

Broads Authority

29 November 2024

Agenda item number 10

Proposed navigation charges for 2025/2026 in the navigation area and adjacent waters

Report by Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Head of IT and Collector of Tolls

Purpose

Following the formal consultation with the Navigation Committee this report outlines proposed charges for 2025/26 for consideration by the Authority.

Broads Plan context

All strategic actions under Theme C: Maintaining and enhancing the navigation.

Recommended decision

The Board approves the navigation and mooring charges for 2025/26 in the navigation area and adjacent waters as set out in section 6 in line with the recommendation of the Navigation Committee.

Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Context – 2024/25 season	2
3.	Financial pressures	5
4.	Feedback	6
5.	Navigation Committee: Formal Consultation	7
6.	Proposals	8
7.	Social, economic, and environmental implications	9
8.	Legal considerations	10
9.	Risk implications	10
10.	Conclusion	10
	Appendix 1 - Extract from Draft Minutes of the Navigation Committee	12

1. Introduction

- 1.1. A briefing note was prepared and distributed to Members in September setting out the financial position based on the income to 31 August. It was also designed to inform stakeholders and the public of the timetable and process for the decision on charges for 2025/26. A briefing session for all members was held on 8 October, and the formal consultation with the Navigation Committee was held on 7 November. Two events have had a significant impact on the figures, the settling of the pay award and the increase of employer national insurance contribution which will have an adverse effect on the Authority's and the hire boat industry's finances.

2. Context – 2024/25 season

- 2.1. Poor weather, the cost-of-living crisis, and the relatively cheap cost of foreign holidays have all put downward pressure on boat ownership and holidays on the Broads. Land and water-based tourism businesses have reported very difficult trading conditions. Visit Britain's 'sentiment survey' (September 2024) stated: "The top barrier to taking an overnight domestic trip continues to be 'the rising cost of living' (33%), closely followed by the 'UK weather' (30%)'. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, most UK adults (66%) are either 'cautious and being very careful' (47%) or have been 'hit hard and are cutting back' (19%)".
- 2.2. The increase in charges over the last two years will also have had an impact alongside other increases in the cost of owning and maintaining a boat, some of which will have been higher than the increase in navigation charges. The result is that the Broads Authority and other navigation authorities have seen a decline in boat numbers. Table 1 below compares 30 September 2023, with 30 September 2024.

Table 1. Number of private boats 30 September 2023 to 30 September 2024

Category	Sept. 2020	Sept. 2023	Sept. 2024	2020-24	2023-24
Motor Cruisers	4,875	4,993	4,893	18	-100
Aux. Yachts	945	960	892	-53	-68
Day Launches	540	582	533	-7	-49
O/B Dinghies	1,023	1,014	919	-104	-95
Workboats	141	155	162	21	7
Sailing	834	809	740	-94	-69
Rowing	1,778	1,870	1,613	-165	-257
Houseboats	45	71	71	26	0
Passenger - SPB	13	22	21	8	-1
TOTAL	10,194	10,476	9,844	-350	-632

- 2.3. In the context of the wider impact of the cost-of-living crisis a reduction of just 2.0% in private motor cruisers, the largest group of private boats, is perhaps surprising. There was an increase of over 230 boats between 2020 and 2021 and the number has returned to pre-COVID levels.
- 2.4. The reduction of 257 rowing craft this year is not entirely unexpected, partly because of poor weather in the spring and early summer of 2024, resulting in people not registering their craft. It could also be the natural course of a trend. There was incredible growth in this sector from 2020 to 2023 illustrated by huge increases of craft registered on the Broads and with Paddle UK (formally British Canoeing). Paddle craft numbers in the Broads are considerably higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- 2.5. Table 2 has the equivalent boat numbers for the hire fleet. The long-term decline in hired motor cruisers has resulted in a reduced income from tolls. Over the last ten years, the most significant falls in number were between 2019-2020, a drop of 67, and 2021-2022, a fall of 56. Table 2 shows that the number has remained stable over the last year with just 6 fewer motor cruisers.

