



**Notes of Boating Issues Meeting
Held at BW Offices, Hatton
Thursday 14 October 2004**

PRESENT:

User Groups

Ann Davies	Association of Pleasure Craft Operators
David Pearce	Association of Waterways' Cruising Clubs
Tony Mason	Association of Waterways' Cruising Clubs
Adrian Stott	Barge Association, The
Kevin East	British Canoe Union
Bernard Hales	Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club & Heritage Afloat
David Daines	Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society
Audrey Smith	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
Tony Hirst	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
John Baylis	Inland Waterways Association
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Geoff Rogerson	National Association of Boat Owners
Paul Bryan	National Community Boat Association
Ivor Caplan	Residential Boat Owners' Club
Scott Deverell	The Yacht Harbour Association, Hartford Marina
Daving Dunning	The Boating Association

British Waterways

Simon Salem	Marketing & Communications Director
Eugene Baston	Customer Relations Manager
Dr Paul Beckwith	Head of Environment, National Support Unit
Peter Wade	Safety Advisor
Amanda Strang	Customer Relations Administrator

Apologies

Alan Meegan	Amateur Rowing Association
Andy Soper	Barge Association, The
Sally Banham	British Marine Federation
Howard Pridding	British Marine Federation
Barry Smith	Canal Boat Builders' Association
Martin Jiggins	Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Richard Booth	Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Roger Squires	Inland Waterways Association
Neil Edwards	Inland Waterways Association
John Fletcher	Inland Waterways Association
Beryl McDowall	Residential Boat Owners' Association
Neil Northmore	Royal Yachting Association
Adrian Birtles	The Steam Boat Association
Sam Bourne	The Yacht Harbour Association
Tim Coghlan	The Yacht Harbour Association

These minutes are also circulated to British Waterways' Chief Executive, Executive Directors, Operating Directors, General Managers, Service Managers, Operational Managers & other key personnel.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Simon Salem thanked all representatives for attending.

The group introduced themselves and indicated which organisation they represented.

1. REPORT ON ISSUES SINCE LAST MEETING

1.1 Stoppage Information Provision

Audrey Smith expressed concern over inconsistency of stoppage notice formats between different waterway units. Simon agreed that waterways should be consistent in the format of stoppage, restriction and information notices. All Waterways

John Baylis confirmed the preference that when publishing the Stoppage Programme the Winter opening hours should be included. Simon responded that this would be taken into account next year. Simon Salem

Sue Day highlighted that she had experienced a stoppage finishing early, which meant the date of the next planned stoppage started earlier than planned. Simon responded that planned stoppages should be started on the stated date, and not before. Stoppages concluding earlier than the stated date are welcome. All Waterways

1.2 Service Cards

Eugene Baston and Simon Salem updated the group on the review of service cards that recently took place within BW. Re-calibration of all machines would mean a standard £6.30 charge for pump-outs by end of March 2005. BW would also make shower facilities and all BW operated waterpoints free of charge. All Waterways

The group expressed ideas on different charging methods / technologies for cards used to access services. Simon responded that views would be sought from User Groups on the style and usage of cards, including the range of facilities these cards could access. User Groups

1.3 National Consultative Council (NCC)

David Pearce asked whether timescales mentioned in the letter from George Greener regarding the setting up of the NCC could be reduced. Simon responded that he would not like to see the establishment of the NCC rushed. It was very important to ensure the framework and constitution of the NCC was fit for purpose, and a part of this process was involvement by User Group representatives in all aspects of the Council's establishment.

Representatives requested that Professor Jowel issue a statement for the forthcoming National User Group meeting of what Professor Jowel intends to do to establish the NCC. Professor Jowell

Some of the Users expressed concern at the planned transparency of the Waterways Ombudsman Committee. Simon and Eugene explained that the committee will comprise representatives from groups such as Corridor Issues and Boating Issues meetings. Two non-aligned members were being sought and adverts would appear in waterway and national press during November.

