

**STRATEGIC USER GROUP MEETING  
22 MARCH 2004  
The Holiday Inn, Milton Keynes**

**NOTES FROM MEETING**

**List of attendees:**

**NAME:**

**REPRESENTING:**

Bryan Barnes	Aylesbury Canal Society
Barbara Bavistu	Whilton & Buckby Locks Association
Tony Collins	Buckingham Canal Society
Paul le Blique	AWCC
J Batchelor	CBOA
Jack Frost	Boater
Ian Lauder and Mrs Lauder	Badsey Bistro
Sarah-Jane Page	Weltonfield Narrow Boats
Mike Goode	Debdale Wharf Marina
John Tucker and Mrs Tucker	Oxfordshire IWA
Stuart McGuigan	Thrupp CCC
M Taylor	Thrupp CCC
James Griffin	The Wyvern Shipping Company Ltd
Philip Ashbourn	CTC
N Langdon	Reach Out Projects
Sharon Miller	Reach out Projects
Julian Brown	Leighton Buzzard Canoe Club
Graeme Lockhart	Lockhart Marine
Denise Laxton	Lockhart Marine
Anne Stanbridge	Lionhearts CC
David & Jan King	I W A Northampton
J Castle	Watford Piscators & GUSAC
J Dickinson	Watford Piscators & GUSAC
David Stevenson	Foxton IPT & IWA
Tim Langer	Crick Marina
Ann Davies	APCO
Tim Parker	Black Prince
Steve Allen	Morley Allen Canal Contractors Ltd
T Bradbury	Tring Anglers
D Harris	Tring Anglers
P Hunter	Bugbrooke Marina
Ian Fletcher	Warks IWA
L Greenstock	Braunston Marina
D Dare	OXNB's
Mike Ballinger	RBOA
K Scott	Luton Angling Club
D Edwards	Luton Angling Club
R Cleverly	MK IWA
Rodney Evans	Bedford & MK Trust
Padraig Herlihy	Sport England
M Clements & M R Clements	OUCS
D Zasadzka	DDBC/Apsley Marina
P Humber	Coal Boats 'Bletchley & Argus'
P Williamson	Herts IWA
Jeremy Cobb	WBOC

## **Finance – Deborah Hurst**

Income profile based on 2003/4 Annual report for BW as a whole, which is available to everyone. It will not be long before the 2004/5 report will be ready in June.

Based on income of £195M the % split is

49% Gov Grant

28% Property Rents & Wayleaves

10% Third Party income – regeneration projects, HLF projects, Councils

7% Craft Licensing and Moorings

Income profile for your waterway (South East Waterways) based on our 3 year business plan which has been agreed.

Based on income of £10.8M

50% Gov Grant – in line with national average

18 % Property rents and wayleaves, below national average as we are a mainly rural waterway and have no large urban areas e.g. Birmingham, Leeds, and London. However we do have some urban areas for instance Milton Keynes, Oxford, Rugby and Banbury so there is potential to generate more income from canal side property rents.

24% Craft Licensing and moorings (81% craft licensing & 19% Moorings)

3% Third Party income, next years ours is mainly related to income from HLF project commencing June 2005 for 3 years.

2% Angling – mainly from intensive fisheries and equates to £180K per annum

## **Services – Murray Geddes**

### **Moorings**

#### **Ian Fletcher, IWA – Warwickshire Branch**

Q: What is your attitude towards the increasing bank-side squalor (towpath and off side) that is creeping north into the Midlands? How do you 'Square' your acceptance of this with a desire to 'delight' your customers – boaters and towpath walkers?

A: No we are not happy with untidy mooring sites! Had success with moorers recently at Batchworth in terms of tidying up site – achieved this through threat of closure.

We can't legislate for unpainted boats.

#### **Sharon Miller and Neil Langdon, Out Reach**

Q: Plans for providing more disabled moorings.

A: Moorings audit taking place right now, one of the aims is to identify those sites that are appropriate for disabled boaters.

