

NOTES FROM USER GROUP MEETING 8 NOVEMBER 2005

Name	Representing
Paul Ayres	Commercial Boat Operators Association
Richard Baker	Bishop's Stortford Canoe Club
Robbie Barrett	Stort Boat Club
Sue Barrett	Stort Boat Club
Ron Bingham	Inland Waterways Association (London)
Len Bray	Lee & Stort Cruising Club
Del Brenner	Regent's Network
Mike Brown	Sawbridgeworth Angling Society
Jean Eldridge	Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
Maurice Eldridge	Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
Craig Haslam	Inland Waterways Association (Lee & Stort)
Martin Gibbons	Sawbridgeworth Angling Society
Bob Langley	Lee & Stort Cruising Club
K. Locke	Rammey Marsh Cruising Club
Ted McEwen	Rammey Marsh Cruising Club
Ann Nash	Broxbourne Cruising Club
David Nash	Broxbourne Cruising Club
John Shacklock	Inland Waterways Association & Stort Boat Club
Roger Squires	Inland Waterways Association – (London)
Adrian Stott	National Association of Boat Owners
A. Ward	Rammey Marsh Cruising Club
Brian Watkins	Rammey Marsh Cruising Club
Steve Wickes	Lea Cruising Club
Alan Wildman	Residential Boat Owners Association
Ant Wright	Bishop's Stortford Canoe Club
BWL representatives	
Mark Bensted	
Amanda Dunk (chair)	
Jon Guest	
Donna Kelly (notes)	
Mike Manuel	
Richard Rutter	
Ian Runeckles	
Gareth Stephens	

APOLOGIES

Alan Byrne	English Heritage
Mr Dunley	Stort Boat Club
Maggie French	London Waterbus Company
Giles Higgitt	Pirate Club
Glen Middleton	Puppet Theatre Barge
Tom Morley	BCF
David Pearce	Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
Lee Tyson	Countryside Management Service
Marion Riley	Inland Waterways Association
Graham Wilkinson	Lea & Stort Cruises Ltd
Peter Woodley	Lee Valley Boat Club
Brian Strong	not stated
Derek Turton	Gerrards Cross & Uxbridge Angling Society

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Amanda Dunk welcomed everyone and British Waterways London (BWL) staff introduced themselves.

Note: introductions followed Richard Rutter's Olympics 2012 update, but have been recorded as the first item for note purposes.

2. Olympics 2012 update

Richard Rutter outlined the important role that the waterways could play in London's Olympic plans and highlighted the long-term benefits that the current proposed plans could bring. They key benefits are listed below, but please refer to the attached document for further information.

During Olympic Park development

- Opportunity for a showcase sustainable project
- 5 million tonnes of materials moved by barge
- 500,000 lorry journeys saved
- 15,600 tonnes of CO₂ saved (the equivalent of taking 15,600 cars off the roads)
- £10,000,000 environmental benefit
- Potential to generate 160,000KWh hydro power through restored tidal mill p.a

Olympic Legacy

- 125,000 tonnes moved by barge p.a
- 12,500 lorry journeys saved p.a
- 440 tonnes of CO₂ saved p.a
- £200,000 environmental benefit p.a
- Potential to generate 160,000 KWh hydro power through restored tidal mill p.a

In addition to the Olympic Legacy benefits quoted above, there will be ongoing development and renewal over a 10 year cycle which, conservatively could generate up to 50,000 tonnes of material per annum which could be moved by water.

Wider benefits

- Full navigation around Olympic Park
- Improved security through greater use of the network
- Improved safety (eliminates tidal inundation in Olympic Park)
- Reduced road traffic accidents and vehicular ambient noise
- Improved air quality
- Potential to secure leisure & mooring income (improves economic legacy)
- Improved river storage capacity in certain conditions
- Land values increased
- Opportunity to enhance freshwater habitats in Olympic Park
- Enhanced tidal habitats and tidal creeks (including 99.7% of mudflats and 100% of reed beds), which would be unaffected by proposals
- Develop cultural, heritage and education resource (Three Mills)
- Potential to connect 13.5m sq ft Stratford City with 2000 mile national waterway network

Comments and questions following Olympics 2012 update:

Prescott Channel – a User Group representative raised concerns over the proposal to install a lock at Prescott Channel and suggested that it would be more viable to re-commission Bow Locks.

Richard Rutter disagreed with this suggestion and added that the majority of boating customers are fully supportive of the current proposal. Representatives of both NABO and the IWA openly pledged their support for the current proposal.

