

**MINUTES FROM SOUTH EAST WATERWAY USER GROUP
MEETING HELD AT GUMLEY VILLAGE HALL
ON WEDNESDAY 5TH OCTOBER 2005**

LIST OF ATTENDEES

NAME:

Deborah Sampson
Garfields
Peter Witting

Bob Martin
Sarah Jane Page
Steve Allen
Dave & Sue Milne

Ray & Alison Gillespie
Mr E & Mrs M Ward
Mike Goode* & Barry Watson
Gary & Sue Hall
Beryl MacDowall
Ian McDonald
Roger O'Dea
Mary Matts
Paul Bennett

REPRESENTING:

Union Wharf Narrowboats
Clifton Cruisers
Cyclists Touring Club (Ron Johnson on holiday).
Old Union Canals Society
Weltonfield Narrowboats Ltd
Morley Allen Canal Contractors Ltd
RBOA (Area Rep: GU Leicester – Foxton Junction to Norton Junction)
Black Prince Holidays, Napton
British Cycling
Debdale Wharf Marina
Crick Marina
RBOA GU Leicester to Market Harborough
IWA Leicester Branch
IWA Northampton Branch
Foxton Boat Services
Braunston Marina

NAME:

Barbara Wilder
Murray Geddes
Matthew Routledge
Neil Owen
Andy Price
Helen Sime
John Lancaster
James Clifton
Debs Hurst
Dave Selby
Gary Underhill
Annalisa Morris

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INTRODUCTION

Matthew Routledge announced Jerry Appleyard's departure about a fortnight ago. First round interviews for the new General Manager had taken place and a shortlist prepared. In the meantime the Senior Management Team were looking after the waterway with close support from John Lancaster.

Changes were also being made to Managing Director units with the general managers reporting to Robin Evans and other members of the team reporting to particular directors.

Matthew was pleased to announce the good news that Jane Marriott has had her baby, Francesca. Mother and baby were both doing well.

Following the update on the Operations Review at the last User Meeting, Matthew was delighted to confirm the following as team leaders:

- Steve Morgan – North Oxford to Napton and GU Braunston to Norton Junction
- Steve Powell – Mid Oxford Napton to Banbury
- Nigel Powell – South Oxford Banbury to Oxford
- Dave Selby – Leicester to Market Harborough
- Nigel Taylor – Foxton to Bottom of Buckby
- Fraser Bunce – Bottom of Buckby to Cosgrove (including Northampton Arm)
- Kevin Hamblin – Marsworth to Cowroast, Aylesbury & Wendover
- Dan Barnett – Cowroast to Stockers, Rickmansworth

There was a vacancy for the Milton Keynes to Marsworth section and an internal advert would be out soon for this.

Finally, “Little Things That Mean a Lot”. At the last meeting we asked you for your ideas that were inexpensive but made a big difference to you. We asked for these to be returned by end August so we could review as part of Business Planning. This was being done in the next couple of weeks, so attendees were invited to fill in forms to hand in on the evening or return within the next week to Milton Keynes. We expect to run this again next year, but please remember these are Little Things (i.e. not too expensive!)

KEY MAJOR WORKS – SOUTH EAST WATERWAY 2005/06

Matthew Routledge outlined the following major works:

Clifton Embankment Freeboard Raising

Part 2 – towpath side was done last year – raising the freeboard on the offside of this 800m long embankment in the centre of Rugby by placing a clay bund on top of the clay lined embankment and various towpath improvements

On site: 5/9/05 – late October 05

Total cost of project = £179k (£143k contract)

Milton Keynes Culvert Repairs

Work on 6 No culverts – 4 No being relined and 2 No being abandoned – between Cosgrove and Woughton Park

On site (on and off) between mid July 05 and mid July 06 – one being investigated and one being repaired in the post Christmas stoppages

Total cost of project 05/06 = £411k (£321k contract) and 06/07 = £106k (£85k contract)

Braunston Backpumps

Providing a permanent pumping station to make use of the existing rising main and associated telemetry

On site 3/1/06 – late March 06 (Stoppage)

Total cost of project = £453k (£313k contract)

Blisworth Tunnel South Portal

Brickwork repairs to the Grade 2 listed portal, improving the towpath immediately adjacent to the portal and stabilising the sliding tunnel ring. Portal also on South Northants BAR register

On site mid Feb 06 – late March 06

Total cost of project = £173k (£140k contract)

Blisworth Dredging – Br GU47 to Tunnel COMPLETE

Dredging 3km from C3 to C1

On site 11/4/05 – 8/6/05

Total cost of project = £234k (£215k contract)

North Milton Keynes Dredging – Br GU72 to GU75

Dredging 1.6km from C3 to C1

On site mid November 05 – mid December 05

Total cost of project = £94k (£80k contract)

GL Dredging – Br GL77 to Newton Top Lock 23

Dredging 1.6km from C3 to C1

On site early November 05 – mid December 05

Total cost of project = £93k (£77k contract)

DREDGING

Matthew Routledge announced that next year BW will again allocate budget for Main Line Dredging on a greatest need on a National Basis and so he couldn't yet say how much dredging South East will be doing.

