

Broads Authority

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2022

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Present

Bill Dickson – in the Chair, Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Matthew Bradbury, Nigel Brennan, Andrée Gee, Gail Harris, Paul Hayden (items 1-12), Tristram Hilborn, Tim Jickells, James Knight (items 1-15), Greg Munford, Michael Scott, Matthew Shardlow, Simon Sparrow, Fran Whymark (items 1-15)

In attendance

John Packman – Chief Executive, Chris Bing – Monitoring Officer, Lottie Carlton - Volunteer Coordinator, Maria Conti - Strategy and Projects Officer, Michelle Glover - Governance Officer, Emma Krelle – Director of Finance, Rob Rogers – Director of Operations, Cally Smith - Head of Planning, Marie-Pierre Tighe – Director of Strategic Services and Sara Utting – Senior Governance Officer.

Also in attendance

Colin Hart - Ranger (items 1 & 2), Sue Stephenson - Ecology and Design Supervisor (items 1 & 2).

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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 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.

Apologies were received from Greg Munford, Nicky Talbot, Vic Thomson.

2. Chairman's announcements

The Chair acknowledged and thanked Colin Hart (Ranger) and Sue Stephenson (Ecology and Design Supervisor) for their 25 years of service in the Broads Authority. The Chair gave an overview of their valuable work and commitment, and presented them with a gift on behalf of the Authority.

3. Introduction of members and declarations of interest

Members indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered, and as set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

4. Items of urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public question time

No public questions had been received.

6. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7. Summary of actions and outstanding issues

Members received the latest summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings.

The Chief Executive confirmed that there were no further updates to the report.

The report was noted.

8. Water resources East - update, with presentation from WRE

This item had been withdrawn from the agenda as it needed further consideration in the context of the wider budgetary discussions scheduled for 5 October.

9. Broads Plan - adoption

Members received the report.

The Director of Strategic Services (DoSS) introduced the Broads Plan 2022-27, which members had seen at various stages of its development in the last few months. The latest stage had been the public consultation, this brought helpful feedback which had been incorporated into the latest draft. Members were invited to endorse the document for adoption. This was an important milestone for the Authority.

A member commented that in the Sustainability Appraisal report, the baseline for species was not strong or clear: the comment was noted by the Chief Executive.

Another member welcomed the ambitious and comprehensive content of the document and thanked all involved in the process.

Tim Jickells proposed, seconded by Andree Gee, and

It was resolved unanimously to adopt the Broads Plan 2022-27.

10. Financial Performance and direction

The Director of Finance (DoF) introduced the report. At the end of August, the total variance moved to a favourable variance of £180,836, mainly due to the income moving to a favourable position of £43k.

There were no further changes to the Latest Available Budget and the forecast at time of writing the report. However, following the recent government announcement that the National Insurance increase would be reversed, it was expected that this would have a favourable impact on the forecast.

The main adjustment to the forecast were the pay negotiations as set out in paragraph 4.2. The DoF provided an update that Norfolk County Council had agreed to implement the proposed spinal points but was awaiting confirmation that this would be included in the November payroll.

Section 6 of the report, covered the waivers of standing orders relating to contracts: the first was to extend the payroll contract to 2023/24 at a cost of £7,500, and the second to extend the contract for the scaffolding at Mutton's Mill for a further six months at a cost of £3,510.

A member asked if grants from Defra were on a 1-year basis, and whether staff turnover rates were an issue and had any impact on operational performance. The DoF confirmed that it was a 3-year grant agreement with Defra with a proviso that they could revise it each year. With regard to staff turnover, many people had reassessed their lives during the Covid period but this levelled out in the last financial year. The CE added that where there had been vacancies, the Authority had been able to successfully recruit, so there were no staffing issues at the present time.

A member commented on the adverse variance of the hire craft tolls at the end July. The DoF commented that the variance in the report is due to timing difference and profiling and had in fact moved to a favourable variance at the end of August.