Simon explained how the Ombudsman committee would inject even greater transparency into the Waterways Ombudsman scheme.

Tony Hirst asked what the opportunities are for IWAAC and changing their funding, Simon agreed to raise this with DEFRA.

Simon Salem

1.4 Visitor Incident Reporting Form

Peter Wade thanked all the users for their input to the reporting form and explained how the form will be used.

User groups should contact Amanda Strang for further copies of the reporting form. BW will pay any reasonable distribution costs, e.g., magazine inserts.

Users /
Amanda
Strang

BW would provide feedback at the next Boating Issues Meeting on how the Visitor Incident card is working.

Peter Wade

Simon would consider the merits of providing this form to everyone with their licence renewal.

Simon Salem

Peter spent some time explaining how the reporting form fits in with AINA's vision of a national database showing all incidents across navigation authorities, and therefore allowing trends to be identified and addressed.

1.5 Overgrowth / Vegetation Management

Audrey Smith highlighted Robin Evans' commitment to control and reduce overgrown vegetation made at the Annual Meeting, Audrey went on to ask what the timescale for this procedure would be.

Simon responded that all General Managers and Operating Directors are committed to making an edge to edge towpath cut by the end of March 2005 except where there are SSSI's or other regulatory restrictions.

General
Managers /
Operating
Directors

It was pointed out that in some areas overgrowth could not be tackled simply by mowing the full width of the towpath. Paul Beckwith responded that extra time may be needed where additional work is required (e.g. cutting trees down and proper treatment works of shrubbery).

David Dunning highlighted a potential hazard on the River Trent where vegetation now obscures an important navigation sign. Eugene to contact East Midlands waterways to see what can be done about cutting vegetation blocking navigation signs (David Dunning has details). It may be something that needs to be taken further with the landowner.

Eugene
Baston

Paul Beckwith advised that a consultation will be issued shortly on mowing guidelines. Users' views would be sought, in accordance with BW's stated commitment to Cabinet Office Code of Practice for Written Consultations, eg. 12 week period of consultation. Eugene would ensure all groups were approached for their views.

Eugene
Baston

Guidance to Operation Managers on dealing with towpath edge saplings would also be issued, and Simon will also reinforce this action with Operating Directors.

Paul
Beckwith/
Simon Salem

Tony Mason spoke of problems with reed growth in canals. Simon commented that BW would try to make more money available in future to control all types of vegetation.

Tony Hirst commented that vegetation on stone work and structures could also cause problems and would need tackling. Simon agreed to communicate this to Operating Managers. Simon Salem

1.6 Updated Contact Details

Amanda Strang to circulate updated contact charts for all service and operations teams in the waterway units within four weeks. Amanda Strang

2.0 LICENSING ISSUES

2.1 Use of date of birth on new applications

Eugene explained that this additional information would be requested from 1 April 2005 and the requirement would not be mandatory. Eugene explained that this was a standard item on many third party application forms. It would act as an additional security feature to protect customers when boats are sold or a customer requires a refund. The group generally made no comment.

Tony Mason questioned the practice on current application forms where it asks for the security code to be provided from a customer's credit card. Tony believed this should only be given over the phone and not on an application form. Simon agreed to look into this concern. Sally Ash

2.2 Round or Square Licence Disks

Simon and Eugene asked for views on whether reverting to round-shaped licence disks would make a difference for boaters. The group did not consider this to be important and no action was necessary.

