

# Navigation Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held on 06 June 2024

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Please note these are draft minutes and will not be confirmed until the next meeting.

## Present

Alan Goodchild – in the Chair, Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Peter Dixon, Leslie Mogford, Greg Munford, Bob Neate, Michael Scott, Remus Sawyerr, Simon Sparrow, and Daniel Thwaites.

## In attendance

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

## 1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Apologies** were received from Mark Collins and 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. The Chair of the meeting had the right to exclude any person acting in a way that could disrupt the meeting.

### Chair's announcements

The Chair reminded Members that they were in the pre-election period of heightened sensitivity and Members should refrain from speaking in a way which seeks to influence voters.

The Chair advised that it was Greg Munford's last meeting as his term of office ended on 30 June 2024. He personally wanted to thank Greg for his time on the Navigation Committee and his wise contributions to many debates. Greg had always provided sound advice on many subjects and would be sincerely missed and that he wished him well for the future.

The Chair added that it would be amiss for him not to mention Bill Dickson, whose term of office would end with the appointment of a new Chair at the annual meeting on 26 July. Although not a member of the Navigation Committee, Bill had always had an interest in the Navigation Committee and had attended many of the meetings and it remained for him to wish Bill well for the future and thanked him for his devotion to the Authority during his time as a Member.

## 2. Declarations of interest

Members expressed their declarations of interest as set out in Appendix 1 of these minutes.

## 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 11 April 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 was an opportunity to update the document by removing some of the historic/outdated information, subject to Members' agreement, as follows:

### **Network Rail Swing Bridge £10 million refurbishment programme.**

The Summary of Actions column needed to be altered to reflect that the replacement of Trowse Swing Bridge with a fixed bridge would now be unlikely to happen because Network Rail had undertaken some further work which showed that if they wanted to improve the speed of the trains to London, it would be more cost-effective for them to carry out works before the bridge in Trowse rather than putting another bridge across the river. Therefore, the CE suggested that this part should be removed. In relation to the Progress so far column, the CE proposed that historic information be removed up to April 2024's update, which gave the current position on the swing bridges.

### **Carrow Road Bridge Repairs.**

The council had carried out some repairs, and he did not think there was anything further planned in the near future, so proposed that historic updates were deleted up to March 2023. He added that he did not think that Carrow Road Bridge would entirely go away as an issue because at some stage it would need major investment. The issue about whether the bridge should be fixed or repaired so that it could open would be something that the Navigation Committee would need to keep an eye on.

A Member commented that in the report it said that the bridge was fit for purpose and asked whether the CE could confirm what that meant and whether the bridge could be lifted. The CE replied that the bridge could open, however, he understood that there were significant issues around opening the bridge and the impact it would have on the road surface. The CE added that in the future Carrow Bridge would come back as an issue for the committee to discuss, and that there was a legal obligation to Norfolk County Council as owners of the bridge to ensure that the bridge could be lifted. However, from the council's view, if they wished to open the bridge on a regular basis, it would need to invest significantly in its repair.

A Member commented that he understood that Trowse Bridge did not work. The CE said that it did open, but this had to be done manually due to issues with the automated system of opening the jacks. The issue of Trowse Bridge was not whether it could be opened, but the frequency of the trains meant there was little opportunity for the bridge to be opened.

The CE said that on the Broads Authority's Summary of actions and outstanding issues, there was an item relating to Haven Bridge and the current dispute between Peel Ports and Norfolk County Council regarding the opening of the bridge. The CE suggested to the Members that this item was added to the Summary of actions and outstanding issues report to the Navigation Committee.

Members agreed to the proposed changes to the summary of actions and outstanding issues, as outlined above.

## 6. Navigation Committee priorities update

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (CE). The CE reminded Members that in 2023 a workshop was held where it was decided what priorities the Navigation Committee wanted officers to address and a list was drawn up and presented at the September 2023 meeting. He thought it would be helpful if he provided an update on the status of the priorities and added that many of the actions had been completed, but there were a couple of things that were still outstanding.

One priority in particular was sustainable boating and it was hoped to have produced a report on this, however, the work that the Authority had been doing was focused on installing electric charging points. The other priority was paddle sports, however, this had to be re-prioritised due to a number of external issues that officers' time had been taken up with, such as the Section 31 appeal by the Hire Boat Federation.

The CE said that this was an opportunity for the Committee to look at whether this was still the correct list of priorities or whether there was anything missing that the Committee would like officers to focus on in terms of producing reports in the coming year.

A Member commented that in terms of sustainable boating, he had recently read a report from British Marine which said that from an environmental point of view there were no cases where electrification of larger boats was beneficial. The CE said that, in terms of the hire boat fleet, the amount of carbon that was released by people travelling by car to the Broads far exceeded the amount of carbon produced by boats. The bigger issue was around how to change people's patterns of travel and the need to look at what more can be done by promoting people using public transport to access the Broads. Through National Park Partnerships, BMW were working on a project called Recharge in Nature, which was looking at charging points that could be installed in hire boat company yards that would charge both boats and vehicles.

