr Brian Wilkins – Chairman of Upper Thurne Working Group and Member of the Broads Authority.

Prof Jacquie Burgess – Chairman of the Broads Authority.

4/1 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Ashley Cato, Henry Cator, Martyn Davey, Barbara Greasley, John Hiskett, Jennifer Parkhouse, Simon Partridge, Bryan Read, Hugh Taylor, Anthony Wright.

Members were reminded to send their apologies if unable to attend meetings and to contact their substitutes.

The Forum was also reminded that the meeting was being recorded; no members of the public indicated that they would be recording.

1) Goodbye to Director of Planning and Resources

The Chairman announced that Andrea Long would be leaving the authority and thanked her on behalf of the Forum for her work with the authority.

2) Welcome to new Member Peter Mason

The Chairman welcomed new Member Peter Mason who had been appointed to represent the Land Based Recreation Interest Group. Peter is a Member of the Broads Local Access Forum and is a professor of Tourism.

3) Goodbye to Member Bryan Read

Members were notified that Bryan Read was retiring from the Forum. The Chairman noted Bryan's long standing Membership of the Forum and his extensive background with the Broads.

4) Variation in the Order of the Agenda

The Chairman announced that he proposed to vary the order of the Agenda to take item 5 after agenda item 6. This was to ensure a prompt meeting as Brian Wilkins was unable to attend the meeting until later on.

5) Report back from the Broads Authority Meeting on 19 May 2017

The Chairman reported that Nicky Talbot had been appointed Chair of the Navigation Committee and Brian Wilkins was appointed Vice Chair, both of whom were appointed to the full authority as representatives of the Navigation Committee.

The Broads Authority Annual Site Visit took place on 13 July; it concentrated on the Southern Broads and the river Waveney. Members visited Mutford Lock, Geldeston Lock, and Beccles Quay, and had a briefing on the Suffolk Wildlife Trust proposals for Carlton Marshes.

The Chair highlighted a public question that was raised by Richard Holmes regarding the cutting of plant growth in Hickling Broad as it was linked to agenda item 5.

The Director of Operations reported on the operations work regarding fen management and work recently done in Hickling Broad.

Reports were received on Ethical Standards, Code of Conduct, and Member and Officer Relations.

Broads Authority Members received the Annual Health and Safety report and report on Marine accidents.

There were also exempt items on Moorings and Corporate Sponsorship, the latter of which was covered in the Chief Executive's report at item 8.

4/2 To receive and confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2017

The minutes of the last meeting held on 27 April 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments suggested by Paul Savage (PS):

Minute 3/7 Mooring Strategy Update 2017

- paragraph 4, fifth line: 'owned' should read 'provided'

- paragraph 4, fifth line: the word '*necessarily*' to be removed.

PS also requested adding clarification on the difference between visitor moorings and Broads Authority owned moorings. As this was not something that was discussed at the last meeting, the Chairman said that this should not be recorded in the 27 April minutes but proposed minuting it at item 12 in the 27 July minutes.

4/3 Public Question Time

No questions were formally received however with the Members' agreement following a decision made at the 2 February 2017 meeting (2/14), Clive Bygrave (CB), a member of the public present at the meeting, was allowed to pose a question to the Forum. The Chairman announced that as the Forum had not received formal notice of the question they may not be able to provide an answer.

CB spoke to the Forum about the recent anti-social behaviour incident on the Broads. He explained that he and his wife were present at the time of the incident and asked the Forum what the Broads Authority was doing in response to the incident and asked if there would be tougher actions in future.

Robin Godber (RG) responded by stating that the issue would be on the agenda for the next Broads Society meeting.

Tony Gibbons (TG) commented that it was not for the Broads Authority to stipulate what the hirers do and that the boat hirers should take responsibility for issuing conditions to people hiring the boats.

CB further asked how similar issues could be policed as the Broads was such a large area.

Richard Starling (RS) said that he was disappointed by the response of the police and suggested that the Broads Authority was limited in what it could do as it was a police responsibility.

Michael Flett (MF) discussed the difficulty in ensuring a limitation on the number of same sex individuals hiring a boat. He added that the police needed a higher profile on the Broads.

Peter Mason (PM) agreed with other Members that the police and boat owners needed to be more active but added that visitors needed to be educated and suggested a code of conduct be signed before hirers get on the boat.

CB stressed that there was a general lack of knowledge amongst boaters on how to contact Broads Beat and proposed a leaflet with contact details be supplied on all hire boats.

The Chief Executive thanked CB for his question and agreed that the recent behaviour was a significant worry. The Chief Executive stressed the need to be proportionate with how to respond to the incident as the behaviour was not exclusive to young same sex parties. He added that the reports from boat yards

indicated that throughout the year there were between 20-30 same sex parties each weekend and that only between one and three per weekend caused any significant problems.