2.3 Licence Evasion / Overstaying on Moorings

Tony Hirst expressed surprise that evasion had increased and suggested that BW was losing approximately £1m through evasion of licences and moorings. Simon agreed to collate data on evasion and report back at the next meeting. Simon Salem

A debate took place on overstaying and evasion and Simon agreed to bring back these subjects as agenda items at the next meeting, where figures would be provided. BW would also develop proposals for charging for overstaying that are enforceable. Amanda Strang Service Managers

User Groups would like to see more support given to Mooring Wardens who are helping to tackle the 'Overstaying' problem. Guidance on how to deal with abusive boaters is needed for these valuable volunteers. Service Managers

Stuart Sampson commented that in some areas 48 hour moorings were replacing 14 day moorings without, it appeared, a proper assessment of demand within the vicinity. Simon to take up with Service managers and ensure that the default mooring period is always 14 days unless there are credible reasons otherwise. Users requested that in instances such as at Llangollen, the first 24 hours should be free. Simon Salem/ Service Managers

Bernard Hales asked how does BW charge for double-breasted boats at moorings – Eugene to investigate and report back Eugene Baston

2.5 Residential Boating Issues Group (RBIG)

Ivor Caplan explained to the group what the RBIG was and who they are working with (Bell Cornwell consultants).

User groups to let Ivor know if any other users would like to attend the fact finding workshops on the 10 November. All Users

2.6 Policy on Mooring Waiting Lists

Ivor explained that BW needed to have consistency of how mooring waiting lists are kept and maintained to ensure that this does not further impact on the shortage of moorings.

BW to review waiting list policy to incorporate greater consistency and report back on plans. Simon Salem

3.0 STRUCTURES AND MAINTENANCE

3.1 Leaving Lock Gates Open

A general debate took place on the pros and cons of leaving lock gates open. BW would confirm policy on this shortly. Eugene Baston

3.2 Charging for access to structures (out of hours)

Users made useful comments on the availability and opening time for structures and charging for their use out of usual business hours. The point was noted that where tide times meant access could only be outside of usual opening hours, the customer should not be penalised.

BW to ensure that bck opening hours and access times are suitable for the customers needs and for safe passage. To report back for next Boating Issues meeting. Service Managers/
Eugene Baston

David Dunning requested that BW identify and publicise where the safe havens are on the BW network. It was agreed that this information would be included in the Boaters' Directory. Sally Ash

David brought a final matter to BW's attention that the signage at Brentford lock is incorrect – Simon agreed to ask BW London to ensure corrects signage at Brentford. Amanda Strang

3.3 Tidal Locks – staff training

Eugene outlined the stringent training provided to tidal lock keepers to ensure the safe operation of structures. It was noted that greater empathy and understanding was required from some lock keepers to the needs of skippers approaching structures from tidal areas.

3.4 Grass Cutting

Covered under Item 1.5.

3.5 Track Maintenance – Prevention of Future Failure

Some users expressed concern that BW had reduced the amount of maintenance planned for the winter period. It was suggested that as a result the recently removed backlog of safety arrears may once again become present.

Simon reassured the group that BW continued to aim to remove the statutory arrears by 2012, and that the general maintenance programme and Principal Inspections regime ensured that any serious issues of maintenance are recognised and dealt with.

Simon also made clear that there are almost exactly the same number of bankside staff now as there was prior to the recent cut in Government grant.

A commitment was made to establish a meeting between some service managers and some User Group reps to discuss what types of improvement were necessary in terms of meeting customer service expectations.

Service
Managers/
Amanda
Strang

3.6 Maintenance Boats - litter

Tony Hirst reported that maintenance boats are being used by our visitors / customers as a rubbish disposal facility, creating an unsightly mess and health hazard. Tony questioned whether BW was providing sufficient rubbish disposal points on the network.

Simon and Eugene agreed that the use of maintenance boats as rubbish disposal points was incorrect, and agreed to raise this issue with Operating Directors to ascertain what measures could be put in place to prevent such usage.

Operating
Directors

Eugene explained that various issues with meeting contract expectations had been experienced with 3rd party contractors employed to empty rubbish disposal points. It was agreed that a review of these contracts would be undertaken and requirements of the contract explicitly stated to contract holders.

