

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2011

Present:

Mr Jonathan Bowman (Chairman)

Mr Andrew Alston	Dr Martin George	Mr Bryan Read
Dr Keith Bacon	Mr Tony Gibbons	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Steve Duckett	Mr Brian Holt	Mr Matthew Thwaites
Mr Colin Dye	Mr John Lurkins	Mr Jeff Toser
Mr Mike Evans	Mr Peter Medhurst	Mr Hugh Tusting
Mr Mike Flett	Dr Philip Pearson	Mr Anthony Wright
Mr Terry Fleet		

In Attendance:

Mr A Clarke – Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer
Ms R Evitt – Administrative Officer
Mr R G Holman – Director of Change Management and Resources
Mr S Hooton – Head of Strategy and Projects
Mr J Organ – Head of Governance and Executive Assistant
Dr J Packman – Chief Executive

Also Present:

Chris Bielby – Natural England
Steve Hayman – Environment Agency

5/1 Apologies and Announcements

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Barnes, Mr J Barnwell, Mr H Cator and Mr J Hiskett.

5/2 Chairman's Announcements

(1) Report back from Broads Authority meetings held on 23 September

The Chairman reported back on his attendance at the Broads Authority Meeting on 23 September.

Members noted that Tuesday November 22 had been scheduled for Broads Forum members to take part in the National Park Authorities Performance Assessment (NPAPA).

Keith Bacon requested that the Broads Forum agenda included the name of the officer as well as the post they held within the Broads Authority.

(2) **Membership Issues**

The Chair welcomed Barbara Greasley to the meeting who was in the process of becoming a member of the Forum.

(3) **Any other announcements**

No other announcements were received.

5/3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 July 2011

Members noted that an amendment to the minutes had been received from Mr Martin George. Mr George suggested that the following paragraph should be inserted at the beginning of Agenda Item 4/12, page 9. The amendment was as follows:

Suggested addition to the minutes:-

"A member drew attention to the fact that although most of eastern England is covered by Nitrate Vulnerable Zone designations, two areas, one in the catchment of the R. Bure, and the other upstream of the Thurne broads, have been omitted. Given the need to take all possible efforts to reduce nitrogen inputs to the Broadland rivers, it was suggested that the Authority's officers ask Defra why these two areas had been omitted, and invite the Department to rectify this anomaly as soon as possible."

Members agreed the amendment.

Keith Bacon noted that comments had not been attributed to the relevant member in the minutes. This practice had been agreed by the Forum previously but had recently lapsed. It was noted that from now on members would be referred to initially by name and then the appropriate initials.

5/4 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response Taken following Discussions at Previous Meetings

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received.

5/5 Water Catchment Management in the Broad

The members received a paper which summarised the main activities that the Broadland Authority had been working on to support water catchment work in the area. The activities ranged from high level Water Framework Directive liaison for the Anglian Basin to practical works on the bank side. It was noted that there was an opportunity to take this further by submitting a bid to the Environment Agency who had been looking for new hosts to lead a catchment pilot that supports the Water Framework Directive following Government

advice. Members were asked to comment on how they saw such an initiative developing and whether the focus should be on existing liaison groups and whether there would be a community level interest in getting involved.

As part of this collaboration, a discussion would take place with key partners regarding how areas outside the Authority's Executive Area would be included in the collation of any relevant data. This practice would enable a more holistic understanding of the water quality and how it was affected by tributary waters. Members noted however that it was crucial to communicate the resulting data in an uncomplicated and understandable form.

Martin George (MG) wished to remind the Authority that there was an enormous amount of background information on the region and how it could be managed, some of which dated back to the early seventies, which should not be overlooked. These reports were just as relevant as they were then.

MG continued that it was important that we presided over what was going on in the catchment of the rivers as it had an effect on what was happening in our region as a whole. The District Councils should liaise with the Authority and share information on a more regular basis.

MG reported that the EA should be encouraged to carry out projects similar to the Wensum Valley Project on other rivers, such as the Bure. The Wensum project had been very successful and may well be instrumental in helping understand how to manage sediment which had travelled downstream so it was not channelled into the Broads. He concluded by saying that the key to improving water quality holistically in the Broads was by manipulating, managing and improving water quality in the contributory rivers.

Keith Bacon (KB) reported that during the pilot scheme for the 'Whole Valley Approach' one element that had been highlighted was that you had to look outside the executive boundary in terms of managing the area as a whole. It was crucial to look at the effects of undesirable developments upstream, sometimes just half a mile outside the executive boundary, which the Broads Authority had no jurisdiction over whatsoever.

Richard Starling (RS) commented that there had not been a serious response to this work to date and that a more robust intervention from the Broads Authority was necessary. He concluded by saying that preventative measures were the only serious option.

Philip Pearson (PP) agreed that we should be more serious about partnership working as this was the only way to tackle these serious issues. He continued that diffuse pollution was very complicated and that the only way to approach it effectively was for all the partners to come together and engage with local communities in a comprehensive but digestible way. Local people needed to understand the negative effect their actions had on the environment as well as how their actions could have a positive effect. PP continued that this engagement could take many different forms but face to face interaction with the community was key. Not only did we have to commit our time and

resources to this, but also commit to going back to see if these initiatives within the community were actually working.