The Chief Executive provided an update to Members on a recent meeting with the Hire Boat Federation and NSBA, in which they agreed the following actions:

1. All three organisations will encourage boat owners and hirers to contact the police (dialling 101) in the event of encountering severe extreme anti-social behaviour.
2. The Hire Boat Federation will develop a Code of Practice for all hire companies in relation to briefings for non-family groups. The Broads Authority will be notified in advance by boat yards if such parties are expected. Broads Beat will be able to attend the yards to give a briefing to the hirers about what is appropriate.
3. A higher deposit should be required. This could then be used to refund the police and the Broads Authority if there was a significant call on their resources in dealing with such incidents.

CB queried the figures as it had been reported to him that there were 50-60 same sex parties each weekend. The Chief Executive concluded by saying he would look into the differing figures and further added he would ask Broads Beat if they could report on why something more significant was not done in response to this incident. He reiterated that ultimately cases of severe anti-social behaviour were a matter for the police.

Julian Barnwell (JB) commented that pub landlords would also need to be contacted as riverside pubs were hotspots for this behaviour.

4/4 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response taken following discussions at previous meetings

Members of the Forum received a report summarising the progress of current issues.

The Chairman raised the issue with the Environment Agency's intention to dispose of the area at Ludham Bridge as he said they are trustees of the Staithe so it was not their freehold to do with as they liked. The Chairman intended to contact the Environment Agency regarding this.

PS added that the Environment Agency needed to be aware of the facility to provide demasting moorings in the area.

The Chairman informed Members that Prof Tom Williamson would be giving a presentation at the Broads Authority Meeting on 28 July.

RS enquired when the Staithe Report would be published. Officers replied that they were still waiting for the maps.

RS asked officers for information on flood risk management, referencing his comment at the 2 February 2017 meeting (2/9). The Head of Strategy and Projects

confirmed that Rory Sanderson from the Environment Agency had looked into the data available and had mapping of the Broads where there were deliberate banks to control the water, but said it was difficult to collect comprehensive data as this could only be done with a significant amount of field truthing.

RS stated that people in the area could provide this information. The Chairman asked RS to provide officers with their contact details.

The report was noted by Members.

Agenda item 6 was dealt with this point.

4/5 Upper Thurne Working Group – Update on Hickling

Members received a presentation from Brian Wilkins (BW). This was followed by photographs of Martham Broad, provided by RS.

BW gave Members some background on the Upper Thurne Working Group and stated that the biggest challenge in the catchment was aquatic plant growth which prompted the question “when is it a plant and when is it a weed?”

BW discussed the Upper Thurne Management plan developed in 2006 which was still in place to deal with the issues.

BW stated that Hickling's water had been dominated by aquatic plant growth and sedimentation of the channel, and in order to achieve better water depth the Broads Authority developed the Hickling Broads Enhancement Project and attended the Upper Thurne Working Group meetings to discuss priorities for dredging and sediment re use opportunities. The result was a set of proposals which were funded by the Authority, known as the Hickling Vision. This included the Hill Common Bank Restoration project, and creating new wetlands.

BW also discussed the issues affecting the Upper Thurne catchment, including water quality and water levels.

Peter Wall (PW) asked BW if the subject of the trees on the river Thurne opposite High's Mill had ever come up at the Upper Thurne Working Group. BW confirmed that the issue was on the agenda and agreed that it was not easy to navigate the Thurne.

Philip Pearson (PP) added that from a wildlife perspective the area was doing really well.

The Chairman stated that Hickling was an important area for sailing and asked to what extent the chara should be allowed to grow/cut back for sailing. BW replied that an investigation was in progress to determine the impact of cutting it.

RS said that there was good work by the Broads Drainage Board to reduce saline intrusion through the groundwater, however, nothing had been done about the increasing geese population and the effects on water quality. RS referred to the

pictures at Martham Broad, he said the weed cutting needed to be addressed. He acknowledged that the Broads Authority had cut the weed but commented that it was not collected. RS stressed that boats breaking down in that area were very isolated and that the mobile phone coverage could be poor.

The Chairman further queried if there was a standard method of raising an alarm if someone needed help. BW remarked that it was ultimately the responsibility of the skipper and that boaters should contact Broads Control during the day, and should dial 999 out of hours. He added that safety was also on the agenda for the Upper Thurne Working Group.

Brian Barker (BB), as a member of Hickling Broad Sailing Club commented that the weed was too high to tack through; he reported that it was affecting club membership.