However, money had been set aside for spot dredging and the indication of our allocation (subject to confirmation) was £130k for next year. We planned to target this at the worst spot dredging sites, although there would be savings if these were grouped geographically on a year by year basis.

Matthew added that we would identify these areas by considering customer comments, feedback from our staff and reviewing survey data. Some years ago Matthew introduced Dredging Comments Cards for the old Grand Union South area as an easier way for customers to feedback any local areas in need of dredging. We decided to re-introduce these for the whole of the South East Waterway and had a supply at the meeting.

Generally, on receipt of a dredging comment card we would not be able to say when the dredging would take place, but returned cards would help us identify problem areas.

Q. I thought you did edge-to-edge surveys for dredging?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. A survey is taken every 50 metres, but this may not pick up spot dredging. If there is a major obstruction, please phone and report it, rather than sending a form in, so that we can respond quickly to remove the obstruction.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Q. Will it be contract dredging?

Beryl McDowall – RBOA GU Leicester to Market Harborough

A. Yes, as we now have contractors and procedures in place and it means our staff are available to carry out other work.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Q. Where are you tipping Newton's (Harcourt) waste?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. I do not know at this stage; suitable sites will be identified by the contractor.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

ENFORCEMENT

Annalisa Morris provided the following statistics on licence evasion:

12 months to Oct 2005	Letters sent	412
	Licensed as a result	227
	Current prosecution files	75
	Section 8 notices served	35
	Craft removed	3
	Liveaboard actions	14
	Continuous cruisers actions	10
	Continuing patrol action	51

Costs

To remove a boat £2k

For a liveaboard – a 12 mth procedure £2k-£3k – about half what it has been

Publicity

We had been asked at previous meetings if we could publicise this activity. Annalisa reported that BW is now taking a much more pro-active approach to this. Louise McCarthy, Media and Communications Executive, was involved in all enforcement actions. There had been a positive result at Batchworth where there were 14 mooring evaders at the site. They were all written to and given 28 days to become lawful or the boat would be moved (not removed). All but one remained unpaid – this was moved and floating buoys put in place, followed by a boat from the waiting list); this was being pursued very strongly.

Annalisa pointed out that we need to be careful about what is publicised due to data protection. However, when a case goes to court, information is then in the public domain. We would like to get this information into the local press to act as a deterrent to other evading boaters.

Having limited financial resources there was a need to prioritise enforcement action. We felt the best way to get the message across was to target sites such as Batchworth and publicise what we were doing. We had just started a similar exercise at Cropredy where 4 boats were unlawfully moored and they received letters giving them 28 days notice before we moved them.

Enforcement Workshop

Over the last few months a small national team had been working on improvements to procedures for enforcement. These were introduced to the patrol/moorings teams the previous week.

There had been several improvements to internal systems to enable better use of SAP etc. Some areas where changes had been made or processes clarified may have been of interest to the User Group.

New Patrol Notices

The old red stickers were being replaced with new black and white indestructible envelopes which are attached by a cable tie to avoid damaging paintwork. They would be multi-use (enforcement notices, S8's stoppage notices, other information).

National Boat Check

This would be carried out in week 7th-11th November and will be a national audit of what boats were where. This would result in improved information on our computer system and assist in taking action against licence and mooring payment evaders. The aim was to find boats that were hiding from us and share information with neighbouring waterways.

We would appreciate help from Users – patrol have got a big area to cover in a short time. Other staff would be helping and would only have time to deal with urgent issues that week.

Refusing Renewals

We had reviewed the process by which the Waterway **could** decide to refuse to renew a licence or mooring in the future due to **persistent** contravention of terms and conditions, eg. no Boat Safety Certificate; direct debit defaulting; non-display of licence and other breaches of T&C's.

Q. Why doesn't BW ask for proof that a boat has been cruising?

Beryl McDowall – RBOA GU Leicester to Market Harborough

A. We would not ask for proof or start logging boats for no reason. When a case goes to court the burden is on the boat owner to provide proof.

Annalisa Morris – Enforcement Manager

Annalisa asked if users would find it useful to publish details and locations where continuous cruisers were mooring, in the same way as the Environment Agency and it was generally agreed this would be a good idea.

Murray Geddes, Service Manager, added that he was keen for these cases to be publicised as much as possible in a 'naming and shaming' exercise.

Debbie Sampson of Union Wharf Narrow Boats commented that many continuous cruisers think they can get away with it as they believe BW will not take any action.