Table 2. Number of hire boats 30 September 2023 to 30 September 2024

Category	Sept. 2020	Sept. 2023	Sept. 2024	2020-2024	2023-24
Motor Cruisers	736	647	641	-95	-6
Aux. Yachts	37	45	43	6	-2
Day Launches	262	358	344	82	-14
O/B Dinghies	4	4	1	-3	-3
Sailing	74	71	71	-3	0
Rowing	174	442	413	239	-29
Houseboats	19	26	32	13	6
Passenger - MCA	5	6	6	1	0
Passenger - SPB	4	7	9	5	2
TOTAL	1,315	1,606	1,560	245	-46

- 2.6. Private motorboats and hired motor cruisers account for 82% of the total toll income. This year's decline in boat numbers has resulted in a forecast reduction in income, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Budgeted and forecast income on 30 September 2024

	Private Boats	Hire Boats
Budgeted income 2024/25	£3,006,000	£1,436,000
Forecast income 2024/25	£2,907,850	£1,403,559
Surplus/(Deficit)	-£98,150	-£32,441

- 2.7. The projected deficit is currently £130,591. To align income and expenditure for 2024/25, two mooring refurbishment projects due to be carried out this year by contractors at Potter Heigham and Martham have been delayed until 2025/26. The savings in this year's budget of £100,000 largely offsets the lost income. Delaying these two projects increases the pressure on next year's budget.
- 2.8. The forecast in expenditure has also moved since the last update to the Committee in September. Table 4 sets out the adjustments to income and expenditure.

Table 4

Item	Amount
Forecast outturn surplus as per LAB	(87,214)
Adjustments reported 05/09/24	1,528
Decrease to hire and private income	12,112
Decrease to salary costs following vacancies	(11,044)
Decrease to salary costs following the pay award	(125,686)
Increased costs for oil spill exercise	5,000
Increased subscription fees	663
Decrease mobile phone charges due to new contract	(2,115)
Increased interest rates due to higher than predicted base rate	(30,000)
Delayed Yare House lease/downsizing	6,800
Delayed lease for Reedham Quay to enable mooring charges	20,000
Forecast outturn surplus as at 30 September 2024	(209,956)

- 2.9. The forecast outturn for 2024/25 is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Navigation outturn 2024/25 vs budget	Budget	Outturn	Difference
Income	(4,624,930)	(4,524,339)	-100,591
Expenditure	4,537,716	4,314,383	+223,333
(Surplus)/Deficit	(87,214)	(209,956)	+122,742
Transfer of accrued interest to earmarked reserves	54,000	72,000	+18,000

Navigation outturn 2024/25 vs budget	Budget	Outturn	Difference
Opening reserves	476,894	476,894	0
Repayment of NP loan	50,000	50,000	0
Closing reserve	460,108	564,850	+104,742
Reserves as a % of expenditure	10.1%	13.1%	+3.1%

3. Financial pressures

- 3.1. When the Authority considered options for charges for 2024/25 at this time last year it was predicted that a 5.0% to 6.6% increase would be required in 2025/26 to maintain services at the same level. When the initial briefing note was produced a 12% increase in tolls would have been necessary to maintain services at the current level. The settling of the pay award at a figure below that in the budget means that a 7.3% increase in tolls would achieve the same result.
- 3.2. In addition to the projected loss of income this year, there are the following pressures on the budget.
- 3.3. **Contribute £171,475 to various navigation earmarked reserves**
National Park capital funding of £1.215 m in 2023/24 eased the pressures on the Authority's earmarked reserves, which fund the Authority's capital purchases, repairs and maintenance, such as the repair of moorings. This meant that the annual contribution to the navigation earmarked reserves was paused in 2024/25, easing the pressure on the navigation budget. If provision towards earmarked reserves is made in 2025/26, it equates to 3.9% of the navigation budget.
- 3.4. **The costs of the dredging programme for 2025/26 are £21,380 higher**
This includes dredging on the river Yare between Carrow Bridge and Postwick, removal of shoals on the Bure between Stokesby and Great Yarmouth, and the Upper Thurne at Catfield Dyke and Somerton Dyke.
- 3.5. **The programme costs for moorings maintenance and repairs in 2025/26 is £40,620 higher than the current year**
This includes Catfield Dyke 24 hr mooring – repiling and complete timber refurbishment; Potter Heigham demasting mooring – full re-piling and timber refurbishment; Martham Bank 24 hr mooring – refurbishment of upper barge boards with new capping and waling; and Ranworth Staithe 24 hr mooring – western section wooden piling replacement.
- 3.6. **The patrol launches are costing more to repair because of their age, and the budget has increased by £11,250**
- 3.7. **The Authority is having to remove more wrecks from the waterways and the budget has increased by £6,000**
- 3.8. These pressures have been exacerbated by Chancellor's Budget which has raised **employers' national insurance contribution**. This equates to an additional cost to the navigation of £69,000.

- 3.9. This has been offset by settling of the **local government pay award** at £1,290 per full-time equivalent. This was £635 below the figure agreed the previous year and used in the Authority's budgeting. This leads to a positive contribution of £126,000.
- 3.10. In order to further reduce the pressure on navigation expenditure the share of the practical work by the Senior Operations Technicians and Operations Technicians has been altered from 70:30 to 60:40 (Navigation: National Park). This is possible because of additional income from **Countryside Stewardship** which allows the Authority to spend more time on conservation work.
- 3.11. The published statistics for inflation¹ do not reflect the inflationary pressures on the Authority's maintenance of the waterways. Salary costs are rising by 4% this year and other costs, for example the repair of ranger launches by 6% or more. If the contribution to earmarked reserves is reinstated that equates to nearly a 4% increase in tolls.