RS asked for feedback from the Broads Authority on weed-cutting. The Director of Operations stated that they were cutting aquatic water plants according to the agreed Standard Operating Procedure and offered to discuss the issue with RS after the meeting to address various points RS had made which he believed were inaccurate. RS declined this meeting.

Regarding Hickling, the Senior Ecologist added that the Broads Authority had negotiated with Natural England to cut 5% of the common aquatic plants to benefit the channel area. This would be done in a controlled area and monitored in order to report back to Natural England if the rarer species could be cut without unacceptable damage to them. The Senior Ecologist acknowledged the importance of the water quality for plant growth. It was emphasised that the cutting was not for conservation but for navigation purposes.

4/6 Riverside Tree and Scrub Management

Members received a presentation from the Senior Environment Officer on the management of riverside trees and scrubs.

The Senior Environment Officer presented Members with the methods that were used as well as sharing examples of completed work. It was explained to Members that key areas of navigation had been identified so that they could be prioritised for river bank management. The Authority was in consultation with Natural England and the Environment Agency to develop a robust way of managing river bank growth. The Senior Environment Officer made it clear that when they referred to riverside management it was about management and not clearance.

The Senior Environment Officer discussed how decisions were made on what they remove and what they leave, Members were shown an example of an area that they would leave as the overhanging vegetation did not affect the navigation channel. In comparison Members were shown an area with overhanging trees on a bend which had an impact on navigation sight lines so this growth was removed.

The methodology developed with the Environment Agency stated that within any managed stretch 20% of overhanging vegetation should be retained, the Broads Authority had the discretion to decide where the 20% is left.

Another feature discussed was trees with roots in the water, particularly for fish refuge. An example showed a tree that was encroaching on the water so the branches were taken away, however the roots weren't completely removed in order to maintain a live system.

The presentation concluded with maps of the areas of focus where the work would take place over the next 5 years.

PM asked how much consideration was given to bank management being linked to damage when cutting down trees, making the bank less or more stable. The Senior Environment Officer explained that all was considered and that they did not disturb the root plates of the trees.

The Chair queried if casual mooring occurs where the work takes place causing erosion to the banks. The Senior Environment Officer explained that they were aware of this happening and that they needed to keep an eye on it.

PS asked about the methodology in terms of bays where trees were overhanging preventing the reeds from growing up resulting in a lack of protection of the edge of the riverbank. The Senior Environment Officer responded that different stretches were looked at each year with the work staggered along the bank; they removed some of the trees in a 3 metre zone to help protect the bank.

PP asked how the process was monitored. The Senior Environment Officer explained that the methodology applied this year was based on the previous 2 years, and that the Rangers were able to report back.

Reporting on comments from the NSBA, John Tibbenham (JT) queried if the Broads Authority's policy on clearing was a 10 metre width of trees and scrub or 3 metres, as the report suggested. The Senior Environment Officer confirmed that with consultation from the Forestry Commission, the Broads Authority had an exemption to remove 3 metres back from the river on straights and up to 5 metres back from the river on bends. The Officer confirmed that trees that had fallen into the river were taken into account and removed if they obstructed navigation.

PW expressed difficulty in sailing in the Broads as vegetation was taking over with particular mention to the river Bure. He further questioned why the methodology was set at 3 metres, he stressed that he did not think that sailing vessels had been taken into account and stated that the RYA should also be consulted.

The Senior Environment Officer explained that the agreement with the Forestry Commission was out for consultation. Officers presented the situation to them with the conflicting interests and that was the limitation that they were prepared to give. The Chairman added that he took exception to the Forestry Commission but said that it was beyond the Authority's control.

On behalf of the reed cutters, RS queried the effectiveness of the flood alleviation project by Broadland Environmental Services Limited (BESL) as the scrub was coming back. He further asked if the Broads Authority had reviewed its methods to remove riverside scrub and asked about the removal of larger pieces. The Senior Environment Officer said she was unsure of BESL's methods and added that the Broads Authority had the ability to share its methods with partners. She reported that there were different floats now available (the method for providing a safe working platform for staff when managing the river bank) so a trial of best options could be considered. She further stated that the removal of timber was a high intensity task with high costs but other options were available in terms of equipment so this is something that could be looked at it.

Andrew Alston (AA) mentioned the forestry grant to be announced by Lord Gardiner and he suggested using the grant for a pontoon with a digger with tree clearing capabilities.

PW asked for a definition of the wind quality targets and how the sailing intensity was defined. The Senior Environment Officer explained that a scoring system had been devised with the Rangers. PW disputed the Ranger's figures and stated that boats would go elsewhere if the water was not suitable.

Members welcomed the presentation and commented that they were pleased to receive the report.

