

# Navigation Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held on 05 September 2024

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## **Present**

Alan Goodchild – in the Chair, Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Mark Collins, Peter Dixon, Tony Grayling, Leslie Mogford, Bob Neate, Remus Sawyerr, Michael Scott, Simon Sparrow, and Daniel Thwaites

## **In attendance**

Dan Hoare – Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Emma Krelle – Director of Finance, John Packman - Chief Executive, Rob Rogers - Director of Operations, Lorraine Taylor – Governance Officer, Jo Thompson – Waterways and Recreation Officer, Sara Utting – Senior Governance Officer

## **1. Apologies and welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Apologies** were received from Paul Thomas.

### **Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014**

The Chair explained that the meeting was being audio-recorded. All recordings remained the copyright of the Broads Authority and anyone wishing to receive a copy should contact the Governance Team. The minutes remained the formal record of the meeting. He added that the law permitted any person to film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of public meetings of the Authority. This did not extend to live verbal commentary. The Chair needed to be informed if anyone intended to photograph, record or film so that any person under the age of 18 or members of the public not wishing to be filmed or photographed could be accommodated.

## **2. Declarations of interest**

Members indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered.

## **3. Matters of urgent business**

No items were proposed as a matter of urgent business.

## **4. Minutes of last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2024 were signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

## **5. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following discussions at previous meetings**

Members received a report summarising the progress of issues that had recently been presented to the Committee. The Chief Executive (CE) said that there were no updates to the report.

A Member commented that he had recently read that there had been proposals to weld Carrow Bridge shut. The CE said that he had not heard anything regarding this, however, the council had recently carried out urgent repairs to the surface of the road.

A Member asked whether there was any update on the East Norwich Development. The CE said that as the largest brownfield site in East Anglia, it was a hugely complicated site to develop for a number of reasons. Norwich City Council had appointed a new set of consultants who were reviewing the plans that were already in place, and he understood that there was not much progress on this development at present.

A Member asked whether there was any update on when the final report on the Environment Agency's (EA) modelling of the Lower Bure would be available. The CE said that he thought that it might be published in October, however, the data needed to be checked and verified before publication. The CE said that once the EA had published the report, he would circulate it to Members.

## 6. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (CE). The CE referred Members to section 1.2 of the report regarding incidents that had happened in August and said that he had circulated a report listing those incidents to all Members. The CE said that the Broads was always particularly busy during the month of August and that there were unfortunately two tragic accidents that happened at Wroxham Broad and Yarmouth which attracted a lot of media interest. The CE said that on the back of that interest, the Authority pushed out three key messages around safety on the Broads:

- If someone was on a boat or other vessel there was a need to wear life jackets or buoyancy aid;
- That drinking substantial amounts of alcohol whilst being out and about on the water was not advisable; and
- That the Authority did not advise people to swim in the Broads unless they were partaking in an organised event.

The CE said that it was important that the Broads Authority did not comment on individual accidents until the results of any police investigation and coroner's verdict was published.

The CE said that in circumstances like these, the Rangers had a big part to play in both preventing accidents, responding to them, and keeping people safe. They worked closely with the coastguard, fire and rescue teams, and in some cases, they had to make reports to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) of the Department of Transport. The CE said that there were a couple of incidents where prompt action by the Rangers meant that boats did not sink, or if they did sink the people on board were safe. In addition, the Rangers assisted the owners of the boats with recovery of them. The CE said that he would like to pay tribute to the Rangers as August had been really busy for them and they had often worked late into the night, or had very early starts.

A Member asked whether those hiring boats were paying attention to the safety information provided by the hire boat companies and could this information be presented in a different way. A Member said that the Authority could not speculate and there was a need to be careful not to blame the hire boat companies. The CE said that through taking advice from the Navigation Committee the Authority had made a series of key decisions over the last couple of years which had been really important. One of which was to produce a series of safety videos which the Authority pioneered with help from the hire boat industry and they had been a huge success. In addition, the Quality Accredited Boatyard Scheme (QAB) had been important and the hire boat yards in the Broads provided a brilliant service. The CE said that because of the additional seasonal Rangers being deployed, they were able to ask questions and survey visitors during the season, asking whether they had watched the safety videos, did they find them helpful, were they given a handover, how long did the handover last, and at the end of the handover did they feel comfortable about handling a boat. The CE added that the survey results one year on from another were better. The Broads Authority and boat yards had done all that they could to make the waterways as safe as possible but it did not mean that there would not be circumstances that happen that would lead to injury or death. A Member commented that the Broads Authority should be applauded on messaging and responsiveness around safety.