4. Feedback

- 4.1. The outcome of discussions this autumn with members and the Broads Hire Boat Federation together with feedback from the Broads Society and the Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association are consistent with the paper on the [Funding the Waterways of the Broads National Park \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](https://broads-authority.gov.uk). This paper was unanimously supported by the Navigation Committee and the Authority in January 2024. A copy has been sent to the new Minister setting out the case for public funding to support the maintenance of the waterways. In the current public spending environment such an important ask may be difficult for the new Government to meet. However the Chairman and Chief Executive are seeking a meeting with the new Minister to set out the case.
- 4.2. In the current economic climate and in light of the last two years' increases of 13% and 8.5%, a substantial increase in charges would be deemed unacceptable to many toll payers. Therefore, the Authority should look to see where it can further reduce its operational costs to mitigate the impact of next year's toll increase on boat owners.
- 4.3. At the Tolls Briefing in October 2024, there was a wide range of views on the charges for next year, which are shown on the following graph, see Figure 1.

¹ Inflation fell to 1.7% in September. "Lower airfares and petrol prices were the main drivers behind the surprise slowdown." (BBC) Consumer price inflation is the rate at which the prices of a basket of goods and services bought by households rise or fall. The basket includes food and non-alcoholic beverages, alcohol and tobacco, clothing and footwear, housing and household services, furniture and household goods, health, transport, communication, recreation and culture, education, restaurants and hotels and miscellaneous goods and services.

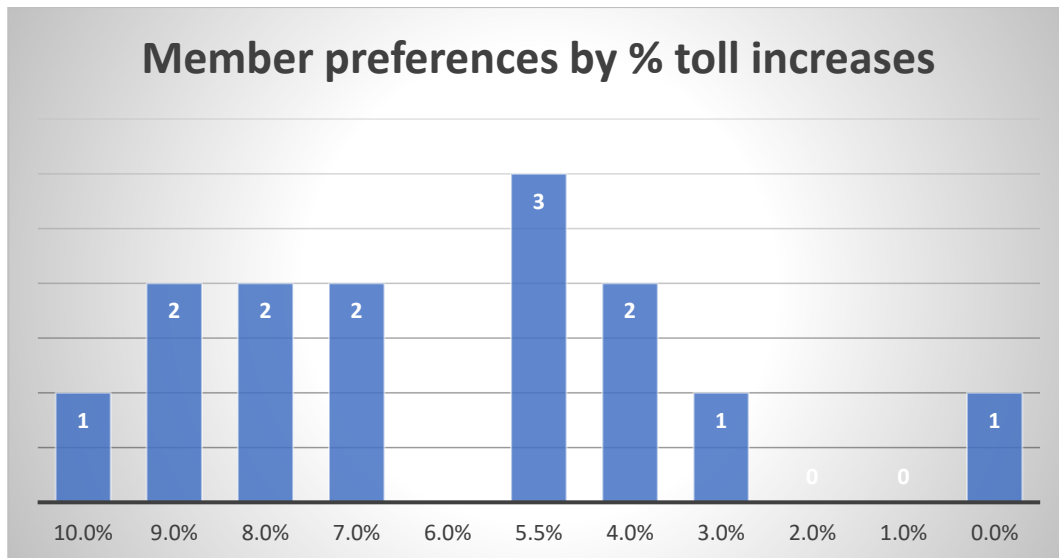


Figure 1 Members preferences for % toll increase levels in 2025/26

5. Navigation Committee: Formal Consultation

- 5.1. Section 13(3) requires the Authority to “consult the Navigation Committee before determining the level of any tolls or other charges to be imposed in respect of the navigation area or adjacent waters”. This took place on 7 November and the draft minutes of the meeting are in Appendix 1 to give Members a good understanding of the range of views and the recommendations of the Committee.
- 5.2. At the meeting a range of options were presented based on different provisions for cuts in service and various allowances for a further reduction in boat numbers.
- 5.3. **The Navigation Committee resolved by 9 votes in favour and 1 against (with 2 abstentions) to recommend to the Broads Authority a 5.9% increase in tolls for 2025/26.**
- 5.4. Officers will develop options for reductions in services and a provision for a reduction in boat numbers in 2025 for incorporation in the draft budget.
- 5.5. Members supported the CE’s request for flexibility on rounding up or down figures when setting the tolls for the various groups of craft.