4/7 Publication Version Local Plan

Members received a report on the Broads Local Plan. The Planning Policy Officer explained to Members the process for the plan. It had had 2 consultations and the next steps were for it to be reviewed at the Planning Committee, Navigation Committee, and the full Authority, as well as stakeholders having 6 weeks to respond before being submitted to the planning inspector. Members were informed that they would formally receive notice of the consultation. Members were asked to discuss the plan.

RS questioned the limited responses from parish councils and stated it was due to the length of the plan.

The Planning Policy Officer reassured the Forum that a summary of the plan would be available at the last stage but reiterated that there was a detailed contents page so that stakeholders could read the portions of the plan that was relevant to them.

Members raised the issue of poor attendance at parish meetings to discuss the plan. The Head of Planning addressed this by stating that parishes could contact Officers to meet with them. It was further explained that the length of the document was a requirement due to the very prescribed process. The Planning Policy Officer had strived to make it as accessible as possible to readers by breaking it down into issue focussed chapters.

The Head of Planning further explained that the Plan had to be reviewed by the Planning Committee and that they had looked at it in detail in bite size pieces over the course of 6 months.

AA asked about the landscape impact and if areas outside of the Broads executive area were covered in the plan. The Director of Planning and Resources stated that the Broads Local Plan only covered the executive area and that matters outside of this would fall into adjoining authorities' plans.

4/8 Chief Executive's Report

Members of the Forum received a report summarising the current position in respect of a number of important projects and events.

Regarding the Broads Climate Partnership Meeting, JB asked if officers of other agencies would be present at the briefings for MPs mentioned. The Head of Strategy and Projects confirmed they would as the Broads Authority was the lead working very closely with the Environment Agency which was the main responsible body.

Members noted the report.

4/9 Parish Issues

JT asked if the moorings at Acle had been purchased by the Broads Authority. The Director of Planning and Resources was not in a position to comment.

JT also raised concerns with the safety of individuals taking part in paddle boarding on the river Bure. The Director of Planning and Resources advised JT speak to the Head of Safety Management.

BB queried the cutting of footpaths at Somerton. The Chairman stated that as it was a public right of way it was the responsibility of Norfolk County Council.

RG queried the clarity of the signage at Ludham, saying it was not clear that it led to St Benet's Abbey. Officers confirmed that the Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer was arranging signage.

Members also discussed the closures of swing bridges due to hot weather. The Chairman informed the Forum that discussions with Network Rail had taken place.

MF updated Members on the Ludham Bridge, Womack Staithe lease with North Norfolk District Council regarding the emptying of waste. He said it was not clear who owned the land but if the parish council was prepared to lease the land for £1 per year it would not be considered a commercial site so North Norfolk District council would clear it at no direct cost. This was what the parish council had decided to do.

4/10 Current Issues

No items were proposed as current issues.

4/11 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business

No items were proposed as items of urgent business.

4/12 Matters for Chairman to raise at next Broads Authority Meeting

As mentioned at item 4/2 PS asked that the following statement regarding the Mooring Strategy Update 2017 report presented to the Forum at the 27 April meeting, be raised at the next full Authority meeting:

Broads Forum 27 April 2017

Mooring Strategy Update 2017 (Agenda item 7)

1.2 The 2006 strategy was reviewed in 2009 and in 2013 The overarching objective of the mooring strategy: "to maintain as a minimum the present number of moorings available for visitor use"

1.3 The adoption of the Mooring Strategy in 2006 and the IAS in 2013 has resulted in a significant increase in the length of moorings the Authority provides. Currently the Authority provides 7,535m of visitor and demasting moorings over 63 sites. They are listed in a table in Appendix 2.

PS comments:

Taken together, these statements give the impression that the total available short-term mooring space must have increased and the objective to, "maintain as a minimum the present number of moorings available for visitor use", must have been fulfilled. In fact, "moorings available for visitor use" and, "moorings provided by the Authority", are two separate categories and are shown on separate Maps of the 2006 survey. For various reasons, the total length of "moorings available for visitor use", has decreased since 2006.

The report goes on to describe as "new" moorings two moorings which the BA will provide at Berney Arms and Rockland Short Dyke. The reality is that they are existing moorings being transferred from one category to the other, with no actual impact on the total available mooring capacity.

Please would the Members consider asking for the annual report they receive on moorings [see section 10.1 under "Auditing and Monitoring, in the 2009 Mooring Strategy] to include not only the "SMART" objectives for new BA moorings – as at present – but also a report on all the objectives, including those for "moorings available for visitor use".

4/13 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

Peter Jermy asked for an update on Boundary Farm and the pontoon moorings.

4/14 To note the date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 2 November 2017 at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich commencing at 2pm.

The meeting concluded at 4:53 pm

Chairman