A discussion took place in regard to charging points, cabling infrastructure within the Broads, and hybrid technology for propulsion. It was generally agreed that the infrastructure needed to be improved, however this would prove to be expensive. Members commented that the

company involved in the onshore cable corridor project would be looking at how the local community in Norfolk could benefit from the new infrastructure, and that they might be interested in helping with the infrastructure in the Broads. It was suggested that the Authority contacts the company involved. The CE said that the Authority had potential projects ready to go if an opportunity came along.

A Member asked that with the combination of factors including sea level rise, increase in salination and increase in flooding, should climate change be a key priority on the list. The CE replied that climate change was a high priority for both the Broads Authority and Broadland Futures Initiative (BFI) who were focused on climate change and rising sea level, the risks involved and planning for the long-term.

A Member commented that there were gaps in moorings and demasting and masting points, and asked whether the committee could be informed on moorings whose leases were up for renewal, thereby keeping an emphasis on this subject as regularly as possible. The CE said that he would look to bring an update report on mooring status and what the current issues were.

A Member commented that regarding the future of the hire boat industry, that it would be wise to resend the letter to the Minister following the General Election, irrespective of results.

A comment was made by a Member that it was vital that the Authority looked at landowner engagement, as without them on board the Authority was limited to what could be achieved.

Members agreed that they would welcome a report on paddleboarding and the health and safety issues involved.

A Member asked whether paddleboard toll income had reduced. The CE said that there had been a reduction in toll income for this group, however, the weather was playing a significant part in this and hopefully once the warmer weather returned, there would be an increase in toll income. A Member asked whether Paddle UK (formerly British Canoeing) provided the Authority with numbers of paddleboarders in the Broads area. The CE explained that the Authority receives income from Paddle UK and it was possible to track numbers from that, however, the Authority was currently looking at mobile phone data as a way of tracking the number of visitors to the Broads.

It was confirmed that the CE would draw up a schedule based on the priorities list and that a report on paddleboarding and an update on moorings would be brought to a future Navigation Committee meeting.

## **7. Recreation and Tourism Strategy**

Members received the report of the Head of Communications (HC). The HC provided an overview of the report and Strategy and that it would be presented to the Broads Authority on 26 July 2024.

The HC said that it had been a difficult process to renew the Strategy and to produce something that was sensitive to the industry and the ongoing challenges, being reactive to the opportunities that existed, as well as the consideration of all comments received during the

stakeholder consultation whilst being mindful of the Authority's statutory obligations, core purposes, and the balance of economic, environmental and social needs and priorities.

The HC said that in relation to previous discussions on agenda item number 6, there was a section within the Strategy that focussed on promoting other forms of transport, thereby reducing carbon emissions. 70% of visitor economy carbon emissions for the Broads came from cars travelling to and from the Broads. On the subject of paddle sports, Paddle UK reported that, between 2018 and 2022, their membership had risen by 259%, which gave an idea of the scale of growth of paddle sports in the UK.

The HC thanked everyone who had taken part in producing the Strategy by offering comments, support and constructive feedback. In particular he wanted to thank Maria Conti as her expertise had been an enormous help during the process. He added that this was a collaborative Strategy and the Authority and VtB could not deliver the action plan behind the Strategy without the help of partners.

A Member asked whether there were any particular areas within the Strategy that the Navigation Committee should focus on. The HC said that sustainable tourism was moving to regenerative tourism as it was not just about reducing the impact but having a positive impact. This meant that the conversation around sustainable boating and the growth in paddle sports was important, encouraging visitors to return to the Broads, thinking about the infrastructure for tourism and supporting the industry.

A Member commented that under item 3.3 (page 14 of the Strategy) it mentioned under-represented groups. However, in objective 7 (page 24 of the Strategy), it was clear about people with disabilities and people from urban areas, but he did not see anything about ethnic minorities and thought that this should be included. The HC acknowledged this.

A Member commented that within the Strategy it mentioned that many overnight craft were concentrated on the northern Broads and asked whether there were any navigation barriers to craft getting from the northern Broads to the southern Broads. A Member commented that he did not think that there were any barriers, however, the increase in short-term bookings meant that people did not have the time to travel south. The HC said that patterns from 2020 and 2021 showed that there were a lot of new boaters on the Broads and they were staying closer to where they had hired the boat and did not travel too far. The HC said that there was quite a bit of work done to encourage people to cross Breydon Water safely. The Authority had produced a number of safety videos, one of which was dedicated to crossing Breydon Water, there were also guides within Broadcaster, and the Rangers had introduced this year a new initiative called Demystifying Breydon Water event which had proved very popular. A Member asked whether the southern Broads could be promoted more and added that there were a lot of great places in that area but they do not feature much as the focus tended to be on the northern rivers.