Also, national review of visitor moorings. Will keep you updated about development plans following reviews.

#### **Dr Jeremy Cobb**

Q: Slipways are encouraged in marina and boatyard developments.

A: Difficulty with BW putting in slipways is that it is very expensive to construct and provide parking etc. For this type of investment we would have to demonstrate a commercial return and, therefore, have to charge.

#### **Ivor Batchelor**

Q: Congestion at Napton – how many boats are allowed per mile of water?

A: MG – We use a boat traffic model to predict the effect of proposed marina developments. This is used in conjunction with a water supply model. If the results of both sets of modelling are favourable we can then give consent.

#### **Tony Redshaw**

C: No consultation – no account of local knowledge

A: MG – All proposals are subject to the planning process. We are statutory consultees and will make a submission based on boat traffic, water supply and impact on the environment. This is the opportunity for concerned individuals and organisations to be consulted.

### **Ann Davies**

C: Experience of visitors/hirers – where can they stop on 1<sup>st</sup> night/last night near pub/facilities. Not giving sufficient weight to visitor moorings. BW promotes the development of new moorings without developing the infrastructure.

A: MG – Accepts the point.

A: JA – Marina prospectus – they will be able to feed into it.

### **From the Floor**

C: BW not encouraging people to moor out in the country because of lack of mooring.

A: MG – Long term – on-line moorings will decrease. Short-term – yes there is a problem.

### **David Dare**

C: Concern with putting in marina in high usage area. Not enough consultation. We've said "Yes" to a marina in an unsuitable location (Marston Doles).

A: MG – we use a boat traffic model to predict the effect of proposed marina developments. This is used in conjunction with a water supply model. If the results of both sets of modelling are favourable we can then give consent.

### **From the Floor**

Q: .Parkinson's Law – provide marinas, they will fill up – people will still come and want to moor on linear. How can we regulate the boats in an area?

A: JA – Yes, there is a risk of congestion – looking at ways of controlling it in South East. Decisions may not always be nice ones. We make a decision, we will stick to it.

### **From the Floor**

C: No level playing field or proper strategy for new investors.

A: MG – Mooring prospectus will help with this.

### **David Dare**

Q: New marinas built which are not yet full – Why haven't boaters gone there? Will have to prise a lot of people from the towpath?

A: MG – Believes will fill relatively quickly.

### **Tim Parker**

C: 500 people on our waiting lists don't want to go into marinas – because they are currently mooring for free

A: JA – Reducing evasion can't be quick! Not easy.

### **From the Floor**

C: What are we doing to increase enforcement function? How are we going to get linear moorers into marinas. Vast majority don't want to go into marinas.

A: MG – This won't be controlled by enforcement alone. We will have to also control demand through price, this will mean higher prices for linear moorings and less of a price difference between linear and marina moorings.

### **Boat Owner**

C: Has boat in a marina – would be good if marinas could be more flexible so boaters could move from marina to marina.

### **Michael Taylor**

Q: How many boats will we remove for £50k? 10/15 removals. We should be able to say how many boats we will target.

A: JA – Long, costly process.

A: MG – In addition to the increased budget, we are also simplifying the enforcement process with a view to freeing up patrol time from administrative duties. One example of this is the move towards focusing on licence exceptions as opposed to checking on all boats, most of whom are properly licensed.

### **From the Floor**

Q: No of boats removed? No of new boats? No of boats in prosecution process?

A: Will we produce these figures in 12 months.

### **Ann Davies**

Q: Anti-social behaviour – have we budgeted for it?

A: JA – We are trying to deal with these boaters but it does take time, there is a legal process to go through.

C: Ann – They should be a higher priority.

### **Tony Redshaw**

C: Who should be contacted (ref previous question from Ann Davies)?

A: JA – Normally your local patrol officer or the Enforcement Manager for the area.

### **From the Floor**

C: Continuous cruising/pricing rises. Will push more people into becoming ccs.

A: JA – Agree – that's why we have to look at marinas/pricing etc together.

**David Stevenson**

Q: How much will Customer Insight Programme pilot cost?

