

Broads Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2012

Present:

Mr Stephen Johnson (Interim Chairman)

Mr Andrew Alston	Mr Mike Flett	Mr Bryan Read
Dr Keith Bacon	Mr Tony Gibbons	Mr Richard Starling
Mr Brian Barker	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 Anthony Wright

In Attendance:

Ms R Evitt – Administrative Officer
Mr B Hanson – STEP Project Officer
Mr R G Holman – Director of Change Management and Resources
Mr S Hooton – Head of Strategy and Projects
Dr J Packman – Chief Executive

Also Present:

Mrs Barbara Greasley

3/1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Messrs Henry Cator, Martyn Davey, Terry Fleet, Dr Martin George, Dr Phillip Pearson and Mrs Lydia Smith.

3/2 Chairman's Announcements

(1) Report Back from Broads Authority Meeting: 16 March 2012

Members noted the Authority believed it was acting as a champion for the Broads.

Dikerogammarus Villosus had been discussed and the Forum was asked to note item 7 on the Broads Forum agenda.

There had been a number of exempt items – one of them being the transfer of responsibility for the Breydon Water and Lower Bure. It was noted that there would be an announcement on 3 May 2012.

(2) Membership Issues

Keith Bacon (KB) enquired about the deadline for the decision on the review of consultative groups. It was noted that the Authority would

make a decision in September following consultation with all the relevant stakeholders.

(3) Any Other Announcements

There were no other announcements.

3/3 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2012

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to amendments to the officers in attendance at the meeting.

3/4 Summary of Progress/Actions/Response Taken following Discussion at Previous Meeting

A report summarising the progress of current issues was received.

(1) Grant Aid for Anti Fouling Paints

The Chief Executive advised that the Authority was struggling to find references to the £800 grant referred to. However, in response to interest expressed by the RYA, he had put them in touch with Imperial College, London who were carrying out research into the effects of Tributyltin (TBT) in sediment derived from historic boats antifouling paints.

(2) Decline of the Eel Population

It was noted that the Authority was liaising with the Environment Agency (EA) in respect of this matter, and would be bringing a report to a future meeting.

3/5 A Review of the Current Drought Conditions in the Region and Especially the Broad

Members received a report which summarised the latest situation in respect of the current drought and considered some of the implications for the area. It particularly reflected on the main issues for agriculture and the demand conflicts that can arise. The likely climate trends were touched upon leading to an exploration of how the community might have to alter how it copes with the climate into the future.

Members were asked to give any observations about what they thought the priorities and possible actions were for the area and for the Broad Authority.

It was explained that the EA had been contacted regarding attendance but due to leave arrangements was not able to send a representative. However, they would potentially be able to answer any questions at a later date with weekly email updates. At the recent Broad Authority meeting Paul Woodcock

had suggested that it might be an opportune time for the Agency to give a presentation to the Broads Forum on its role.

Members noted that there was currently a soil moisture deficit of 57mm in the Anglian Region with exceptionally low ground water levels in all but four indicator sites. Reservoirs were exceptionally low also.

The major impacts on the Broads were identified as habitats under stress, saline transmission, and diffuse pollution with potential to affect agriculture and possibly recreation options. Regular research and monitoring was taking place to record this information fully.

Members queried the allocation of water use during the drought conditions and the Broads Authority's role in this decision making process. The process was led by the Environment Agency though it probably was the Authority's responsibility to encourage water conservation and make visitors aware of the impact the drought had on wetlands.

Andrew Alston (AA) commented that usually it was only the high value crops that were irrigated but this year there was 4 feet of soil with no moisture and crops were dying. There was therefore a huge demand from farmers to irrigate crops that did not usually need irrigating. As a result of these conditions there had been a reduction in the growth of normally irrigated crops, and only about 70% of the normal volume of crops was being grown. He continued that Farmers were the only abstractors subject to Section 57 restrictions which required them to reduce abstraction when the system was under pressure.