A Member asked whether the dangers of boating at Great Yarmouth was highlighted in the videos. The CE said that that both mooring at Great Yarmouth and crossing Breydon Water was covered. He said that he was really impressed by the staff at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station and that they did a great job helping boaters in that area. The Director of Operations (DO) said that for the last two years the Authority had provided fast water training for hire boat companies as some of the yards at the top end of the Broads area, away from Yarmouth, might not have had the necessary experience to navigate Yarmouth and Breydon Water. He added that the hire boat industry was heavily regulated and that both the Authority and QAB audit them in the event of any incident, looking at paperwork regarding inductions, handover etc., and so far, in all of the incidents, it had been found to be correct and above board.

The Chair said that the Rangers do a great job, especially on Breydon Water which was a dangerous area. He added that the boatyards were doing all that they could and the Authority was doing all that they could to support the yards.

A Member commented on Table 1 and 2 in the appendix to the report and observed that the Wroxham launch, and to some extent the Irstead launch, was always significantly higher in the number of warnings given than other launches, and asked whether it was just down to the weight of traffic in those areas or were there other factors at play. The CE said that the figures were a reflection of the particular nature of the Wroxham area and that it was a very busy stretch of river for day boats and hire boats that started out from Wroxham.

## **7. Income and expenditure**

Members received the report from the Director of Finance (DF). The DF said that the Authority was in the middle of the month end for August so did not have any update to

expenditure, however, on income there had been a slight improvement at the end of August. The forecast deficit on the private craft had reduced by £705 and was now £86,716. The hire craft toll forecast deficit had reduced by £4,361 and the variance was now £26,697. In total the forecast for hire craft would be £1.409 million compared to the budget of £1.436 million.

A Member asked for clarification on the income figures for private craft and hire craft and asked whether there was a greater deterioration in the numbers of private craft than hire craft. The Chief Executive (CE) confirmed that this was the case and that the largest part of the income came from motorboats and the figures for these craft was down by 1.9%. The CE said that both the Canals and Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency had seen a drop off in the number of boats.

The DF said that the result of the adjustments and the timing differences on staff – the gap between where a member of staff might leave and new members of staff starts – the forecast had improved by £13,614. This meant that there would be a surplus of £99,300 at the end of the financial year which would give reserves of 10.7%. The DF said that the report made reference to pay differences. The DF explained that pay negotiations were undertaken on the Authority's behalf by the National Joint Council (NJC) and they put together the pay offer to the Unions which consisted of GMB, Unison and Unite. The pay offer of an additional £1,290 per fte that had gone forward was slightly less than what was budgeted of £1,925. GMB had voted to accept the pay offer but Unite and Unison had rejected it. Unison was holding a 6-week ballot of its members for strike action.

A Member asked a question on back dating any pay award and how that affected the accounts. The DF explained that any pay rise would be back dated to 1 April, however, the Authority did not know when the pay negotiations would be complete in any one year but was hoping that they would be in place by 1 April. The budget would be profiled as if all staff would get that pay rise from the 1 April. Each year, there could be a number of reasons why the pay offer would be delayed and when the pay rise was eventually agreed it would be back dated to 1 April and would wipe out the variance in the accounts, unless the pay award was higher than was budgeted for.

A Member asked if there should there be strike action was there a contingency in place and did the DF know what impact any strike action might have. The CE replied that only a small proportion of the Authority's workforce were members of a union so was not anticipating that any strike action would have a big impact.

A Member asked what happened to the excess in reserve if it increased beyond 10%. The DF said that anything over 10% would stay in the reserve and this would then be built into the budget assumption for the forthcoming year when the level of tolls was looked at.

A Member commented on the surplus on maintenance and asked whether this meant that work was being postponed. The CE confirmed that the Authority did not have the income to carry out all of the programmed maintenance. The Member asked whether the CE could clarify that the Authority had made up for the loss in toll income by not doing some of the maintenance work. The CE confirmed that this was the case and the Authority had taken

action to defer two piling jobs at Martham and Potter Heigham which amounted to about £100,000 worth of expenditure which would have been carried out by a contractor.