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

Members received the report from the Chief Executive (CE) on the significant matters relating to the maintenance and management of the waterways. The CE said that he could confirm that Defra were giving the Authority some additional funding which meant that it could purchase the items set out in Table 1 of the report, including the new concrete pump which would be used for the Authority's dredging activity, replacement Hilux vehicles, and a new steel welfare unit. The CE said that this was a very welcome injection of money.

## 9. Annual income and expenditure 2023/24

Members received the report of the Director of Finance (DF). The DF said that this was the annual report that came to the committee which showed the actual income and expenditure compared to the budget and was the basis of the draft Statement of Accounts which was published on 31 May 2024.

The DF provided an update as at the end of May, and there was a forecast deficit of £141,065 on the toll income for private and hire boats. Compared to the same point last year, the deficit was at £123,000 and at the end of 2023/24 that deficit had reduced to £79,000. There was, therefore, the possibility that some of the current deficit would be made up over the summer. The DF said that the Head of Tolls had carried out a comparison on the figures and on the private side, the biggest percentage decrease was on outboard dinghies which was 11.6%, followed by rowing (which included paddleboards and canoes) which was down by 10.8%. On the hire side, the biggest percentage decrease was on rowing at 11.8% decrease on last year.

The DF said that in response to a previous question regarding income from Paddle UK, this would be received in October and was not currently reflected in the boat numbers.

A Member suggested that those who owned a cruiser yacht or dinghy but only used them once a year would not buy a toll and commented that there was a lot of ill-feeling from private boat owners. The Chief Executive (CE) said that it was apparent that the pressure on people's income was having an effect on the tolls and that some boat owners were delaying paying the toll until they had received a contravention notice.

A Member said that the hire boat industry could not sustain the increase in tolls. The CE said that this was a delicate issue and that the subject of tolls would be debated at the dedicated briefing in October with Members, where it would be discussed as to what extent the Authority could maintain its existing services. The CE said that this was the reason why the Chair of the Authority wrote to the Minister to say that the Authority was getting to the point where the maintenance of the waterways was no longer feasible just from the income from tolls, and was why the Authority was arguing that it needed support from central government to maintain this important facility.

A Member commented that the Authority was spending less on dredging than in the past. The CE said that the Authority was spending more on maintaining the waterways than it had ever before. The DF explained that within the accounts the operation costs sat under a range of

different headings, and the figure for dredging, for example, did not include the staff time involved.

The CE said that from recent survey carried out by the NSBA, it was clear that the boating community wanted more moorings, more dredging, more weed cutting, and more tree cutting. This was why the Authority lobbied the Government to give more money to contribute to helping maintain navigation. He added that he thought that in the future, the maintenance of the system would cost more and that more maintenance would need to be done. A Member commented that the Broads was a unique environment and it was necessary to see the continuance of maintenance.

A Member said that it was sad to see the shortfall in tolls on small boats such as dinghies as he saw that these craft were important for the future of the Broads as it was children that often used them. The CE commented that the BA had made a significant decision a number of years ago to make the tolls fairer for smaller boats, which made it exceptionally good value to have smaller sailing dinghies on the Broads. He added that they had seen no increase in tolls over the last few years, and in fact had seen a decrease. The CE said that he did not think it was cost as to why there were fewer sailing dinghies, but more to do with wider social changes in terms of what was available for young people to do. The CE said that in the past the Broads Authority had grant aided sailing dinghies for some of the sailing clubs.

A Member asked that when payment was received from Paddle UK, did the Authority receive an accurate number of paddleboarders in the Broads area. The DF confirmed that numbers were received. The Head of Communications said that the Authority was informed how many were registered in Norfolk and Suffolk but it would not include those who visited the Broads who were registered elsewhere in the country.

A Member said that it was difficult looking at numbers in isolation. There was some discussion on how navigation costs were presented and a Member suggested that it would be a valuable exercise to look at costs and budget, so that answers could be provided as to how the front-line costs were prioritised.

A Member suggested that the DF meet with Navigation Committee Member, Bob Neate (a Chartered Accountant specialising in auditing and advising large corporates) so that between them they would be able to devise some training that would provide Members an opportunity to understand how the accounts work.

The DF said that there would be a Statement of Accounts training on 16 July and if there were subjects that Members want covered, could they let her know. A Member said that having sat on these workshops, the DF did an excellent job on explaining the accounts and answering questions and added that the session in July was the right environment to ask questions relating to the income and expenditure.



