

Navigation Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 09 January 2025

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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, Mark Collins, Peter Dixon, Tony Grayling, Bob Neate, Simon Sparrow, and Daniel Thwaites.

In attendance

Lucy Burchnall - Head of Ranger Services, 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, Sara Utting – Senior Governance Officer.

1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from, Leslie Mogford, Remus Sawyerr, Michael Scott, 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.

Chair's announcements

The Chair commented that some Members were not responding to committee meeting invitations and asked that all Members respond in a timely manner.

The Chair advised that it was Simon Sparrow's last meeting as his term of office ended on 31 March 2025. He personally wanted to thank Simon for his contributions in committee meetings and added that he had been very constructive in his approach and it was much appreciated.

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 7 November 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) commented that Haven Bridge was the only item where there had been a significant update and this was covered in the Chief Executive's report.

A Member commented that on the new on-line software for tolls item, the report stated that the Authority was looking for a 'go-live' date of early January and asked the CE for an update. The CE said that there were a few details to finalise around the reporting side, and the hope was that it would be live very soon.

6. Chief Executive's report and current issues

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (CE). The CE said that there had been ongoing difficulties with Haven Bridge and that before Christmas there had been discussions between Peel Ports and the Port Users Group concerning a proposed fee for lifting the bridge. A letter, dated 19 December 2024, had been sent to the Port Users Group from Great Yarmouth Port Authority which indicated that the proposed lift charge would not be applied for 2025. The wider issue of the operation of the bridge and its lifting remained outstanding and was still being negotiated. Members would be aware that there had been discussions between the County Council and Peel Ports about that issue. The letter from the Port Authority indicated that it had asked the Great Yarmouth Port Company to have meaningful discussions about improving the availability of bridge lifting. The CE added that it was difficult to underestimate the importance of having the bridge in operation regularly and easily for users.

The CE said that the Authority had carefully programmed work for Mutford Lock in February so that it would not clash with repairs due to be carried out on Haven Bridge in January. The CE said that these were the only two routes to the sea from the Broads and both needed to be operating efficiently for users. The CE added that the Authority would continue to work closely with the Port Users Group and put pressure on Peel Ports to come to a reasonable solution such that the bridge opens in a timely way.

A Member commented that he very much welcomed the CE's comments and said that it was good to see progress. He added that it was important that the committee saw that access from the Broads to the North Sea was a fundamental right of navigation. The Member stressed that pressure should be kept on Peel Ports and the Port Authority by the Broads Authority to recognise that there were a number of boaters who wished to have unrestricted access to and from the North Sea.

A Member asked how the work to Mutford Lock was to be paid for. The CE said that Mutford Lock was the Broads Authority's largest asset and largest liability and that there was a reserve fund in case there was a major issue or repairs were needed. The reserve fund currently stood

at ~£450,000. The essential work that was due to be undertaken in February would cost £125,000 and this would be funded from that reserve.

A Member asked whether Breydon Bridge and Herring Bridge was operated by Peel Ports. The Head of Ranger Services (HRS) replied that Breydon Bridge was operated by Peel Ports on behalf of the Highways Agency. The Chair said that he believed that the operation of Herring Bridge would shortly be up for tender. The CE said that in an ideal world, the operation of all three bridges would be co-ordinated by one organisation and added that the HRS and the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) worked closely with Peel Ports to try and co-ordinate things as best as possible.

A Member commented on the possible tender in relation to the operation of Herring Bridge and said that it was important that the Broads Authority had input into that tender, i.e. what the nature of the tender was and whether the Authority could influence it in terms of how often the bridge would open and how it co-ordinated with other bridges.

7. Proposed budget 2025/26 and financial strategy 2027/28

Members received the report of the Director of Finance (DF). The DF said that the report covered two items: the actual figures to the end of October 2024 and the proposed budget. The DF said that at the time of writing the report, the figures for November 2024 were not available, and therefore provided a verbal update. The DF referred Members to table 1 of the report and said that the variance at the end of November was £290,140 which was an increase of £79,445. There was no change to the latest available budget or the forecast at the end of November. December figures were being worked on following the Christmas break, however, the total variance on the hire and private craft tolls had increased by £815 at the end of December.

The DF said that the budget was based on the 5.9% increase on tolls for 2025/26 and assumptions were made about the toll increases for 2026/27 of 3.5%, and 2027/28 of 1%. This was based on current boat numbers and assumptions around pay increases, negotiated by the NJC, which meant that the Broads Authority had no control over what any settlement would be. The DF said that the figures would be revisited throughout the coming year and the Authority would always look at savings that could be made or where expenditure could be cut. The DF referred Members to paragraph 6.3 and the factors taken into consideration and said that the pay increase was a significant part of the budget and said that salaries formed 68% of the navigation budget, compared to 72% for 2024/25.