The CE added that weekly hire craft were continuing to decline: they were down to approximately 660, and indications were that a further 15 would come out of the system next year. However, the loss of weekly hire craft was offset by an increase in day boats which paid more in tolls per square metre than weekly hire craft. The trend that seemed to be continuing was that older boats were being taken out of the system, and companies were using the income generated to fund the construction of newer boats. Thus, the quality of the fleet was improving but reducing in total number.

A member commented that the reduction in fleet was a concern not just for the tolls' income, but for the whole infrastructure of the Broads and the network of trade and income generated by other businesses in the area. Other members agreed that a holistic approach and view of the local economy of the Broads was important.

The CE commented that surveys undertaken last year demonstrated that the vast majority of people who come on a boating holiday enjoy it, and many return time after time. Businesses were delivering a product that people enjoy, with largely high standards of handover, and

although the figures were changing because of the reinvestment of new boats, the CE believed that the industry had a good future.

A member asked what the main factors were that had caused the decline in boat numbers. The CE commented that the pattern and nature of tourism had changed: people were more likely to come for shorter breaks and to book last minute. Foreign holidays were also more available and often a cheaper option than a Broads holiday. In 1980 there were 2,300 weekly hire boats, and it was most likely a positive change in the respects of reducing what used to be too many boats for the Broads to sustain. The current boat numbers were more in equilibrium with the environment but it needed to fit in with the tourism offer. Broads tourism was thriving but there was a greater diversity of options on offer, such as shore-based or floating accommodation.

A member asked, whether, as the trend of 'staycations' levelled out, the Authority should be working now to promote and boost tourism, using wider publicity across Broads. The CE confirmed that advertising was actively being used with Broads Tourism at this time, particularly through social media.

A member added that people's expectations of a boating holiday were higher than they used to be. In previous years there was a large number of smaller, simpler boats, whereas now there were a smaller number of larger, more sophisticated vessels. There have also been changes in the types of boat operators: small family run businesses were now generally consolidated into larger companies due to costs. There was demand to be near the river, not necessarily on boating holidays, and so the Authority needed to consider how to support the entire Broads holiday industry. Businesses should be able to undertake their own promotion as long as the Authority is enabling and supportive in this.

A member commented that, when taking into account fleet length and surface area, a smaller number of large boats may give a similar income to a large number of smaller boats, and so the drop in numbers may not be as drastic as they look.

A member commented that it was important for members and the Authority to give full consideration about the current issues of cost of living, energy costs and recent central government initiatives in preparation for the meeting in October, to enable decisions to be made.

Stephen Bolt proposed, seconded by Gail Harris, and

It was resolved unanimously to:

- i) To note the income and expenditure figures**
- ii) To note the latest pay negotiations.**
- iii) To approve the waiver of Standing Orders for the extension of contracts for payroll and scaffolding at Muttons Mill as outlined above.**

11. Local Plan - Issues and Options

Members received the report. The Chair noted that there was an additional (fourth) recommended decision required under section 6 of the paper: 'endorsing the 3 NPPF scenarios and related actions in event of the release of a new National Planning Policy Framework for consultations'.

A member asked for insight into Nutrient Neutrality and the potential impact it might have on the Plan, and if it could be an issue for the Broads. The member also asked about two other points raised in recent meetings: electro-magnetic radiation/5G, and plastic grass and the environmental harm it was causing, and if there was a way of having some standards for that in the Plan.

The Director of Strategic Services (DoSS) commented that there was a lot of work going on in regards to Nutrient Neutrality (NN). One main tool for tackling NN would be Nutrient Credits, to mitigate the impact of development schemes, and this necessitated the use of a calculator. Natural England has produced a calculator and Norfolk Local Authorities were also producing another calculator, which was being assessed by Natural England. All Norfolk local authorities were working together on this topic and some Broads Authority members were involved with the process. It was important that all the local authorities should keep one common approach as to how to tackle this issue. A member asked if more skills and resources would be needed for this task. The DoSS commented that some training may be needed for planning officers, and in particular training for the use of the calculator which took the form of a large spreadsheet.