## 8. Construction, Maintenance and Ecology work programme – progress update

Members received the report from the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME). The HCME said that there were no updates to the report since publication.

A Member commented that he would like to see more information on water plant management and said that the Authority had more capacity to cut water plants than previously and asked whether it was possible to plan for a bigger programme of water plant cutting for next year. The HCME said that there would be a report on this with detailed year-end figures presented at the November Navigation Committee meeting. The Member then asked whether this would provide enough time to alter any plans for next year. The HCME said that the additional variable would be how much water plant growth there would be in 2025, however, a forecast would be prepared for next year's cutting targets.

A Member asked whether there were any figures available as to the difference between water plant growth this year compared to last year. The HCME replied that the data was not tracked on a weekly basis but would be summarised at the end of the season.

A Member commented that he understood that Norfolk Broads Yacht Club had requested that water plant cutting be carried out in Wroxham Broad and asked whether it would be possible to extend the channel in Hickling Broad, and whether funds would be able to be obtained to carry this out. The Chief Executive (CE) said that Norfolk Broads Yacht Club had requested the Authority to cut water plants in Wroxham Broad and that the club had covered the costs. However, a fundamental change in the cutting, e.g. widening the channel and additional cutting of protected species, at Hickling would require an appropriate assessment by Natural England (NE) and it was unlikely that NE would grant a request of that nature. Therefore, it was not something that the Authority was pursuing at present.

There was a discussion held on water plant cutting on Hickling Broad, and Members commented that the Broads Authority should put in a request to NE to widen the channel. A Member asked for a future agenda item to be brought to the committee to explore water plant cutting at Hickling. The CE said that on an annual basis the Authority carried out a water plant survey which formed part of the data and evidence that was used to plan cutting schedules for the following year. Once that data was collated, the information would be presented to the Committee which would enable a debate about water plant cutting. He added that the Authority had not been approached by the NSBA or the sailing club to widen the channel and said that if the channel were to be widened, it would be an enormous undertaking and would not only be costly but there was an issue as to where the material was offloaded. The CE said that the Authority would be having a meeting with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to discuss their future plans for the site so any issues and work were aligned on the basis of the evidence.

A Member commented on dredging of the Lower Bure and that the accumulation of silt seemed to be on the lower banks which could prevent the egress of the river when the tide was going out, and asked whether there could be greater co-operation with the Environment Agency (EA) and the dredging to include the lower banks to encourage the flow of water. The CE said that they needed to wait for the report from the EA and reiterated that the dredging that the Authority carried out was for navigation and not for flood prevention.

A Member commented that he had previously expressed frustration that the opportunity to raise the height of the mooring at Repps Bank was missed and asked whether this be taken into consideration when looking at replacing the mooring at Martham. The HCME said that the works to the mooring at Martham had not yet been agreed and this would be something that they could take into consideration.

A Member commented about riverside tree management and said that a number of sailing clubs' programmes were adversely affected by bankside woodland to the point where they are unable to sail in certain areas. The HCME said that the work detailed in section 4.1 of the report was part of the consented programme of works and the fundamental reason for carrying out riverside tree management was for safety of navigation. The areas mentioned by the Member would constitute landscape change and habitat change beyond the riverbank, and was different work to what the Authority would focus on under riverside tree management in the report. The HCME added that he recently had a conversation with NE regarding this issue and where those areas of riparian reed bed were funded by other schemes, the landowners did have a duty to maintain a certain level of tree cover but not so that it succeeded into woodland. This meant that there was an angle there which could be explored with NE, and NE had confirmed that they would look at this issue on a case-by-case basis if it could be identified which patches of fen needed to be managed. The HCME invited the Member to discuss this issue outside of the meeting.