It was resolved unanimously

- i. **to recommend to the Broads Authority that the tolls be frozen on hired sailing craft and**
- ii. **to instruct the Chief Executive to explore the differentials between electric, hybrid and diesel-powered day hire boats ahead of the Broads Authority meeting on 29 November.**

Also to recommend to the Broads Authority that the charges for Ranworth Staithe and Reedham Quay be increased by £2 to £12 for an overnight stay, and the overnight charge at Norwich and Great Yarmouth Yacht Stations be increased from £16 to £17.50.

6. Proposals

6.1. Taking account of the recommendations of the Navigation Committee the following charges under the heading suggested rounding are proposed for 2025/25 for the 15 classes.

Table 6. Proposed costs per m² by Category of Vessel

No.	Category – cost per m2 except rowing, canoes etc	Current Charge	+5.90%	Proposed Charge	Percentage Increase
1	Weekly hired motor craft	£41.60	£44.05	£44.05	5.89
2	Weekly hired motor craft – electric and hybrid	£28.63	£30.32	£30.32	5.90
3	Day hired – petrol/diesel	£63.65	£67.41	£70.00	9.98
4	Day hired electric	£43.58	£46.15	£43.58	0.00
5	MCA passenger boats and small passenger boats	£54.74	£57.97	£57.97	5.90
6	Hired motorised sailing craft – diesel	£33.77	£35.76	£33.77	0.00
7	Hired sailing boats & hired motorised sailing - electric	£24.69	£26.15	£24.69	0.00
8	Hired houseboats	£21.09	£22.33	£22.33	5.88
9	Hired rowing – fixed amount	£92.65	£98.12	£98.12	5.90
	Hired paddle craft – fixed amount	£46.32	£49.05	£49.05	5.89
10	Private motorboats - petrol & diesel	£18.47	£19.56	£19.56	5.90
11	Private motorboats electric	£14.12	£14.95	£14.95	5.88
12	Private motorised sailing craft - petrol & diesel	£13.66	£14.47	£14.47	5.93
13	Private sailing boats & private motorised sailing craft - electric	£11.28	£11.95	£11.95	5.94
14	Private houseboats	£7.27	£7.70	£7.70	5.91
15	Private rowing, canoes etc. – fixed amount	£46.32	£49.05	£49.05	5.89

6.2. The following table provides sample increases for the most size and type of vessel.

Type of Vessel	Number	Current Charge	Proposed	Difference
5 m ² Private sailing craft	349	£56.40	£59.75	£3.35
11 m ² Private sailing craft	124	£124.08	£131.45	£7.37
5 m ² Private motor boats	624	£92.35	£97.80	£5.45
15 m ² Private motor boats	237	£277.05	£293.40	£16.35
22 m ² Private motor boats	307	£406.34	£430.32	£23.98
38 m ² Private motor boats	112	£701.86	£743.28	£41.42
11 m ² Day hired boats – petrol/ diesel	47	£700.15	£770.00	£69.85
11 m ² Day hired boats - electric	23	£479.38	£479.38	-£0.00
38 m ² Weekly hired motor craft	52	£1,580.80	£1,673.90	£93.10
48 m ² Weekly hired motor craft	57	£1,996.80	£2,114.40	£117.60

6.3. Following the meeting of the Navigation Committee the staff of the yacht stations have been consulted and suggested the charges be increased for Yarmouth and Norwich to £18 rather than £17.50 for practical reasons. The charges proposed are:

Ranworth and Reedham - £12 overnight

Gt Yarmouth and Norwich - £18 overnight

Mutford Lock - £17 per day (no change)

7. Social, economic, and environmental implications

7.1. Toll payer surveys have shown that the Authority’s tolls account for less than 10% of the typical costs of owning a boat. While boat ownership may be seen by some as a luxury, we know that this is not always the case. The cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on society and its impact on the boating community using the Broads and those visiting on holiday is difficult to predict. Our community of private boat owners is diverse, and some may face difficult decisions regarding their continuing boat ownership.

7.2. The Broads Society and Inland Waterways Association conducted research into the level of navigation charges across different waterways. The result is summarised in the following table. The research concluded that: *‘Looking beyond the headline percentage increases of the past two years, however, the cash cost to most private boat owners*

today remains modest, giving good value when compared with other navigations.’
(Broads Society 2024).