The DF said that table 5 of the report provided a high-level overview of the 2025/26 budget, whilst Appendix 3 provided it by reporting summary level. Paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 of the report provided details by directorate which highlighted where there had been increases and decreases. Ranger patrolling had been adjusted to maximise patrolling in the busy season. Table 6 of the report provided details of the central costs with the forecast for 2024/25 and the budget for 2025/26 to 2027/28. The DF said that Members would notice that for 2024/25 the central costs as a percentage of income for National Parks was higher due to the delayed

works of the Yare House alterations and the lease which was completed in the summer of 2024.

The DF referred Members to paragraph 11 which set out the key assumptions. The DF explained that where staff vacancies arose, there was often a timing difference between when the person exited the post and when the new person could take up the post. This would lead to a variance which would then be adjusted in the forecast. All vacancies required Management Team approval to recruit.

The DF referred Members to paragraph 12 which set out the Navigation Earmarked Reserves and provided Members with an update on paragraph 12.2. The work at Mutford Lock was scheduled to go ahead at a cost of £125,000 which meant that the forecast Earmarked Reserve balance at the end of March 2025 would be £1,207,835. This was, however, subject to approval by the Broads Authority on 24 January 2025. This would also update the balance of the reserves at the end of 2027/28, in paragraph 12.5, to £1,130,178.

The DF said that despite the projected small deficit in the budget, the Authority looked to maintain the 10% minimum reserve over the three years and, as previously stated, savings and cost reductions continued to be investigated during 2025/26.

A Member commented that the committee had been asked to take the decision on the level of tolls for 2025/26 with the understanding that this would result in some reduction in activity, and therefore asked what those reductions would be. The DF said that it would be under the Operations section and it would be a reduction to Ranger Services. The Chief Executive (CE) said that there was another element to this, in that there was increased income for managing some conservation sites. This enabled a change in the balance of work allocation for some technicians from Navigation to National Parks from 70/30 to 60/40 which effectively meant a 24% reduction in the dredging operation. The Head of Ranger Services (HRS) had planned a small reduction in patrolling in some areas, but it would still be more than previously happened some years ago.

In response to a question on whether there would be one further repayment to the National Park reserves after this financial year, the DF confirmed this was correct.

A Member referred to Appendix 3 of the report and commented that costs grew at a faster pace than income and that this was not sustainable for the future and asked to what extent was this a one-off. The DF said that part of the reason why it looked like there was a higher increase in costs was because of the payment holiday taken in respect of the 2024/25 earmarked reserves and this had been reinstated for 2025/26. Part was also the budgeted salary increase of 4%. In addition, the DF said that as part of savings made in 2024/25 projects had been delayed and these would be undertaken in 2025/26.

A Member commented that in central costs for 2024/25 in paragraph 10 of the report the split between National Parks and Navigation was 61/39, but for 2025/26 it was 50/50 and asked what the basis for the change in split was. The DF said that 2024/25 looked abnormal because of the works completed on Yare House was 100% National Park and because that

work would not be repeated the split on central costs would revert to 50/50 as in previous years.

A Member asked how realistic the 4% projected pay rise in the budget was. The DF responded that the Unions would put forward a suggested rise to the NJC employment panel and this would be followed by some negotiation. Prior to a couple of years ago, the pay rise was always a percentage, but in the last two years it had been a flat cash award across the board. In 2024/25 the pay award was £1,290 across the board, which equated to approximately 4%. The DF said that the pay negotiations for 2025/26 had not started, however, 4% was considered to be prudent, but it could be as low as 2%. If the award was less than 4%, it would be good for the navigation budget as this could potentially lower any toll increase in the following year. The CE said that in terms of any salary increase, the DF had always been prudent and that the 2024/25 pay award was lower than had been budgeted. The DF reminded Members that employers' National Insurance costs were due to increase from 1 April 2025, however, the Authority had asked Defra for clarification on whether the Authority would receive any help on this.

A Member asked whether there was a stable head count from budget period to budget period. The DF said that for 2024/25 the staffing figure was 126 FTE and for 2025/26 it would be 123 FTE.

A Member asked whether the statement in paragraph 6.3 that expenditure had "been reduced in line with the 5.9% toll agreed" was correct. The DF confirmed that expenditure had decreased in terms of Ranger Services.