## 9. Waterways and Compliance report

Members received the report of the Waterways and Recreation Officer (WRO). The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) said that the report gave an overview of how the Authority prioritised the dredging work and to explain how the Authority went through the cycle of survey identification of areas of highest priority for sediment management, the work carried out to remove that sediment and the re-survey to see how effective the dredging had been. The HCME said that appendix 1 to the report was an internal tool to help prioritise which areas in the Broads were targeted and dredged. The prioritisation in appendix 1 looked at how much volume of sediment, what proportion of the area was outside the Authority's specifications, and how busy that area was. Those three factors helped to determine the priority and enabled dredging of areas which would be most cost-effective that had the most benefit to users.

A Member asked what the status was in relation to the disposal of sediment. The HCME said that in the Upper Bure, the sediment was pumped onto agricultural land for it to be dewatered and then used for agricultural benefits. On the lower reaches, the sediment would

be stockpiled adjacent to Environment Agency flood banks. The HCME said that those techniques were the most sustainable and positive reuse of sediment, however, some of the sites to dredge would produce huge volumes of sediment with no obvious location for sediment reuse and they were the challenge areas. The Member asked whether there was much contaminated sediment which would not be suitable for reuse. The HCME said that the only sediment within the Broads area where there was a restriction in terms of its final use was downstream of Whitlingham on the Yare and the Authority had its own tip site at Postwick which was strictly managed due to mercury in the sediment removed.

A Member asked how comfortable the Authority was with the accuracy of the activity data logs and was that a factor that pushed the priorities. The HCME said that in terms of privacy the data was very much amalgamated data in a 100m<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, when applied to a small watercourse 100m<sup>2</sup> might cover a footpath or a garden, which was where the WRO would identify alternative squares within the data to make informed decisions. The HCME said that although there were some caveats to the mobile phone data where data from a few areas needed to be tweaked, in terms of actually representing the number of users in an area it was a powerful tool. The data had constantly tracked since 2021 and it could be screened for weekends and weekdays. He added that the data could also be used to look at numbers using footpaths etc. Some Members commented about the accuracy of mobile data and the use of which within the dredging prioritisation factors and expressed concern that it could be misleading. Officers indicated that they would be improving the interpretation of the data by carrying out similar analysis to that undertaken in Norwich.

The HCME gave a presentation with slides which provided a case study of dredging Oulton Broad and showed the extent of hydrographic survey work in 2022 and 2024, the initial volume of sediment to dredge, the actual dredged volume from specific locations, and the background sediment accumulation rate. The HCME said that the slides highlighted the challenges of dredging in a lowland system, with removal of sediment quickly being replaced by redistribution and on-going sediment transport down the rivers.

A Member asked whether the waterways compliance percentage area got worse. The HCME replied that it had actually improved.

The Chair asked whether the Authority had explored deep dredging in one area and then apply a bed leveller. The HCME said that the Marine Management Organisation would consider that capital dredging because it would go below what was deemed routine maintenance and anything below the set depth would mean that the Authority would be working to a different legislative process.

In response to a question on whether boat traffic affected sediment build up, the HCME said yes, but in a very small way.

The HCME showed a slide detailing a heat map of mobile phone data in Barton Broad during July 2024. He explained where the areas were that had the lowest and greatest activity. A Member asked in areas where there was little mobile phone signal, how was the data



collected. The HCME said that it was not just on mobile phone signal but also tracked GPS data from phones and added that all location data was tracked.

A Member asked for clarification on what Barton Broad (outside channel) referred to in appendix 1 to the report. The HCME said that Barton Broad was split into two parts for sediment management purposes because, like Hickling Broad and Rockland Broad, it had a delineated line of channel and they either had a different dredging specification or was there for safety reasons to guide users through the Broads.

In response to a question on whether the Authority would dredge outside the channel at Rockland, the HCME said that this was on the list where survey data has been gathered, but it would depend on the priority.

A Member commented that the Authority had spent half the amount on dredging than what was spent in 2016, and asked why in light of the toll rises, the Authority was spending less. The Chief Executive (CE) said that 2016 was a particularly unusual year and there were two large dredging activities that year where more was spent than would have usually been spent. Therefore, if one looked at the trend, the trend was not to the degree as the Member had suggested. The CE added that there were limited resources and other priorities had grown at the expense of dredging, such as weed cutting, tree and scrub management, patrolling and maintenance of moorings. The Member said that tolls paid for the maintenance of the navigation and he understood that the Authority was spending a decreasing amount on dredging. The CE said that the Authority had done so much dredging over the last fifteen years it was less of a priority and said that toll payers wanted more moorings, more weed cutting and more tree and scrub cutting. The Member said that the Authority should look at its messaging because there had been two years of above-average toll increases and that had been largely down to the maintenance of the waterways. The CE confirmed that the Authority was not spending less on maintenance but was spending it in different ways in relation to other maintenance works.