ANNUAL TOLLS FOR SPECIFIED MOTORISED CRAFT					2023/24	PRICES
Research courtesy Inland Waterways Association						
Navigation	Navigation	Navigation	Private	Private	Hire	Hire
			Cabin Cruiser	Cabin Cruiser	Cabin Cruiser	Cabin Cruiser
	km	miles	7.3m x 2.4m	10.6m x 3.6m	7.3m x 2.4m	10.6m x 3.6m
Broads Authority*	200	125	£289.34	£646.76	£651.78	£1,456.92
Canal and River Trust*	3200	2000	£831.00	£1,127.66	£2,031.74	£2,437.49
Env. Agency: Thames*	217	135	£410.38	£917.32	£631.02	£1,137.96
Env. Agency: Anglian*	568	353	£462.18	£818.00	£678.50	£1,034.32
Env. Agency: Medway	29	18	£337.55	£475.83	n/a	n/a
Middle Level Navigations*	160	100	£462.18	£818.00	£678.50	£1,034.32
River Avon	74	46	£392.00	£495.00	n/a	n/a
River Wey	32	20	£218.00	£260.00	n/a	n/a
Scottish Canals	226	141	£239.47	£239.47	n/a	n/a
* Navigations used in the final analysis; others considered too small or too fragmented.						
Basingstoke Canal: not comparable						
Bridgewater Canal: not publicly listed						
Essex Waterways: not comparable						
River Cam Conservancy: figures unavailable						

8. Legal considerations

- 8.1. The Authority is following its standard process with an informal briefing open to all members (which took place on 8 October) followed by the formal statutory consultation with the Navigation Committee at its meeting on 7 November. A decision will be made by the Broads Authority Board on 29 November 2024. If the Board decides on a different option to that recommended by the Navigation Committee, then it is required to ‘provide full reasons for doing so’ in line with the amended Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988.

9. Risk implications

- 9.1. The level of uncertainty involved in determining charges for next year is higher than normal both in the short and long-term. It is unknown whether the decline in hired motor cruisers is going to continue. Over the last ten years the number has fallen by 200 and this has been a major factor in the above inflation increases for private craft. Similarly, it is not clear if the reduction in small private boats this year is a rebalancing of numbers post COVID or part of a wider move away from boat ownership.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1. The Board is asked to consider the level of navigation charges for 2025/26, balancing the need to continue to maintain the waterways for the benefit of users with what is considered an appropriate increase in charges.

Author: John Packman, Emma Krelle, Bill Housden

Date of report: 11 November 2024

Background papers: Navigation charges 2025/26 – Briefing Note

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: C1, C2, C3, C4.

Appendix 1 – Extract from Draft Minutes of the Navigation Committee

Appendix 1 - Extract from Draft Minutes of the Navigation Committee

7. Proposed navigation charges for 2025/26 in the navigation area and adjacent waters

The Chair stated that, following presentation of the report written jointly by the Chief Executive, Director of Finance (DF) and Collector of Tolls, and after members had the opportunity to ask questions, he would invite Members in turn to present their preference for the tolls increase together with their reasons, so that the Navigation Committee could provide clear direction and recommendations to the Broads Authority.

The Chief Executive reminded Members of the paper circulated to them in September setting out the challenges that the Authority faced in terms of income and expenditure, followed by the briefing/workshop in October. The key issues were that there had been a decline in the number of small private boats which had an adverse impact on income. The CE referred Members to section 3 of the report which set out the pressures in terms of costs. The CE said that, in the October briefing, Members were polled on the level of toll increase they thought appropriate, which was set out in a graph in section 4.2 of the report. The CE reminded Members that, in addition to the discussion on tolls, there were two smaller issues to discuss: one regarding hired sailing craft; and the other about day hired petrol/diesel craft.

The DF provided an update on the financial figures and referred Members to table 4 on page 31 of the papers which gave figures up until the end of September. She said that the forecast had since improved to £209,956 surplus, the majority of the increase had been because the pay award for staff had finally been agreed. A figure of £1,925 per FTE had been budgeted for but a settlement was reached at £1,290 per FTE. Staff would receive this in the December pay and it would be backdated to 1 April 2024. With additional costs of national insurance and pension contributions, it equated to an £853 saving per FTE. The DF said that in table 5, the result in the change to the forecast meant that reserves would be £564,850 which was 13.1%.

The DF said that as part of the toll setting process, officers had been looking at savings on the navigation side of the budget, and one area was to move some of the operation technician work to National Park. This had been achieved by moving some land holdings into the Countryside Stewardship scheme which offered high payment rates than other land management schemes. Therefore, by moving a portion of the work to National Park, this equated to £91,940. At present, the operation technician split was 70/30 and it would now be 60/40 – a 10% shift.

The CE said that the paper produced in September showed that if the Authority were to maintain the level of service as currently provided, it would require a 12% increase in tolls and the paper made it clear that in his, and the Management Team's view, was too much in terms of the impact on the toll payers and what was needed was to look at where savings and cuts

in services could be made. Fortunately, there had been some changes in the financial position which the DF had explained.