A: JA – National project – focus groups will be set up and users may be asked.

**David Stevenson**

Q: What are you going to do about moorings evasion – are we having more patrol officers?

A: MG – No – looking at the processes and organisation so that we can give patrol staff more time out on their patch.

**David Stevenson**

Q: How can one patrol officer do all this on the Oxford.

A: JA – We will check exceptions – concentrate on those who aren't paying rather than those we know have paid.

**James Griffin**

C: Raised Beds/MK link - Good partnership ... won't have linear moorings but basins and lay-by's and marinas.

## Operations – Matthew Routledge

### 1. Operating Efficiency – 45% c£4.5m.

1. GWP Review: Ops review to target staff and key things where we add expertise (lock maintenance, length inspections etc).
2. Plant Review: New boat standards MCA, cranes, etc.
3. Lock Gates: 392 sets of gates, extra £160k so now fit 16 gates = 25 year cycle.
4. Veg Management Backlog identified 167 sites @ cost of C£490k – extra £211k taking total to £348k for 120 sites.

### 2. Asset Management

1. Length Inspections – new improved format.
2. Principal 100 Intermediate 300 Inspections.
3. Arrears 26% c£2m + C£400k dredging.  
Focus on criticality £440k culverts in MK – emergency plan.  
£150 under water works Leicester bridges  
£290k Clifton Embankment 2<sup>nd</sup> phase.
4. Dredging  
Blisworth                      200k  
Bradwell                      )  
Kilsworth                      )                      185K

### 3. Water Management

1. Water Act                      Licence Abstraction/water entry – 200 licences  
Need to fully understand water need.
2. SCADA                              Helping to do this.
3. Current Resources              Dry summer + winter.  
Review Tring Holding.  
  
Okay this summer but need rains next winter.

Pumping – 38 pumping stations.  
Braunston back pumps - £464k. (Watford last year).

Berkhamsted – handcuffs through Berkhamsted  
vandalism

Didswell 48.

4. Safety

1. Staff safety.
2. Contractor safety.
3. Neighbour safety.
4. User safety.

**Peter Williamson, Herts Branch IWA (Hon Sec)**

Q: What is BW's policy on buildings in its possession that have no operational use but are part of the history, interest and character of the waterway?

A: If building not needed operationally we review its future. Some might have alternative uses that compliment building and our business, for example cottage at Startops extended and converted into Tea Room – this is a Listed Building.

Sometimes no business need for property so we can let it or sell on open market.

Consider heritage value and impact of property in the canal's history. Some sites we would therefore prefer to retain. However, control over the future use and maintenance can be assured through Listing and a private individual might be better able to invest in the ongoing maintenance of a listed property, especially if it is their home.

Obviously, any money spent maintaining, say, a cottage, is not spent maintaining the canal track, therefore we should target this spend where it is of most benefit (e.g. strategically important buildings).

## **James Griffin, The Wyvern Shipping Co Ltd**

Q: Standards of presentation of canals, e.g.: (1) Grassing cutting policy; (2) Lock painting policy; (3) Surface rubbish policy; and (4) Hedge trimming policy.

### **A: Grass Cutting**

Basic standard of 4 cuts – 2 full width, 2 the path. Start end April depending on growth. Provision for extra if hot, wet summer.

Additional edge cut at lock approaches, moorings etc.

### **Lock Painting**

We have been focussing on lock maintenance rather than painting on some parts of the waterway.

We are now using Sadoline as protects the wood – unlike gloss paint which holds in the moisture and doesn't adhere well to green oak.

In response to comments from customers:

This year plan to paint approximately 50% of the gates, starting with key flights that look the worst. The other 50% will be done next year. Thereafter, each year we plan to paint key sites with the others being done every 2 years.

We also plan to use our own staff for this at most sites so they can be accessible to boaters.

### **Surface Rubbish**

We do allow time for our staff to carry out litter picks – indeed during week commencing 21 March 2005 we had towpath tidies taking place across the Waterway. (Oxford, Banbury, MK and Watford.)