He explained that water moved naturally underground from west to east, and came close to the surface in Broadland, so the Broads area was not as badly affected as some other areas, such as North West Norfolk for example, and he was not anticipating serious problems. Nevertheless each individual river reacted differently, and decisions had to be made on a catchment basis. The Broads distribution area was supplied not only by Anglian Water but also by Essex and Suffolk Water, who were yet to impose a hosepipe ban. Members were concerned that the public may not be aware of this distinction.

Members raised concerns regarding the increase in large housing projects in the area. Large housing estates needed vast supplies of water and these projects were impractical and untenable at the current time. Members noted that the Authority was consulted only when the building work had a direct impact on the executive area and there was a limit to what the Authority could do.

Members noted that European directives required consideration of increased water demand. There were long term water studies taking place at a strategic level to consider long term adaptation work to conserve water supplies and look at lower usage.

KB queried the current fish situation and possible increase of salinity caused by the drought. The Senior Waterways and Recreation officer commented that any fish in stress were being moved to more suitable areas or given additional aeration by the EA as part of a strategic programme to protect the fish from any drought related problems.

Peter Medhurst (PM) stressed the need to publicise to householders and others how they could save water. He suggested that guidance be provided at Broads information centres.

Barbara Greasley (BG) commented that one of the major criteria of the Green Boat Mark was to save water and that her business was committed to passing on information to their customers about how to conserve water and use it wisely. The largest hirer in the Broads was in the process of joining the Green Boat Mark scheme and this was a very positive step forward in raising awareness of water use in general.

The Head of Strategy and Projects commented that Anglian Water sent out a regular electronic newsletter to all its customers with lots of tips and ideas to save water. Anglian Water was also running the 'Drop 20' scheme – a project to get all householders to drop their water use by 20% so there was some useful and practical work going on. However, there was more potential to engage with the various stakeholders and explore a consistent message.

Conclusions

- (i) The Authority should look to provide notices on standpipes to reinforce messages about water use.
- (ii) The Authority must continue to look carefully at plans for increased housing and other infrastructure demands in the Broads catchments and express concerns to local planning authorities where this development was not felt to be environmentally friendly.
- (iii) The Forum would like to understand more about the Environment Agency's approach to the drought, how they are using water in the Broads and their 'headroom' for water use.
- (iv) The Authority should advise visitors about the use of water (not just about whether or not to drink it) at moorings and other suitable locations.

2/6 Progress on Delivering Sustainable Tourism Strategy

Members received a presentation by the STEP Project Officer on Delivering the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, including a wide range of successful projects happening in and around the Broads.

Members noted that working together with the tourism industry and seeking a wider vision for the area and its complex biodiversity required a delicate

balance to be struck. The continuing improvement and transformation of relationships were crucial to the success of industry and the Broads Authority.

Members noted the wide range of schemes currently taking place to enhance, improve and regenerate the area's tourism with as little adverse impact on the area's biodiversity as possible. These schemes included:

- The Visitor Gifting Scheme.
- Britain's Magical Waterland Branding.
- The Outdoors Festival.
- The Green Boat Mark.
- Green Tourism Business Scheme.

Tony Gibbons commented that not enough attention had been given to angling in the Tourism Strategy and that the activity should be recognised for the positive impact it had on the area's economy and tourism. He continued that anglers would like to see more recognition of the activity in leaflets and publicity, and more information about the pastime in the Strategy.

Richard Starling (RS) commented that some tourism had a negative impact on some parts of the Broads area, specifically in terms of litter. He continued that there must be a strategy or partnership in place - including some kind of funding - that encouraged local businesses to help keep litter under control and reduce the negative impact on the Broads area.

The Chief Executive commented that the issue of litter was not a straightforward one. A number of national park authorities had removed litter bins in order to encourage people to take their litter away with them rather than leave piles of litter in and around bins. Collecting litter was expensive, time consuming and sometimes difficult to achieve given the wide variety of landscapes. He commented that long term education was the key to resolving this issue.