The CE explained that there was a complex arrangement where some elements of the Broads Authority work were entirely National Park such as planning, some elements entirely Navigation such as the collection of tolls, however, there was a lot of shared costs which were set out in a transparent basis in the accounts. A critical part in terms of navigation was the work of the operations technicians and in the current year, the basis of time spent was 70% navigation and 30% National Park. The CE said that through Natural England, the Broads Authority had been awarded a significant amount of money through the Countryside Stewardship programme to look after the wildlife sites and conservation sites, it meant that for next year it was possible to increase the amount of time the operations technicians spent on conservation work rather than navigation work, to the equivalent of over £90,000/three members of staff. The key thing to remember, however, was that less work would be done to the benefit of navigation as a result of this shift. The Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) would have to reprogramme some of the navigation work such as dredging and maintenance and would look at where efficiencies could be made to make the most of the resource available.

A Member asked whether this would be a one-year change, or would it be into the future. The CE confirmed that it would be into the future.

The CE presented some slides providing an update to the information available in September and October. The CE said that there was concern that income from tolls was on the decline, which was mainly due to the reduction of small boats and this seemed to be a national trend and not just restricted to the Broads. There had been a huge growth in smaller craft during the pandemic, however, that growth had tailed off significantly – confirmed by the figures provided by Paddle UK. The CE added that fortunately the Authority's income in October was in line with the forecast.

The CE said that following the Chancellor's budget earlier in the week, he had been in contact with Defra following the announcement of the increase in Employers NI contributions in 2025/26. Since the budget, the Chancellor had confirmed that local government would be expected to pay the additional contributions, and therefore the expectation was that the Broads Authority would not get relief from this. The CE said that he had not, as yet, heard back from Defra on this point.

The CE referred to the graph in 4.2 of the report, which showed Members' preferences on toll increases by percentage. He said that there was a wide variety of views, from 10% increase to 0%, with a mean of ~ 6%. The CE said that his job was to find a series of options that gave Members a degree of unanimity about what the outcome would be. The CE talked through a slide showing a table providing different scenarios of tolls increases through toll income/boat levels vs service cuts. The CE said that his own view was that £50,000 of service cuts was quite a lot and that he thought the Authority should be making some provision for the potential loss of boats.

The CE said that in addition to the discussion around the setting of tolls, he asked Members to consider freezing the tolls for hired sailing craft in the two classes, the pure sailing craft and the auxiliary sailing craft. He added that hiring a sailing craft was something special in the Broads and it would be sending a signal to those small commercial hire operators that the Authority had listened and responded to their concerns. In addition, the CE said that there was an existing difference between day hired craft powered by diesel and petrol, and day hired craft powered by electric. The CE said that he did not suggest that by an increase in the toll for diesel/petrol powered boats and a lower increase in tolls for electric would encourage the move away from diesel/petrol to electric overnight, but it would encourage greener boating.

Lastly, the CE said that he would like Members to consider minor charge increases at Ranworth, Reedham, Great Yarmouth and Norwich to align charges with other organisations, as detailed in the report.

A Member commented that the existing infrastructure was a restricting issue for electric boats and that there were not enough charging points, as was the cost of development of electric boats which required a lot of investment from hire boat companies. The CE said that the Member was correct about the infrastructure and that the Authority had looked at various options, in particular with the innovation centre at Hethel, but thought that these were some years from being deployed. This, however, reinforced the case that there should be a bigger differential between the cost of tolls for electric day hire boats and diesel/petrol day hire boats.

A Member referred to the table of options and asked what would cuts look like in respect of the safety on the Broads and other services – both in terms of frontline and backroom costs. The CE referred the Member to the exercise carried out at the tolls briefing meeting, where members were asked to indicate on a chart where they thought the Authority could make service cuts. The two service areas that came top was the practical work, which was in second place, where the Authority had been able to make a reduction of £90,000, and the Rangers in first place. The CE said that following the accidents in Great Yarmouth, the Authority had increased the Ranger service so that Ranger launches were out every day of the week over the summer season, the cost of which was currently £137,000 of extra money. The Head of Ranger Services (HRS) had completed some additional work to look at what reductions of £20,000, £50,000 and £75,000 would mean if the Authority were to look to Ranger Services for those cuts. This was as follows:

- £20,000 – would mean a reduction of 6 patrol days per week;
- £50,000 – would mean a reduction of 12 patrol days per week; and
- £75,000 - would mean a reduction of 18 patrol days per week.