MG commented that leakage was also huge problem. The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (RELU) demonstrated how human discharges strongly affected the water system and the control of Phosphorus was an enormous problem.

Andrew Alston (AA) commented that the Water Framework targets were heading in the right direction and partners could only do their best to reach them. A wide range of partners were responsible for attaining these targets and for getting people to buy into it.

PP stated that it was not good enough to simply 'hope' to reach the required targets. These issues were serious and had to be addressed immediately. Partners had to start building the necessary research and information to make a difference immediately.

5/6 An Integrated Access Strategy for the Broads

Members noted a report considering the future strategic management of public access in the Broads. The report proposed a more integrated approach to the management and development of a wide range of access to the area. The report took into account the needs of all classes of users of the Broads and drew links to other relevant strategies and plans. The report also suggested some themes upon which such a strategy could be based. Members' comments were welcomed on the content of the report.

KB commented that as Chairman of BLAF he was very supportive of this strategy and the issues it raised. Part of this awareness was the understanding that it was Norfolk County Council who had the responsibility to deal with public rights of way. Unfortunately they were now concentrating on long distance paths. This was unfortunate as communities were generally more interested in short paths and the footpaths linking their own villages. He suggested that footpaths should be based around 'hubs'. These hubs would create a new network of short paths linked together by car parks, toilets and better access for visitors and local alike. KB was very concerned about the situation and requested reassurance that the Authority would protect and enhance the public rights of way access, pressurising the County Council if necessary.

AA highlighted another issue - landowners taking part in HLS farming schemes were facing serious cutbacks and farmers providing permissive paths may well withdraw from the scheme because of withdrawal of funds. He suggested that it may be worthwhile contacting landowners with permissive paths independently as some of them may be willing to maintain them on their own.

It was noted that the Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer had spoken to Norfolk County Council about talking to the landowner and seeing if they

would consider maintaining any permissive paths on their land on an individual basis. It was agreed that talking to landowners and local community groups was the key to the success of the strategy.

It was noted that KB wished to have it on record that the Broads Forum was not happy with the withdrawal of funding for permissive paths in the first place. It was noted that this area relied on its network of paths and access for a wide variety of reasons and the commercial ramifications of this should not be underestimated.

Terry Fleet (TF) commented that unfortunately sometimes only official communication worked when it came to access issues and permissive paths. Members of the community had tried the 'friendly approach' to landowners but to no avail. Sometimes a formal process was the only way to make people listen. TF also proposed re-instating a local ferry as part of the Integrated Access Strategy. The Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer confirmed that he had looked into this and had been involved in discussions with James Knight.

RS voiced his concern that if the paths are not maintained correctly then people cannot use them. It was not right to pass the responsibility on to the parish councils who had neither the manpower nor the funding to take on this important responsibility.

PP commented that he had met Broads Authority officers in February to discuss mapping conservation areas in the Broads in relation to possible access disturbance. This had been a timely discussion as the process was coming together and could fit well into this strategy. The mapping exercise also had the potential of engaging the public on a wider level.

5/7 Broads Climate Change Adaptation Plan

The Preliminary Draft of the Broads Climate Change Adaptation Plan was considered by the Broads Authority at its meeting on 23 September 2011. Forum members were asked to consider some specific questions about the idea of a range of simple scenarios as a way of helping wider interests. The Forum was also asked to consider the issues and how they thought this document, written for Defra, should be modified to help the dialogue approach.

The Head of Strategy and Projects reported that flooding was the main risk for the Broads area and it was crucial that the concepts of this issue were understood as a whole. It was also important that people were engaged with the issue, an element that benefited from a partnership approach.

MG commented that the report discussed the wettest winters and the driest, hottest summers but it failed to distinguish between ordinary 'run of the mill' mean sea level rise with extreme events and it was these events that would cause the major problems. Saline incursions and extreme sea level rise would effect a complete change to the local flora and fauna and the communities

living within these areas. It was crucial that we spelt out the fact that the Broads were under threat from two separate events, sea breach and controlling the flooding of water forced up the rivers – which would occur an increasing number of times.

MG continued that a ‘washland’ was often cited as a preventative measure but they are not easy to create, can be very expensive and there was still no guarantee that they would work. The only option to prevent the wide scale flooding of Yarmouth and Gorleston was to create a structure at the entrance of the haven and give security to the place and the people. It must be noted that this could affect over 18,000 people in the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston area and was not to be underestimated.

BR commented that members must remember that this report was an investigation and was not intended to resolve any of the current problems; it was the beginning of a necessary process. He felt the term ‘scenarios’ was suitable, agreed a simpler document was needed for the public and that an electronic newsletter in due course would help.

KB reported that careful publicity was needed to make the communities aware of the issues and encourage people to engage in looking at solutions. Unnecessary panic and upset had been caused in the past with inappropriate and misleading publicity. He enquired whether the partners involved had an emergency plan in place for such an event and was there procedure set out to deal with a catastrophic saline incursion.