Richard has since contacted the User Group representative who expressed concern and outlined the reasons for pursuing Prescott Channel and not Bow Locks.

Access to the navigation during games - Richard Rutter acknowledged that this is a sensitive issue and explained that BWL will be reviewing operational issues regarding security and access when further information becomes available, details of which will be discussed at forthcoming User Group meetings.

Richard added that BWL is anticipating that there will be a certain degree of disruption during the construction phase, but was unable to offer any specific details. However, attendees were assured that they will be kept informed of any proposed closures or works.

Crossrail - BW representatives were asked to comment on the current crossrail proposals.

Mark Bensted acknowledged that Crossrail will have a major impact on the waterways and confirmed that access to Poplar Dock will effectively be removed.

As stated in previous notes, BW representatives are reviewing the plans and talking to Crossrail and Department for Transport to minimise the impact where possible.

In addition, BW has appointed a parliamentary agent in order to ensure that our concerns are adequately addressed and considered in parliament.

3. Actions arising from previous meeting

Commercial Barges – page 4 of previous notes

Amanda Dunk agreed to send a copy of the policy statement, which was sent with the original notes in June 2005. A further copy is attached and the document can also be downloaded from www.britishwaterways.co.uk/accountability

Abbott's Wharf, Limehouse Cut – page 6 of previous notes

A User Group representative claimed that Mark Blackwell's comments about this scheme were inaccurate as were the subsequent notes.

Mark Blackwell has since reviewed the notes and confirmed that his statement was correct and recorded accurately.

4. **Maintenance issues** - comments and questions from the floor

Ramney Marsh Bridge - a User Group representative asked BWL representatives to explain why the proposed bridge works are not being carried out imminently?

Jon Guest explained that it is essential for BWL staff to explore all potential replacement options in order to minimise disruption and ensure that the necessary funds are available. He added that the bridge is subject to various planning constraints as it is a grade 2 listed structure.

Gareth Stephens has since conducted a site visit and is liaising with representatives from Ramney March Cruising club in order to find a sensible and safe solution to the current access problems.

Bridge plaques - Jon Guest agreed to install all bridge plaques on the Rivers Lee & Stort by April 2006.

Elsan facility at Hertford has been locked for past 2 years despite being listed as a public facility in BW literature. Can BW representatives arrange to have this facility re-opened?

Gareth Stephens explained that he had recently contacted John Milton and arranged for the elsan to be unlocked. The facility is now fully accessible to all boaters. However, User Group representatives were urged to notify Gareth if they experience any problems with this facility.

5. **Planning issues** - comments and questions from the floor

King's Cross - a User Group representative asked if BW had responded to the revised planning application for the redevelopment of the above site in light of the 11th November deadline?

Ian Runeckles confirmed that the deadline is the 21st November and not the 11th November. He went on to say that he hadn't responded as yet, but that after a brief examination of the revised plans, British Waterways was pleased that our suggestions regarding residential, visitor and performance barges appeared to have been included.

The User Group representative went on to say that that none of his previous comments appeared to have been taken on board by the developers and that the proposal for native planting would not adequately mitigate the effects of the proposed development. He was also concerned about the proposed demolition of historic walls adjacent to the canal was a significant concern for him.

Ian Runeckles stated that he wasn't aware of any proposals to demolish historic walls, except for re-opening arches into the Fish and Coal Drops, but agreed that he would check before responding formally to the Council.

Hardmead Cottage - a User Group representative asked if BWL representatives were aware that a planning application (requesting permission to rebuild cottage) has recently been submitted to East Herts District Council?

Ian Runeckles explained that he had not been consulted about this particular application. However, he has since requested a formal consultation from East Herts District Council and will respond in due course.

Hardmead Lock a User Group representative commented that the lock is in a poor state of repair.

Jon Guest acknowledged this point and explained that BWL representatives will be liaising with the owners of Hardmead cottage in order to try to agree and establish a works schedule to coincide the proposed cottage works.

6. Enforcement issues - comments and questions from the floor

Overstaying boats - User Group representatives were concerned about boats overstaying throughout the navigation generally.

Gareth Stephens acknowledged this problem and explained that BWL staff are actively tackling and prioritising problem areas. He added that it can be a lengthy procedure, but stressed that BWL staff are fully committed to pursuing offenders.