A Member asked whether the Authority was doing enough about a longer-term financial strategy for the management of the Broads and whether there was an opportunity to look at bigger picture scenarios over how the Broads would be paid for over the next five to ten years, as well as diversification of funding. The CE said that this report was a three-year plan and commented that the level of uncertainty going forward was so great, he did not think scenario planning would be of use to the Authority. One of the big unknowns in relation to Navigation was what boat numbers would be over the next few years which was why the Authority had made provisions for reduced income for private boats this year. It was not known, however, whether the Authority had made enough provision. It would, therefore, be difficult to have meaningful discussions over the timescale the Member proposed and reiterated that there was no Government funding to support the navigation side of the Authority's operation. The CE said that the Authority did look at external funding, however, big funding opportunities such as the National Lottery did not support the provision of statutory duties, such as the maintenance of the navigation. Previously, the Authority had access to European funding, however, this was no longer available and other sources of funding were much more limited. The CE said that the Authority had recently taken legal advice regarding the maintenance of the navigation and the present legal framework significantly constrained what the Authority was able to do. He added that Defra had expressed the intention to modify the current legislation for National Parks and the Broads

Authority which might give the Authority a wider remit under a General Power of Competence. This would bring the Authority in line with Local Authorities.

The CE said that in terms of using the Authority's resources for private work there were legal restrictions on this at present. In addition, if the Authority were to undertake private work, it would not have the resources to carry out programmed work on the navigation. The CE said this was the reason why the Authority had taken the position that maintenance of the navigation was a public good and there ought to be funding from the public purse.

The DF added that although the report covered a period of looking forward for three years, it was part of a five-year look-forward.

A Member commented that when discussing toll increases in previous meetings, one of the consequences was that cuts would need to be made and asked for clarification on the figures in relation to cuts to Ranger Services and dredging. The CE said that in terms of cuts to Ranger Services, it would be 3 FTE posts. In addition, there would be a significant shift in projects from Navigation to National Park which would result in less dredging.

A Member commented that National Parks were not getting their fair share of Green Infrastructure and Recreational impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (GI RAMS) income as Councils were spending their GI RAMS money on other areas such as country parks which they controlled. He explained that GI RAMS was a surcharge on development which was spent on mitigation of the impacts of new developments, and added that as access to the Broads National Park was through navigation and that there should be an argument that the Authority should apply for GI RAMS income for navigation.

A Member asked whether there was any possibility of accessing alternative funding such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. The CE said that the 50% of the Water, Mills and Marshes project was funded by the Heritage Lottery. He added that the Authority had a good record with the National Lottery and it was hoped to capitalise on that with the proposed Landscape Connections bid.

8. Consultation on proposed General Direction

Members received the report of the Head of Ranger Services (HRS) which included a summary of the background to this proposal. The HRS said that the Authority was now at the point where statutory consultees were being asked to comment on the General Direction. As one of the statutory consultees, the purpose of the paper was to ask Members of the Navigation Committee for their comments on the proposal. Members had been circulated a report from Marico Marine prior to the meeting which looked at whether the navigational risks could be managed without pilotage. The report confirmed that there was no significant increase in risk by the removal of the pilotage service.

A Member asked whether the Authority needed to remain a Competent Harbour Authority and also asked whether there was a cost attached to retaining this status. The HRS said that there was no cost to maintaining this; the cost was only in relation to the pilotage service itself. If, however, commercial activity was to restart, the Authority could look to remove the

General Direction and look to provide a pilotage service to support that. The General Direction basically made the pilotage service dormant.

A Member commented that the Pilotage Act applied to commercial vessels only and asked if the Authority was intending to apply this to commercial vessels only. The HRS confirmed that the General Direction would apply to all vessels over 24m, however, it did not restrict vessels coming into the Broads; it was requiring them to complete a risk assessment before they did so. The HRS said that it would apply more to commercial vessels as there were few non-commercial vessels that large.

A Member asked whether, in terms of the risk assessment, was there any criteria around that. The HRS said that the Authority would develop a proforma similar to the passage plan that it already had. This would include bridges, tide times, time of departure, time of year etc., and would allow the Authority to determine whether there would be anything needed to be put in place. The HRS said that most of the time a launch escort would be required, not for the vessel itself but for the other boats on the water.

A Member questioned why an application must be completed 42 working days prior to the date of arrival. The HRS said that most applications would be processed quicker than 42 working days, however, if a pilotage service was required or a more substantial risk assessment was needed, it would allow the Authority the maximum time to put those measures in place. For larger vessels, the timescale was realistic in terms of getting bridges opened and feasibility in terms of loading and unloading.

A Member asked whether there would be a cost incurred for the risk assessment and could the Authority recover any costs from the applicant. The HRS said that the risk assessment would be done in-house and for vessels that needed pilotage, the Authority would look to recover any costs associated. The Director of Operations reminded Members that any vessel would need to pay tolls.