PM commented that walking was not highlighted enough in the Tourism Strategy and he would like to see a more consistent approach to walking as an activity in the area.

The STEP Project Officer drew attention to the Broads Outdoors Festival, which was taking place in May. The main driver of this festival was to highlight the wide range of activities which were available to do on land, including walking, in addition to those on water.

Antony Wright (AW) commented that there was need for more partnership working with the highway authorities for strategic routes to be signed and identified with coloured marking and or specific trails for cycling. He continued that cyclists spend more money per head than any other visitor and this must be kept in mind when proceeding with the Tourism Strategy.

Brian Barker commented that a significant problem with attracting increased numbers of visitors to the area was the lack of parking. Whilst it was

acceptable to encourage more visitors to the area, the infrastructure must be able to cope and it was already under a great deal of strain.

Colin Dye drew attention to the fact that tourism was a very labour intensive industry. It created many jobs for the area, both directly and indirectly.

The STEP Project Officer informed the Forum about the "Green Traveller" website. Through STEP funding the Authority had been allocated several pages on the website comprehensively detailing to visitors how to access accommodation hubs and attractions whilst leaving their cars at home. There was also a project in place to develop an application for smart phones which would have maps, suggestions and alternative routes updated on a regular basis.

The Head of Strategy and Projects commented that this all related to the Integrated Access Strategy which was currently being developed. This involved mapping all the facilities available in the area, including public rights of way, cycle routes, 24 hour moorings and public transport routes – and pulling them together into an integrated strategy.

Conclusions

- (i) The Authority should look at the arrangements for the support of tourism initiatives after the conclusion of the STEP programme.
- (ii) The Authority should focus on how angling, and other land based activities such as cycling, should be included more clearly into its tourism programme.
- (iii) The Authority should look at any measures it can take to prevent the deposit of litter, or to manage its disposal, perhaps by encouraging the spread of the partnership arrangements which exist between the Parish Council and businesses at Potter Heigham.

3/7 Dikerogammarus Villosus: Update

The Forum received a presentation from the Chief Executive on the current occurrence of *Dikerogammarus Villosus* (DV) (also known as 'Killer Shrimp') in the Broads.

Unlike native shrimps the DV were carnivorous and would eat anything including small fish. Unfortunately there was little that could be done to stop the spread. However, there was evidence that the Broads may not be the most suitable landscape for its long term habitation and the impact might not therefore be as bad as was feared.

Members noted that the DV's natural predators were birds and fish and that fish can predate it quite well. It had been reported that in Graffham Water the fish were doing better as a result of having the DV to feed on.

The Chief Executive continued that the DV were prolific and fast at reproduction. In one year on the Rhine they managed to spread 140 km downstream. It was also considered that bio-security controls in the UK were weak compared to other countries. New Zealand was an example where much tougher measures were in place, and this was now an important consideration for the future of the area.

As part of the local bio-security measures a new campaign had been launched – ‘Check, Clean, Dry’ - which encouraged all water users to check, clean and dry their equipment before moving it into any other water systems to prevent the spread of DV.

Mike Evans (ME) commented that the RYA fully supported the campaign and would do all it could to publicise it.

3/8 Consultation on Changes to Governance Arrangements for National Parks and the Broads Authority

The Forum received a report concerning the Government’s response to the consultation on the governance of national park authorities (NPAs) and the Broads Authority. The report detailed the five areas of development requiring changes to primary legislation which Defra are consulting on, though some of these were not applicable to the Broads Authority. The Forum’s comments on the consultation questions were sought.

The Chief Executive pointed out that one of the major issues raised by this report was that of Direct Elections. The Authority had long believed that Direct Elections were expensive and administratively problematic in the Broads. Surmounting the problems may bring limited direct benefit and might not improve the current consultation mechanisms. He suggested that one element might be to invite toll payers to appoint members to the Authority by means of a postal ballot. He continued by asking the Forum their opinion on these matters and that of decreasing the maximum term of office for members from ten years to eight.