The CE said that it would be feasible to reduce the level of Rangers, although not to the level before the accident at Great Yarmouth, without any significant adverse impact on safety. One of the things that the HRS would like to do was to review how patrol levels were organised to ensure that there was the right level of coverage. The CE said that the reduction of the

£137,000 by £50,000 would still leave a margin above the patrolling the Authority had traditionally carried out.

The CE advised that there was a possibility of bidding for funding under the Landscapes Connections programme which could deliver £10m of funding, however, if the Authority were to remove some other services, this would mean that there would not be the personnel to develop and deliver that bid.

A Member commented that he was nervous about reducing Ranger Services and would like to see cost savings from other services, and asked whether savings in other areas had been looked at thoroughly. The CE said that once the Navigation Committee had submitted their recommendation as to where the tolls should be set, the Management Team would look at all options and how savings would be achieved and then present those to the Authority. The CE said that he did not expect Members at the Navigation Committee to commit to any areas of service cuts, but thought it was helpful to provide Members with an indication of what any cuts would mean.

A Member commented that any decision would need to be grounded in the rate of inflation. The CE said that the current rate of inflation was 1.7%, however, the impact to the Authority was much greater, for example staff costs had increased by 4%, repair costs to Ranger launches had gone up 6% and in general, costs were going up significantly, and would estimate that the total cost of rises was about 6%. The Member replied that he thought that on the basis of that percentage, it would be entirely reasonable to keep the toll rises in line with that and not to go below and suggested that the Authority create a basic rationale to align future rises with the cost of inflation to the Broads Authority.

In response to a question regarding diversification of income and whether the Authority had looked at other income streams, the CE said that in terms of raising additional income, the big opportunity was the National Lottery which the Authority would pursue. In addition, the Authority had used plant and equipment for private work such as weed cutting on Wroxham Broad, but had since received legal advice that was not positive from a navigation point of view, therefore, that route of income stream would be unlikely.

In response to a question about why the Authority was not charging for moorings outside of Ranworth, Reedham, Great Yarmouth and Norwich, the CE said that the Authority only charged for moorings where a service was provided, such as mooring help and facilities. It would be difficult to charge at other moorings where there were no staff because it would be very difficult to collect fees and enforce non-payment, therefore it would not be straightforward.

A member asked how many staff the Broads Authority employed and how many of those were part of the frontline maintenance team and Rangers. The CE responded that the Authority had approximately 100² FTE staff and the Director of Operations (DO) confirmed

² Following the meeting it was confirmed that there were approximately 140 FTE staff.

that there were 72 FTE staff in the maintenance and Ranger teams which would shrink slightly once the seasonal staff had finished the season.

A Member commented that there had been a reduction in dredging, and that finance and support was over 20% of the budget, and said that he was worried that there had been two years of above inflationary increases on the tolls and the Authority had not addressed the real issue: that there were too many staff. The CE replied that the Authority could achieve less with less staff but referred the Member to the survey by the NSBA that highlighted the need for more moorings, weed cutting, dredging and tree management. The CE said that the process was trying to find a balance between what users want and what they were prepared to pay.

A Member commented that last year contributions to the reserves were paused and asked whether this was the plan for the coming year. The DF said that the plan, when agreed to not contribute to the reserves in 2024/25, was to restart contributions in 2025/26 and the figures Members had in front of them included the planned contributions for 2025/26. The Member asked if there were no contributions to the reserves in 2025/26 would that mean that the Authority would have to dip into the reserves taking them below the 10% threshold. The DF said that the Authority had a minimum reserve policy which was 10% which was for instances where a new capital purchase was needed and money could be taken from the reserves rather than from the budget. The CE said that if the reserves did go below the 10% threshold, then it might mean that certain work was not undertaken. The CE said that he had planned to contact Defra to see if there was any likelihood of further capital money which might ease the position.

A Member commented that he supported the CE's comments about a reduction in Rangers and thought that it would not have an impact on safety, bearing in mind that there were fewer boats on the water and the hire boat season was shorter, and asked could the Authority justify the number of Rangers with the reduction in boat numbers. The DO said that the number of boats and the number of incidents were not directly related and although there was a reduction in boat numbers in 2024, the Authority had seen an increase in incidents and an increase in overstaying. For example, in August alone there were a number of incidents on the Broads. In addition, there were a lot of sailing vessels that capsized and there had been increase in notices of contravention for overstaying, which was all dealt with by the Ranger services team.

A Member asked whether the CE could clarify whether the changes already mentioned, such as staff time being allocated to the Countryside Stewardship scheme and the pay award, had been included in the table of options chart. The CE confirmed that this was built into the table, however, the HCME would need to look in detail as to what the practical effect of the allocation would be. The CE said that in September, the Authority was looking at a 12% increase to maintain services but was now looking at 7.3%.