It was noted that there was an emergency planning scenario in place but for people and property and not for the holistic environment. It was agreed that this is something that needs further work.

MG enquired whether it was possible for the Broads Authority to commit to making a decision and confirm that they were going to let nature take its course or if they were going to continue to protect this system as a fresh water environment.

The Head of Strategy and Projects reported that Authority was not in a position to make a definitive decision on this yet as it was vital to listen to the range of views being expressed and to help move towards a consensus view. He confirmed however that together with Natural England, the Authority fully supported the Environment Agency’s current flood management policies.

5/8 Broads Biodiversity: The Authority’s Role

Members noted that the report and appended paper had identified a set of priorities for the Authority’s work on nature conservation. This paper aided the Authority in closer working with its partners in delivery of the Broads Plan.

The new Broads Plan set out the objectives for the next five years for all the organisations involved in protecting and enhancing the special qualities of the area. Members noted that in times when budgets were constrained it was

even more important that organisations worked closely together, supporting each other's activities and avoiding duplication.

The Chief Executive reported that this was a very significant paper. The Broads Authority had lost a percentage of its grant so this paper was even more important in reiterating partnership working and moving forward successfully with the Authority's conservation targets.

MG welcomed the paper, commented that it was very helpful but that he was concerned that it did not draw attention to water quality. He drew members' attention to the second paragraph of item 5 on the agenda which stated that 90% of the water system was considered less than good in at least one of the aspects measured. MG continued that virtually nothing had been said about the rivers. There were some examples where work had taken place and conditions were improving, such as Whitlingham, where Phosphorus reduction equipment had been fitted. It must not be ignored that the rivers and broads were still highly charged with Phosphorus and nitrates and this had been shown very clearly in these reports. MG commented that pressure must be brought to bear on Anglian Water and their tertiary treatment on selected sewage works. It is imperative that any research into biodiversity should make water quality high on its list.

PP reported that he and the RSPB Area Manager had met with Anglian Water about the water quality. Currently Anglian Water was still meeting the Environment Agency water quality criteria and targets so little or no pressure could be brought on Anglian Water to improve their systems. PP concluded that the RSPB was not happy that the Water Framework Directive targets had been pushed back to 2027; targets they believed should be met much earlier.

KB commented that there had been a lot of trouble at Sutton Staithe with the capacity due to electrical issues and raw sewage had flowed into a RSPB reserve.

MG was concerned that the attitude adopted by the Environment Agency was looking at the UK as a whole and not individual compartments. He felt that the Broads Authority should not accept this attitude and should insist on a far higher quality to reflect the area's very special outstanding natural ecology and biodiversity.

KB enquired whether monitoring of land management was to be registered centrally and the information mapped so it was easier to see when work had been done and where.

The Chief Executive reported that better systems were now in place to map the area, including more advanced use of GIS technology.

RS commented that national parks authorities should be leading the way in sustainable land management.

5/9 Governance Review

Members noted that the Government had published its response to the consultation on the governance of national parks and the Broads. The report summarised the key issues.

The Chief Executive reported that the Government had been discussing the size and composition of the Authority and how members were appointed. The main talking point was the issue of direct elections. It had been decided that the New Forest and the Peak District would act as pilots of direct elections and the parks as a whole would begin to see the importance of that. The trials would be reviewed half way through the pilot scheme to see if they would be stopped or extended to the other national parks.

5/10 Chief Executive's Report

Members noted the report which summarised the current position in respect of a number of important projects and events, including decisions taken during the recent cycle of committee meetings.

5/11 Current Issues

MG commented that a grant aid of £800 had been awarded in 2009 for research in the use of Copper based anti-fouling paints. He added that Hickling Broad in particular was suffering from copper pollution at the present time, and asked for a report to a future meeting on the continuing use of this paint which, he claimed, had been banned outright in some other countries.

RS requested that the Environment Agency's Fisheries Department be asked to report back to a future meeting on the decline of the Eel population.

KB enquired whether the Middle Thurne Working group had been disbanded.

The Head of Strategy and Projects confirmed that unfortunately the group had been disbanded but felt local rangers would continue to provide liaison and Thurne valley issues would be explored by the Upper Thurne Working Group.

BR requested a report for the next meeting about the implications of algae in the Broads.

It was requested that the Administrative Officer re-send members the option of which papers to receive in hard copy and which to receive electronically. Previously some members had requested to receive the papers in hard copy and the appendices electronically, but had not found this system suitable for them

5/12 To note whether any items have been proposed as items of urgent business

The Chairman reported that there were no items of urgent business.

5/13 Matters for Chairman to raise at next Broads Authority meeting

The Chairman requested that members contact him (or the Administrative Officer) via email with any items they wished him to take to the Authority when he made his usual report at the next meeting.

5/14 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 9 February 2012 at Dragonfly House, commencing at 2.00pm.

5/15 Matters to be discussed at the next meeting

No items were identified.

The meeting concluded at 16.24pm

Chairman