Mike Flett (MF) commented that he would like to see Direct Elections and believed this would dispel the belief of some members of the public that the organisation was not directly accountable. He suggested that the constituency should be the whole parish where part of that parish was within the Authority’s executive area.

KB commented that he was in favour of Direct Elections in principle but pointed out that they could cause many legislative problems, including when there were boundary changes. He felt that the constituency should be the whole parish, but this raised problems about how to deal with urban areas such as Norwich and Great Yarmouth. He also felt that there was a good case for an electorate of toll payers, but not as a substitute for local elections. Regarding the term of membership, he felt that exceptions should be built in for Chairs and other special cases.

Bryan Read (BR) commented that he was in favour of Direct Elections, but that the Broads was a very different case because of its unusual boundary and other complications such as the number of second home owners. Consequently he did not believe that there would be any great benefit to the area. He added that he did not support direct elections for toll payers, as he preferred the current method of appointing navigation representatives to the Authority and, on balance, felt that ten years should continue to apply to all categories of members.

PM commented that he did not believe the system needed changing at all. The current system worked well even if it was not to everyone's liking. He also believed that a maximum term of ten years was sensible, perhaps with some discretion for the Chair.

RS commented that he was very much in support of Direct Elections.

BG queried why there were only two representatives of navigation on the Broads Authority when toll payers would soon be contributing a bigger percentage of the income. She believed that Direct Elections would improve this statistic and make for a better and more realistic representation of navigation on the Authority.

ME considered that the Authority should wait to see what happens in the trials. However he supported the view that there should be a larger representation of navigation interests on the Authority, so that accountability was comparable with the income provided. He also felt that a maximum term of eight years was too short.

Brian Holt supported the view that there should be more representation by boating interests.

AW commented that whilst navigation may contribute 50% of the funding, this did not necessarily represent a holistic catchment of the people living and working in the Broads Executive Area. He did not consider that navigational interests should be given precedence over other users, including residents.

KB commented on the balance between national and local interests and considered that there should be a majority of local members. He considered that the current application process for Secretary of State appointees was very poor and needed redesigning.

Conclusions

- (i) There was a general support in principle for Direct Elections to provide greater accountability but the difficulties in doing this were recognised.
- (ii) A strong view emerged from some that toll payers should have more representation on the Authority because of their growing financial contribution.
- (iii) The Forum recognised that substantial problems could exist over the constituency for a Broads' electorate because of the current boundary; the suggestion was made that this should include all parishes of which part lies in the Broads executive area.
- (iv) It was generally felt that a maximum term of eight years was too short, and that there should be discretion to enable the services of a Chair to be retained.

3/9 Chief Executive's Report

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

(1) Million Ponds Project

AA expressed disappointment about the pond which had been established at Catfield Fen, and also questioned the cost of the project. It was agreed that officers would respond to AA with the details, and also bring a report back to the next meeting.

3/10 Current Issues

MF enquired about the HLS funding to How Hill and requested information on how that money was being used. It was noted that it was a legal requirement for any HLS scheme to be published and that the relevant officer would send MF the appropriate information.

3/11 Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3/12 Matters for Chairman to Raise at the Next Broads Authority Meeting

The Chairman would raise the conclusions from the meeting's agenda items, as detailed in these minutes, to the attention of the Broads Authority at its next meeting.

3/13 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 19 July 2012 at Dragonfly House commencing at 2.00pm.

3/14 Matters to be Discussed at the Next Meeting

The following matters would be considered at the next meeting:

- Presentation by EA on disaster recovery measures relating to flooding and its drought response.
- Report from Broads Society Charitable Trust on Broads Payback Scheme (BR agreed to identify a suitable author/speaker, although this may need to be deferred to the September meeting).
- Report back on the Million Ponds Scheme.
- Report on improvements at St Benets Abbey.

The meeting concluded at 16.55

Chairman