Stephen Bolt proposed, seconded by Tony Grayling.

It was resolved unanimously to support the proposed General Direction to restrict vessels from over 24m in length entering the Broads, subject to a risk assessment to see if such vessels could safely be accommodated without a pilot.

9. Consultation on the appointment to the Navigation Committee

Members received the report of the Senior Governance Officer (SGO). The SGO said that as mentioned earlier in the meeting, Simon Sparrow's term of office ended on 31 March 2025. The Authority had undertaken a recruitment process to fill the resulting vacancy which would take effect from 1 April 2025 for a four year term, subject to approval by the Authority.

Harry Blathwayt proposed, seconded by Simon Sparrow.

It was resolved unanimously to recommend to the Broads Authority that Susan Cadamy be appointed to the Navigation Committee wef 1 April 2025.

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

Members received the report of the Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology (HCME) who highlighted some of the key issues. In terms of dredging, the HCME confirmed that the work on the Upper Bure had been completed as planned in partnership with the landowner for spreading the sediment for arable benefit. Working with the IDB, sediment from dredging the Ant had been placed on a private landowner's riverbank to maintain a floodbank along that section.

Water plant management figures for 2024 were set out in the report in section 3. The HCME commented that water plant management had more than doubled in the last ten years due to water quality improvement. Riverside tree management had now started and the team was focused on identified sections of the rivers Yare and Bure.

Repairs to Mutford Lock was a significant project which was due to commence in February, programmed to avoid a clash with the work to be carried out on Haven Bridge during January. The HCME said that the last time the gates were lifted out was in 1993, and as this was not a frequent activity for the Authority they had, therefore, developed a relationship with the Canals and Rivers Trust (CRT) who lifted out approximately 150 lock gates each year, and the Authority would benefit from the CRT's experience. The HCME confirmed that Notices to Mariners had been issued.

The HCME said that in terms of staffing, the 2025/26 work programme would be updated for the next Navigation Committee meeting. However, with the shift from Navigation work to National Park, this would equate to 405 days less work on Navigation next year.

A Member commented that at present the dredging figure set out in paragraph 1.1 was only 47% of target and to achieve the remaining 53% in four months was rather tight and asked if the HCME had a sense of what the actual dredging figures would be at the end of the year. The HCME replied that the forecast outturn of dredging would be less than 100% at the end of the year. This was partially due to the work on the Upper Bure at Bridge Broad where it was decided not to dredge, and in other areas the dredging specification was perhaps too ambitious. The HCME said that the Authority was not yet in a position to review waterways specifications, however, this would be done at the end of the current cycle of the Waterways Management Strategy.

A Member asked for clarification around the Lower Bure and additional costs of dredging for dealing with some shoals which was mentioned in the Director of Finance's report, and commented that there was no reference to that in the HCME's report. The HCME said that the forward plans for 2025/26 would be presented at the April meeting of the Navigation Committee.

A Member commented that he had seen a report that volunteers were being asked to remove Pennywort by hand in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire rivers and added that he was worried that untrained personnel removing Pennywort could mean the potential spread of this invasive plant and should be done by professionals. The Member asked that, if the Broads Authority had any influence, it should ask that the removal of Pennywort was carried out by professionals. The HCME said that the Authority did have an influence on this in Norfolk. The Ecology team were members of a steering group with Natural England, the IDB and the Environment Agency in terms of species management. Where there was Floating Pennywort on the River Ant, the Authority did engage volunteers but they were led and directed by members of the Ecology team. The Head of Ranger Services said that all the invasive species signs had just been renewed around the system to reinforce that message. In addition, the Rangers spoke to people who were using the water where invasive species were present.

There was a discussion on the widening of the channel on Hickling Broad. The CE suggested that this subject could be brought back to a future meeting of the Navigation Committee to be discussed, with the benefit of an officer report setting out the facts.

A Member commented that he welcomed a review of the Waterways Specification and said that there should be a discussion in the form of a workshop about the subject with Members of the Navigation Committee to ensure that dredging was done effectively to make the most of the budget available. The HCME replied that when the Waterways Strategy was first introduced, it was in conjunction with the Sediment Management Strategy in 2007. Prior to that there was a consultation phase, a workshop etc. The next window to do this would be before the current Strategy ended in 2027. The Member commented that this should be done sooner rather than later.

A Member asked whether the Authority could look at Heritage Lottery funding for the work on Mutford Lock. The Chief Executive said that this could be looked into.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Committee would be held on 3 April 2025 at Yare House, 62-64 Thorpe Road, Norwich, NR1 1RY, commencing at 10am.

The meeting ended at 11:19am.

Signed

Chairman