On a positive note, Gareth was pleased to confirm that he is in the process of recruiting a moorings co-ordinator for East London. This means that our Patrol Officer will be solely dedicated to tackling evading craft in the area.

7. General issues - comments and questions from the floor

Top Lock gates – a User Group representative asked why BWL is reluctant to install railings along top lock gates?

Jon Guest stated that the Health & Safety assessments carried out on BWL various locks have concluded that current footbridges provide the safest means of crossing a lock. However, he agreed to discuss the issue in more detail with our safety advisor, Peter Wade.

8. Updates requested in advance of meeting

Vegetation

Mike Manuel outlined BW corporate policy for vegetation/tree management and provided specific examples of recent vegetation works carried out on the Rivers Lee & Stort. He explained that BWL is committed to pursuing this policy, but stressed that we must always consider the impact of such works on both the landscape and local wildlife, particularly as the River Stort is such a special environment.

Comments and questions following vegetation update:

Angling - a User Group representative stated that anglers object to extreme vegetation cut backs as it has a major detrimental impact on wildlife. They fully oppose the 'scorched earth' policy and feel that the requirements of all canal users should be considered before major vegetation work is undertaken.

Mike Manuel welcomed these comments and confirmed that he would consider the concerns of anglers and all other waterway users when assessing vegetation requirements in future. For the benefit of the anglers present, Mike also explained that BWL is not proposing to cut back any aquatic vegetation.

Planting scheme - a User Group representative suggested that BWL should plant a shrub or tree at an alternative location each time they remove a tree for safety reasons or otherwise.

Mike Manuel welcomed this suggestion and confirmed that BWL is working with various partners to create a green infrastructure plan for the River Stort.

Trees on private land - does British Waterways have any legal rights to cut back trees that are on private land?

Jon Guest explained that it can be extremely difficult to address trees that are overhanging the offside of the waterway. However, he assured users that BWL staff will continue to work with local authorities and land owners to try and reduce the potential of trees falling into the navigation or causing navigational hazard. He also urged canal users to notify BWL if they are concerned about specific trees.

Stanstead Abbots (referred to as Amwell moorings) – vegetation clearance was done by the end of April 2004, as promised. However, there are a few remaining tree stumps, which still cause an infringement to navigation and therefore need to be removed.

Jon Guest acknowledged the point and will ask relevant supervisor to remove.

Dobbs Weir & Fielde's Weir - a User Group representative requested that BWL staff cut back the willow tress at each of these sites, but stressed that they should not be removed completely.

Jon Guest acknowledged the point and will ask relevant supervisor to action as necessary.

Ramney Marsh Island – a User Group representative confirmed that BWL had sent a tree surgeon to assess whether or not a particular tree was potentially hazardous, but that no further action has been taken since the report, which confirmed that the tree is hazardous, had been submitted.

Jon Guest has since investigated this issue and established that the tree is question is situated on land which BWL lease to Ramney Marsh Cruising Club (R.M.C.C.) and as such they are responsible for its maintenance. Jon is now liaising with representatives from R.M.C.C. in order to agree a mutual resolution.

Backlog of vegetation maintenance – there was a lengthy debate about vegetation management and User Group attendees overwhelmingly agreed that the River Stort is a unique environment and that a 'common sense' approach is essential when tackling vegetation. One User Group representative had outstanding concerns about not following the corporate policy to the letter and these issues have since been followed up with Mark Bensted and Robin Evans.

Mark Bensted welcomed attendees to contact him if they have any specific concerns about this matter.

Dredging update

Jon Guest confirmed that £8 million has been assigned for dredging (nationally) in the next financial year (2006). This is a significant increase from the £4 million allocated for 2005. The dredging priorities are as follows:

- Feakes Lock to Tednambury Lock, River Stort
- Bulls Bridge to North Circular Road, Paddington Arm, Grand Union Canal

Jon added that BWL staff will continue to spot dredge specific problems areas such as Turkey Street Brook.

Turkey Street Brook – a User Group representative suggested that BW should install a damn at this location.

Jon Guest stated that the Environment Agency would unfortunately not agree to this.

Any other business

Agenda's will be sent via e-mail in instances where attendance is confirmed in advance of meeting (i.e the acceptance date specified on our invite letter).

If you would like to receive User Group notifications via e-mail, please send confirmation of your e-mail address to donna.kelly@britishwaterways.co.uk and your details will be added to our circulation list.

Dates of next meetings

24 & 31 May 2006 – venues to be confirmed