Procurement

David Daines raised an on-going problem where BW maintenance boats are persistently left on visitor moorings. Eugene responded that while on some occasions this was necessary, either to allow safe access of plant and other materials to the boat, or protect it from vandalism, it was noted that not all instances were acceptable.

All Waterway
Units

BW to reinforce to General and Operations Managers that maintenance boats are not to be left on visitor moorings unless with good reason. It was also agreed to investigate creating designated moorings for BW operational craft.

Simon Salem

3.7 Standard Design of Service Buildings

A number of issues were raised regarding the design of service buildings and problems associated with some of these designs. BW to review design of service building to take account of contemporary and future needs and to improve the facilities for all users.

Simon Salem

4.0 NEW SAFETY GUIDANCE

4.1 Lifting Craft on BW Property

Peter Wade informed the group that BW is to introduce a new safety document

'Lifting Craft on BW Property'. The document would provide the necessary check lists of requirements necessary to be undertaken before any planned lift of a vessel could be completed. The document was expected to be available on the web site and by printed copy in November 2004.

4.2 New Signs Document

Peter Wade presented to the group details on proposed new navigation signage in line with other UK and European navigation authorities. These signs were designed from templates of existing road and other safety signage and would be subjected to a consultation period managed by AINA commencing in December 2004.

David Daines asked that both Imperial and Metric measurements be provided.

Tony Hirst asked that a presumption against signage should be the guiding principle.

Sue Day requested that the needs of the horse boating community be considered when positioning signs.

5.0 FACILITIES

5.1 Rubbish Recycling

John also suggested providing recycling facilities like those at Stoke Bruerne across all waterways – Simon agreed to look at this and report back. Simon Salem

5.2 Boaters' Directory

Eugene outlined the intention to produce a directory containing up-to-date information on all facilities across the network. A summary of the Directory was provided to the meeting.

The group asked if cranage points could be included in the Boaters' Directory – Sally Ash BW to review. Sally Ash

Simon asked the User Groups to advise where they feel the Boaters' Directory is lacking in information. All Users

It was agreed that prior to publication, BW would seek the input of representatives in verifying the information to be published. Eugene Baston

6.0 BOAT HEADLAMPS

John Baylis suggested that new boats are being fitted with bigger and brighter lights that are blinding to other boaters. BW agreed to look at putting advisory information in the Boaters Code on boat headlamps, positioning and brightness. Sally Ash

7.0 USER REPRESENTATION ON BSS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

John Baylis informed the group that there is currently a vacancy on the BSS Management Committee for a User Representative to be nominated to sit on the committee. IWAAC are to nominate a user group representative to be on the BSS Management Committee.

8.0 STANDARDS OF HIRE BOAT HANDOVER PRACTICES

Audrey Smith informed the group that while on her travels this year there was noticeably not any operators at locks on turnover days. She believed it used to be common practice for hire operators to show boats through the first lock. Additionally it was noticeable that bad manner from hirers and private boats alike was increasing. Simon responded that unfortunately this is a reflection of social change as a whole.

Ann Davies outlined what APCO was proactively doing to address handover procedures. Ann noted the hire companies cannot control the behaviour of people when they are out and beyond the yard

A debate took place about whether it is common place to have a practical demonstration of how a lock works.

Ann responded that she did not say that a practical demonstration was not given, it is done where needed and through different methods of delivery (e.g. Boaters' Video, model lock at Hire base etc).

Tony Hirst suggested that in some areas a practical demonstration at a real lock would be beneficial to the customer.

9.0 BW's MARKET RESEARCH

Simon Salem presented to the group objectives and methodology of market research carried out by BW. (E.g. Boaters Views, Towpath, Boating Holidays etc).

Simon also agreed to provide the latest results of these surveys for the next meeting. Sally Ash

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Red Diesel – it was confirmed that BW supported AINA's position on this subject.

SUMMARY

Simon closed the meeting, thanked all for attending and promised to detail all action points arisen from the meeting and report back on progress.

Amanda
Strang