A member commented that the Norfolk authorities together were challenging the figures from Natural England's calculator and had proposed changes based on local evidence. As long as Natural England was convinced by the science behind that calculation, that would then potentially reduce the cost of mitigation, and there was then potential for the use of a credit system similar to carbon trading. The member added that the biggest challenge was the fact that the developers would realise that there were areas in the Broads that were not currently drawn into the NN issue, which would put pressure on planning authorities in those areas. Another potential issue was linked to the five-year land supply. A member commented that in terms of the Broads specifically, there were not many of those cases to deal with because the Authority did not have large numbers of properties that would be relevant. However, development of the surrounding areas would be of interest, and there could be a necessity to create some wetlands for instance, which may be useful in the Broads context. Some discussion followed on whether that could bring funding into the Broads Authority from other local authorities to deliver some nutrient mitigation.

The Chair confirmed with members' consent that a vote be cast on all four recommended decisions together.

Michael Scott proposed, seconded by Harry Blathwayt, and

It was resolved unanimously to endorse the Issues and Options, SA and HRA documents for consultation, and to endorse the 3 NPPF scenarios and related actions in event of the release of a new National Planning Policy Framework.

12. Strategic Priorities - update

Members received the report. The Chief Executive (CE) commented that all eight Strategic Priorities were on track or complete.

In recent months, with the Chair's help, the Authority had been cultivating its relationship with Defra and Department for Transport (DfT) officials rather than working through National Parks England and that was beginning to bear fruit. A number of officials from Defra and DfT had visited the Broads on 2 and 3 August.

Following the visit and at extremely short notice the CE was asked on 12 August by Defra to submit a bid for capital funding. On 15 August the CE submitted a bid for £1,215,000 for 8 projects (Truxor T250, three Whaly work boats, the purchase of 30 acres of fen habitat, a Loglogic soft track system, a long reach 360 excavator, a third water plant cutting machine, ancillary items to support the moving and locating of plants and the replacement of the drainage structure at Strumpshaw fen).

The CE added that a positive response had been from Defra was received yesterday, but it was not clear whether the Authority would receive anything, or what the timetable was. There was no clearance as yet to spend any money, and clearly time was short for expenditure this year, so preparatory work was underway. The CE was grateful to the staff who turned the original bid round so fast. The CE would let members know if the bid was successful, and due to the price, he would need authority to purchase the land, as this was beyond the scope of his delegated powers.

As regards the Water Mills and Marshes (WMM) landscape project, this has been doing extremely well, but COVID and inflationary pressures were making the delivery of the programme difficult. Match funding was needed especially for the restoration of the mills. The CE had therefore also submitted a further bid to Defra for £233,880 for which a response was also awaited.

A member asked that if the DEFRA contribution was not received for the Water Mills and Marshes project, would that money need to come from the Authority, and would it put future priorities at risk. The CE commented that restoration of windmills was difficult and complex. The cost could be reduced by using students but Covid had limited that resource. The underlying problem was about availability of skilled labour. Therefore, the BA was in discussion with Norfolk County Council (NCC) about a longer-term ambition to develop skilled people. Mills were an ongoing challenge for the Authority and the NCC. A decision would be needed on WMM projects once the outcome of various requests for external funding, including to DEFRA, was known.

A member asked, that given the timescales, would there be any governance issue with the Authority pre-authorising purchase of the 30 acres of fen habitat up to a certain amount, so

that the CE would not need to come back to members if there was not time. The CE responded that that would be helpful, and added that if Defra were to provide whole of that capital funding and should the Authority want to proceed with the purchase, it would need to move quickly.

A member asked, that if the Authority were to go ahead with these projects and purchases, what this would mean in terms of revenue impact: were these essentially substituting money the Authority might have spent itself? The CE confirmed that care had been taken to minimise revenue impact; it was largely capital equipment which either would be purchased anyway, or capital equipment which would improve the efficiency of the management of conservation sites. The purchase of additional land would create some revenue but not significant because of its location. It was a site that the Authority already managed on behalf of the owners, and so the Authority already had knowledge and interest in the site.

A member asked how far the potential revenue liability of new machinery and running costs had been considered. The CE confirmed that the Director of Operations and his team had considered the list very carefully. The items were mostly things which would bring more efficiencies to the work involved, and ultimately make savings.