A Member commented that he was pleased to hear that the HRS would be looking at the way in which Rangers were used and said that he thought there were ways that they could be used more effectively and efficiently, and added that the Authority should find smarter ways of

doing things without reducing services provided. The Member also commented that visibility was critical and suggested that workboats be branded which would have an impact on people's behaviour.

A Member asked whether the DO had record of the police patrols on the Broads and whether the number had reduced. The DO said that the Broads Beat vessel was still operational but, on many occasions, personnel were using cars rather than the boat. A Member commented that the Broads Beat did visit boat yards by car and speak to single sex boat parties as a prevention measure. A Member commented that the Broads Beat were often seen on the River Yare.

Another Member suggested that the Authority should consider using drones as part of the Ranger services.

A Member commented that he would not encourage charging for all moorings and said that it was well known that the main cause of accidents on the Broads were trips and falls when alighting from their boats. By encouraging use of informal moorings might put hirers, in particular, at risk.

A Member commented that eight years ago Ranger Services was 15% of the navigation budget whereas now it was 22% and asked whether there were more Rangers out on the Broads now. The DO said that the Ranger force was increased so that patrolling would be seven days per week throughout the season.

The Chair then asked each Member in turn what their preferred option of increase would be. The comments and suggested increase were:

- Although expected the trend of boat numbers to reduce, did not want to reduce head count and therefore should stretch budgets rather than cutting jobs by finding efficiencies and improvements – 6%
- Need to drastically look at what the Authority did, why it does it, and cut costs accordingly – 5%
- No service cuts and agreed with stretched budget. Not sustainable for toll payers to continue to pay for services in the long-term – 7.5%
- Understand some cuts and savings needed to be achieved but there must be no compromise on safety. Agree that the Authority should look at income diversification to give a more considered view when setting 2026/27 tolls – 7.5%
- Based on the real inflation that the Broads Authority was experiencing in addition to the cost of, and negating the impacts of, climate change – 6%
- Inflation costs needed to be taken into consideration and suggested another reserves holiday – 6.6%
- Agreed with looking at efficiencies and should put pressure on staff to look at cost savings, however, was against using safety as a reason – 5%

- Safety costs were paramount, inflation to the Broads Authority was greater than it was to the person buys the 'basket of goods'. Other bodies that had similar costs were looking at 12% increase in their tolls, and one was looking at 12% each year for the next four years – 6.5%
- Did not think costs should be increased over the cost of inflation and anything above that would lead to criticism – 5%
- 5%
- Believed that there were opportunities to improve services and agreed with the suggestion that the Authority should consider using drones, as well as AI – 6%
- Based on what boat companies could charge their customers and increased costs within business - 5%

Michael Scott proposed, seconded by Peter Dixon

It was resolved by 9 votes in favour and 1 against (with 2 abstentions) to recommend to the Broads Authority a 5.9% increase in tolls for 2025/26.

Members discussed the cost of tolls in relation to hired sailing craft and petrol/diesel day hire boats versus electric day hire boats.

A Member commented that there should be some differentiation on hybrid boats as well as electric. The CE confirmed that hybrid day hire boats did currently have a reduction on tolls compared to petrol/diesel hire boats, but the differential could be looked at.

A Member asked how much freezing the tolls on hired sailing craft would equate to. The CE said that he did not think it would make a big difference in income.

A Member said that he did not think that reducing tolls for electric day hire boats would make any difference in encouraging firms to move to electric boats. The CE said that it was important that the Broads Authority supported sustainable transport on the Broads.

A Member asked why tolls were not being frozen for private sailing craft. The CE said that private sailing craft currently received a significantly lower toll than hired sailing craft - £13.66 per square metre compared to £25.08 per square metre. A Member commented that the hired sailing craft was a vital part of introducing people to sailing on the Broads.

Members supported the CE's request for flexibility on rounding up or down figures when setting the tolls for the various groups of craft.

Michael Scott proposed, seconded by Tony Grayling.

It was resolved unanimously

- iii. **to recommend to the Broads Authority that the tolls be frozen on hired sailing craft and**

- iv. to instruct the Chief Executive to explore the differentials between electric, hybrid and diesel-powered day hire boats ahead of the Broads Authority meeting on 29 November.**

In relation to the increase in charges for the yacht stations as set out in 5.1 of the report, Stephen Bolt proposed, seconded by Michael Scott.

It was resolved unanimously to recommend to the Broads Authority that the charges for Ranworth Staithe and Reedham Quay be increased by £2 to £12 for an overnight stay, and the overnight charge at Norwich and Great Yarmouth Yacht Stations be increased from £16 to £17.50.