We also will continue to support others who kindly help with rubbish clearance such as MK IWA who provide the 'muscle' and we empty the hoppers they fill – and for this we are very grateful.

But – we will never get rid of all the litter. Obviously it is best if people don't leave litter in the first place, but maybe User Groups can all help us as well – when I am walking along the towpath I frequently pick up the stray can or crisp packet and take it to our nearest bin (or take it home).

I noticed in a boating magazine yesterday, a boater was suggesting boaters might like to do likewise.

## **Hedge Trimming**

We have approximately 25% of the waterway in hedgerow stewardship which means we get a grant from Defra when we lay a hedge (refunds approximately 1/3 of the cost).

When in stewardship we have a plan for the life cycle of the hedge – lay – top and face – then face to allow upward growth – then lay. Generally this is circa 20 years.

We will cut hedges to maintain the towpath width – some need trimming more often than others. The work should be done during the winter to avoid nesting birds.

Late last year – as you might have heard – there was a tragic accident on the K & A where a father and son (who were contractors for us) were drowned when the tractor they were using, ended up in the canal. Therefore we have had to carefully review our hedge cutting. This includes where tractors can safely work. This has delayed the cutting this year in some places, but the worst parts have been cut by hand.

## **T Bradbury – (190 Tring Road) – John Sweeting, Dave Harris**

Q: In view of recent tow path/footpath renovations, are BW adopting a more user friendly approach to tow path maintenance?

A: Yes – maintenance of towpaths are important to us. A lot of improvements have been done jointly with partners – and we'll continue to seek assistance with funding for this. However, there are still many miles of towpath that we'd like to improve and repair.

**Mrs A Stanbridge/Mr P J Stanbridge, Lionhearts Cruising Club**

Q: With regard to the Leighton Buzzard to MK cycle track what controls are in place to protect boaters, fishermen and pedestrians as a Health & Safety issue. Is a risk assessment available and if so where?

A: We have been speaking to Sustrans for about four or five years about this proposal. At the outset there were a number of issues that had to be resolved before we would consider the proposal.

Future maintenance was one but the most important was safety of existing canal users and any future cyclists.

We have looked at this very carefully involving a number of local users and discussion at the former GU South User Meetings.

A number of 'walk-throughs' took place looking at pinch points and areas of concern.

Some key measures have been incorporated as a result:

Width of path – generally 1.2 m but wider in Leighton Buzzard.

Margin between edge and water to allow space for anglers and boaters mooring up; to achieve this some hedges have been trimmed or layed and bank protection – piled and soft bank – installed.

There will be a 10 mph speed limit.

Sustrans are responsible for clear safety signage and, most importantly, this is a shared path – cyclists do NOT have priority over other users – and the path will be signed as such.

The agreement allowing access has provisions in it to deal with all safety issues if they arise. Ultimately, the agreement could be brought to an end if serious safety problems can't be resolved.

These are the principles we will apply to any shares 'cycle path application'.

Regarding risk assessment – we have a file about 2 inches thick dealing with the negotiations for safety and maintenance!

Incidentally – Sustrans have raised £790k for this path, of which approximately £400k is being spent directly on the canal. This work benefits not only cyclists but others using the path – anglers, boaters, walkers etc. One of the funders is Sport England.

**John A Tucker & Sheila Tucker, Oxfordshire Branch IWA**

Q. When recruiting BW employees is canal boating experience considered necessary.

A. An effective team needs a number of skills and different people bring different skills.

Matthew has been with BW for over 15 years doing a number of jobs. Before he joined BW he had been boating – including his honeymoon boating through Birmingham.

Some of the senior management team who are newer to BW have brought valuable experience to the team – and we are learning a lot from them. We have taken the opportunity of sharing our knowledge and experience of canals with them and so have you.

**NEXT MEETINGS**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2005 – Red Cross Hall, Faversham Close, Tring**

**Thursday 16 June 2005 – Barby Village Hall, Barby Nr Rugby**