A member stated that the location of the fen site would be welcome before making a decision, or further information and why the purchase was considered appropriate. A member commented that it would add to the Authority's reputation and experience, and the opportunity for making a difference if it could own more of that kind of land.

The suggestion was made that members could delegate authority to the CE, in consultation with the Chair, to proceed with the purchase.

It was suggested to name the land in the proposal. The Monitoring Officer advised that this would have to be in a closed session as the information surrounding the purchase and value of the land was exempt.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.35am and reconvened at 11.40am.

Exclusion of the public

Tim Jickells proposed, seconded by Gail Harris, and

It was resolved unanimously to exclude the public from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved 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 recording was suspended.

It was resolved unanimously that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman, be given delegated authority to purchase the land identified in the exempt minutes, subject to the necessary funding being provided by DEFRA and on terms that best protect the Broads Authority's interests.

The Press and public were re-admitted to the meeting.

13. Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance - update

The Director of Strategic Services (DoSS) introduced the report and commented that it was originally envisaged that this would be a short-term alliance, but it would now be ongoing, with annual updates to the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA) Strategy.

The Strategy had been amended and the groups updated to include the Inland Tactical Coordination Group and the Coastal Partnership Group.

A member commented that he was happy to endorse the Strategy, but that it would be better if it was endorsed by the whole Authority rather than delegated to officers because it showed intent as a group more powerfully.

There was discussion on whether the latest decision on water abstraction would have an effect on this document. The DoSS confirmed that water abstraction had not had any direct impact so far on the work delivered by the group.

Based on a previous suggestion, the DoSS suggested that recommendation two could be removed and members would just endorse recommendation one today.

Harry Blathwayt proposed, seconded by Gail Harris, and

It was resolved unanimously to endorse the updated Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA) Strategy.

14. Volunteer Strategy for the Broads

Members received the report. The Director of Strategic Services suggested that the date period of the report should be amended to read '2022-27' in order to correspond to the decision at item 9 to adopt the Broads Plan 2022-27.

The DoSS updated members that the Volunteer Strategy had considered the recommendations from the Glover Review, and the option to work with partners on volunteer type work had been enlarged. It had also been made simpler and clearer to read.

A member asked whether the Authority had considered the impact that volunteering had on volunteers and their health and well-being. Managing and monitoring that impact could make the Authority more eligible for funding in this area. The Volunteer Coordinator confirmed that this was an important point, and monitoring on health and well-being could be added to the monitoring plan.

A member asked how the insurance around safeguarding was positioned in the regular audits. The Volunteer coordinator responded that two members of staff accompanied volunteers who were under 18 years of age, and that safeguarding was included in the training for volunteers. The member added that it was important to test the robustness of our systems, and to check that we were content with how we were discharging our responsibilities. The Vice Chair commented that it would be helpful to check our safeguarding policy that covers

volunteering, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy at the same time. The CE commented that the Head of HR was also the Safeguarding Officer, and that officers would check that the Authority's safeguarding policy covered all aspects including volunteers. The DoSS added that as the Head of HR line manages the Volunteer Coordinator, and oversees the adequacy between the safeguarding policies and volunteering work.

A member asked if one objective could be slightly amended to add one action to capture the positive outcomes for volunteers' health and well-being. The member also suggested that objective 3 on monitoring is amended to reflect the monitoring on health and well-being. He also asked what data was available for objective number 3: "Promote and increase opportunities to support greater engagement of under-represented groups in the Broads National Park and the work of the Broads Authority and its partners", and whether there were any plans to have volunteers from other areas involved. The DoSS confirmed that the first objective could be amended as the member suggested with an additional action, as well as an amendment to the monitoring section. The Volunteer Coordinator commented that objective 3 was more focused on getting under-represented groups to visit the park, not just on the make-up of the volunteers themselves. The DoSS commented that the Authority sent monitoring numbers to Defra each year, including the numbers of volunteers in under-represented groups, and that geographic statistics, in terms of where volunteers come from, were not currently monitored but this was something that could be looked at.