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

Members received the report of the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME). The HCME said that he had two updates to the report, the first was responding to a question from the last Navigation Committee in relation to the work to the quay heading at Repps Bank and the possibility of the capping height being raised. The HCME said that the mooring would not be raised up higher than the existing structure due to the design of the piling, therefore it would have to be a like-for-like replacement and would be similar to the quay heading either side. The HCME said that this did not answer the issue of rising water levels, however, in terms of other moorings where brand new piling was being installed, they would look to raise levels of quay headings.

The HCME said that the second update was that table 2 of the report was in under item 5.2 when it should be under item 6.2.

The HCME highlighted some key points in the report including Appendix 2 which set out the delivery achievements in 2023/24. There had been some slippage in two key projects, one was due to the breakdown of the older concrete pump which impacted the dredging volume and progress on the upper Bure. The second was on the lower Yare at Haddiscoe Cut where the dredging was delayed by a couple of unplanned issues, the first due to finishing the Oulton Broad dredging, and the second because dredging had to be stopped to transport the new crawler crane back to the Dockyard. This meant that there was a shortfall in dredging by 6,000m<sup>3</sup> but this work had moved into 2024/25. The HCME added that when the team were not dredging, they picked up various maintenance work such as setting up the marker post replacement project at Breydon, and mooring maintenance tasks.

The HCME said at the beginning of each year staff time and budget were allocated across different work types such as water plant cutting and dredging, and in Appendix 3 of the report it set out the planned and actual time spent on navigation work types. For the reasons mentioned earlier, one area that had slightly less time spent working was on dredging, however, this was offset by increased water plant cutting.

The HCME referred to section 6 and Defra's request to public bodies to look at herbicide and pesticide use. Data had been collected around storage and use of herbicides and pesticides to provide a baseline on which the Authority could then target reductions in the future. The data also enabled the Authority to demonstrate to Defra that targets were being met and within best practice.

The HCME confirmed that the channel marker project in Breydon Water was now complete and all original timber posts and temporary buoys had now been replaced with steel posts. The next priority in terms of marker posts, would be looking at the condition of the posts from the upstream of Bure mouth on the Lower Bure. The Chief Executive (CE) said that credit needed to be given to the HCME and the team. By taking the initiative of purchasing a second-hand crane from Holland, training the team, and the hire of a pile driver enabled the Authority to install the posts at a cost which was significantly less than what a contractor would charge.

The Chair commented that since the marker posts had been installed it had made Breydon Water much safer.

A Member asked whether there was any use for hard wearing “copper coat” type antifoulants on boats rather than using those using herbicides. The HCME said that copper would still leach into the water, but possibly at a slower rate than other product types, such as ablative antifoul paints. The Authority, however, used products that did not leach toxic chemicals into the water and added that evidence showed that vessels moored within the Broads area accumulated very little algal growth, questioning the value of applying antifoulant paints in the Broads.

A Member asked that once the Environment Agency (EA) had completed their hydrological study in the lower Bure area, would the EA carrying out any dredging if required in relation to flood alleviation, and if that was the case, how much control would the Broads Authority have of the depth in that area and was the Authority content that any dredging would not lead to higher salt incursion into the northern rivers. The HCME said that the Authority’s approach to dredging was to model mean low water depth and set a Waterways Specification depth across 66% of the width of the channel below this mean low water level. The Authority had detailed and accurate hydrographic survey data which are updated every five years, and this picked up where sediment had built up and helped Authority to make an informed decision on which areas to target for dredging. At September’s Navigation Committee meeting, the HCME would provide a report on dredging targets and achievement. The question that had been asked of the EA was whether dredging a deeper depth through the lower end of the River Bure would facilitate evacuation of water from the northern rivers out through Yarmouth – all this would depend on low water levels in Yarmouth which did not happen last winter, as high water in Yarmouth prevented water flowing out. The HCME said that they were expecting the results from the EA in late July. If dredging was needed solely for a conveyance purpose, where the Authority was not the Risk Management Authority for flood work, a discussion would need to be had on funding with the EA, which has this responsibility.

A Member commented on Appendix 3 of the report that the difference between planned and actual work was about 400 days, and asked how this was calculated as he thought that this would reduce the expenditure on the navigation figures. The HCME said that part of those 400 days was from other work areas not listed, however, he would provide the Member with a more detailed breakdown and would report back.<sup>1</sup>

## 11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on 5 September 2024 commencing at 10am (venue to be confirmed).

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<sup>1</sup> The HCME reported back to the Member after the meeting that the breakdown of variation in planned and actual time spent was detailed in section 5.2 of the report.

The meeting ended at 11:50am

Signed

Chairman

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Please note these are draft minutes and will not be confirmed until the next meeting.

## Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests: Navigation Committee, 06 June 2024

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest
Peter Dixon	10	Residence at Hickling Broad

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