A Member stressed that the conversation was regarding dredging for navigation and not dredging for flood management. A Member asked whether there was financial support from other income sources, would the Authority increase dredging. The CE said that in that scenario the Authority would increase everything including the maintenance of patrolling at the current level, more tree and scrub management, increase in the number of moorings, increase in dredging, and more maintenance. He added that the management of Britain's most important wetland together with navigation and climate change had become increasingly difficult and the Authority was constantly juggling priorities, therefore, the Authority need more support from Government which is why the previous Chair and current Chair of the Authority had both written to the Minister in that regard.

A Member commented that the Authority should re-examine the waterway specifications and prioritise areas, focus resources and save money.

## 10. Future proofing Broads Authority public moorings

Members received the report of the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME). The HCME explained that the report was focused on one set of the Authority's assets in terms of navigation maintenance and the service provided for boat users. The HCME said that currently the Authority had over sixty moorings and was responsible for much of the sheet piling. The additional challenge was the water level changes that was currently being experienced.

The HCME provided a slide showing sea level rise predictions by 2050 for Great Yarmouth and a further slide showing standard mooring cross-section detail and dimensions with a suggested 30cm mooring freeboard above Mean High Water (MHW). The next slide showed a table setting out the average height of current capping above MHW level at various moorings, the increase in the piling level required to retain the 30cm freeboard by 2050 and estimated basic cost to repile. The HCME then provided images of alternatives to hard-edged, vertical piled moorings. The HCME said that the budget was about £150k per annum to keep up with replacement of vertical piling, without raising the height.

The HCME asked for Members views on the following points:

- Suggested approach to setting a safe and practical mooring freeboard height above mean high water levels.
- Mooring design options other than the traditional vertical piling with timber quay heading.
- Replacement of all wood chip mooring surfacing with compacted crushed aggregate given the cost, maintenance and future resilience benefits.

A Member asked whether the Authority had looked at Mean High Spring Water as well as MHW and would 30cm freeboard would be enough in extreme high water. The HCME said that this was considered, however, he did not have figures for each location and confirmed that was something that would be looked into further.

A Member commended the report and commented that given recent temperatures seen, the modelling on temperature rises might be behind the times and the figures suggested were likely to be conservative.

A Member commented that it was likely that boat numbers would have decreased by the year 2050 and asked whether the number of moorings that the Authority would be responsible for in 2050, including ones that were leased, was factored into the figures in the report.

A Member commented that the Authority should look at other factors other than sea level rises, such as extreme weather events, changing patterns of rainfall and groundwater levels, all of which would affect mooring. He asked whether any of the modelling completed for the Broadland Futures Initiative (BFI) could cast further light on this issue and help as the Authority sets new standards for mooring design. The HCME said that the UKCP data was available publicly and the data was used to help drive the EA's flood height projection levels in

areas. BFI outputs are being completed which would help guide the development of new standards.

A discussion was had on mooring design options and the common agreement was support for pontoon moorings, where the width of the river allowed. The Chair said for long stretches of pontoon there was a formula that could be used to reduce the width of pontoons required. A Member suggested that the Authority consider temporary seasonal moorings. A Member commented that for masting and demasting, timber dolphins and vertical piled moorings would be ideal, however, these would not give access to the riverbank.

The Chair commented that there was a trend for using galvanised steel for piling as this would last longer than traditional wooden piling.

A discussion was had on possible mooring surfacing. Members expressed concern over the use of compacted crushed aggregate as this had a tendency to be transferred onto boats and could cause damage to the boat. A Member commented that although crushed aggregate was durable, it was also heavy and could push the moorings out into the river. A Member suggested that the Authority should look at composite decking.

The HCME thanked Members for their comments.

## **11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on 7 November 2024 at the King's Centre, 63-75 Kings Street, Norwich, NR1 1P commencing at 10am.

The meeting ended at 12:03pm

Signed

Chairman