There was discussion about shorter term volunteering opportunities, such as the Volunteer Action Days, and about volunteering being open to all. A member commented that volunteers do have a cost to the Authority and only finite resources to pay for them, and the Authority needs to acknowledge these financial implications in the context of the challenges facing our budget.

Stephen Bolt proposed, seconded by Andree Gee, and

It was resolved unanimously to adopt the Volunteer Strategy 2022-27

15. Appointment of Trustees to Whitlingham Charitable Trust

Members received the report. The Vice-Chair and the Chief Executive had met with Nigel Savoury, the new Chair of the Whitlingham Charity Trust (WCT), who was keen to reignite a close working relationship with the Broads Authority (BA). The WCT Chair broadly approved the proposals sent to him from the Authority, such that there would be four trustees appointed by the BA that would meet the skills and needs of the Trust in line with their new strategic plan.

Following a meeting of the Trust on 14 September, Nigel Savoury sent correspondence to the CE, confirming that the WCT board had suggested and agreed that WCT should have its own nomination panel rather than leaving the matter just to the WCT Chair, and that WCT presence of the interview process should include not just the Chair but just one other WCT board member. The WCT Chair added in his correspondence that WCT were making significant progress with their strategy which should be signed off in November, and then they

would be in a position to agree and communicate the skills and experience that would complement the board and take WCT forward.

The CE therefore suggested to members that one amendment could be made on paragraph 2.5: that the interview panel would consist of 2 members of the Broads Authority, and the Chairman and one other trustee from WCT.

The Vice Chair (VC) commented that many of the points raised at the last BA meeting were taken to the meeting with WCT, including some of the points around what relationship the Trust had with other local authorities, and that the new Chair was grateful for the support that was being provided, particularly in relation to South Norfolk Council. The new Chair was keen to develop positive relationships and partnerships with all other local authorities.

The VC also made members aware that he had offered some of his free time to WCT, not as a trustee but as a volunteer to advise them on their strategy. He would be attending some of their board meetings to help with this, not as a member of the BA, but as the CE of a large country park and Chair of the Parks Alliance.

A member asked if the last bullet point of 2.6 needed further clarification, as it might not always be appropriate to report things to the Authority, and suggested amended wording to read: "when it is in the best interests of the WCT".

There was some discussion around the point about terminating the appointment of the trustee, and a comment that this was too prescriptive. The VC suggested amending the wording to read that: "the Authority shall terminate the appointment of the trustee in the event that they failed to abide by the governance of the Trust".

A member commented that the third bullet point needed the addition of "with the agreement of" which members agreed.

Therefore, the wording would read as follows:

- Trustees shall be appointed by the Authority for not less than one year and not more than three years.
- A Trustee appointed by the Authority may resign by giving notice in writing.
- With the agreement of the Trust, the Authority shall terminate the appointment of the Trustee in the event that they failed to abide by the governance of the Trust.
- Trustees appointed by the Authority will report significant issues to the Authority, if and when they arise, when it is in the best interest of the Trust.

Tim Jickells proposed, seconded by Matthew Bradbury, and

It was resolved unanimously that, in collaboration with the new Chairman of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust, to use an open and transparent process, similar to that used for the Navigation Committee and Broads Local Access Forum, to appoint four trustees with the skills and experience to deliver the Trust's Strategic Plan.

Fran Whymark and James Knight left the meeting at 12.31pm.

16. Items of business raised by the Designated Person in respect of the Port Marine Safety Code

There were no matters to report under this item.

17. Minutes to be received

Members received the minutes of the following meetings:

[Broads Local Access Forum 9 March 2022](#)

[Planning Committee 22 July 2022](#)

18. Other items of business

19. Formal questions

There were no formal questions of which notice had been given.

20. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Authority would be held on Friday 02 December 2022 at 10.00am at the Kings Centre, 63-75 King Street, Norwich NR1 1PH.

The meeting ended at 12:36pm

Signed by

Chairman

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Broads Authority, 23 September 2022

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Fran Whymark	11 & 13	On the Greater Norwich Local Plan Board, Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance, and Broadland Futures Initiative - other registerable interests