Q. What is the evasion rate?

Paul Bennett – Braunston Marina

A. Normal evasions 5%, Financial evasions 2.5%, Hardcore 1%

Annalisa Morris – Enforcement Manager

Q. Why not publish details on notice boards?

Bob Martin – Old Union Canals Society

A. After a discussion, there was general agreement to this suggestion.

Mary Matts commented that she had asked 25 years ago for BW's definition of a residential boat. Matthew Routledge responded that this definition was removed from the 1995 Act, but the problem was not people living on boats, but the antisocial behaviour that some of them display which we needed to focus on.

Q. Is it the boat, the boater or the mooring being targeted?

Bob Martin – Old Union Canals Society?

A. The boater

Annalisa Morris – Enforcement Manager

Tabled question:

Residential moorers who state they are continuously cruising but do not move – what are you going to do about them as the problem is getting larger and larger? The regulations state they have to move parish, which in this area means they can bridge hop, or lock hop to get around this.

Sarah-Jane Page, Weltonfields Narrowboats Ltd

Sarah-Jane added that this amounted to 17 boats next to her marina and they were all liveboards as there was a van parked, a motorbike used the towpath daily and a number of generators and wood were on the towpath.

A. The patrol officer has been logging one boat which has not moved

Sarah-Jane had observed that the boat had been there for 9 months, then moved away for a couple of weeks and has now returned.

Murray Geddes and John Lancaster, MD Southern Waterways, responded that the price of continuous cruise licences was an issue that needed to be addressed.

Alison Gillespie of Black Prince Holidays commented that it was becoming very difficult for visitors to find a mooring and some had found it necessary to moor up at 2.00 pm to get an overnight mooring.

Sarah-Jane said that the problem was so severe that Weltonfields Narrowboats would be giving up hiring out boats after next year and other hire companies would follow suit. She had been reporting this problem for 10 years and it seemed that BW were only concerned about revenue and not solving the problem.

John Lancaster said this was certainly not the case and BW were addressing this problem.

Q. Why are residential permits being given out for visitor moorings?

Beryl McDowall – RBOA GU Leicester to Market Harborough

A. They should not be, but could Beryl please give Annalisa details so she can look into it.

Annalisa Morris – Enforcement Manager

Deborah Sampson added that this was happening in other places.

Murray Geddes responded that it was an extremely difficult problem nationally and BW was working on a long term strategic plan.

Tabled question:

Why do we see so many unlicensed boats on the system when we are out cruising?

Ray and Alison Gillespie – Black Prince Holidays, Napton

A. There are a number of people who do actually have licences, but forget to display them. We are tackling the problem but addressing specific areas such as Batchworth and now Cropredy.

Annalisa Morris – Enforcement Manager

Q. Why can't lock keepers prevent the passage of unlicensed craft?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. The decision was made that this would cause too many problems to other boaters and lock keepers, for example if the boat is in a queue at a flight of locks.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Helen Sime, Supervisor GU North, added that many lock keepers were seasonal and it would therefore not be appropriate to place them in a confrontational situation, particularly if they were lone working.

Q. Why can't lock keepers feed this information through to patrol officers?

Paul Bennett – Braunston Marina

A. This is already being done, as well as on length inspections.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Dave Selby, Team Leader GL North, reported that as a former lock keeper he had received abuse from unlicensed boaters and did not think it should be part of a lock keeper's responsibilities.

MARINA PROSPECTUS

Murray Geddes outlined the following new initiatives:

Tackling the shortage of moorings

- Whilst our boating network is thriving, shortage of investment in new long term moorings around the network threatens to limit expansion to this important part of our business.
- Over recent months, a small team has been working on several projects aimed at reducing the obstacles to investment in new offline mooring sites and marinas. The results are:
 - A new procedure for channelling BW support to new marina schemes. There would be a formal application process that mirrors local authority planning applications. It's designed to help the developer and BW to work together to bring schemes to fruition in the shortest possible time.
 - "Marina Central" – four people were to be seconded from the business to manage the process and co-ordinate local and central input to marina development schemes. Reporting to Derek Cochrane, the team would be led by Nigel Sheppard and supported by Carl West, Peter Bays and Jenny Whitehall. The team started work on 1st October with initial priority to review the 150 tentative

schemes which were already at various stages in the pipeline around the business.

- A new website, www.britishwaterways.co.uk/marinadevelopment would be launched in November containing detailed guidance for developers including information about the market, advice on selecting a site and testing feasibility, design and construction guidance, template agreements and all the necessary application forms.
- The Marina Opportunities Guide:- designed for landowners, investors and planners its purpose to attract investment in new mooring sites. It would be launched as a glossy booklet at the London Boat Show in January 2006.
- These moves underline BW's commitment to its core boating business and we hope they will mark the beginning of much improved satisfaction amongst our business customers.

Q. Will they handle large developments?

Roger O'Dea – IWA Northampton Branch

A. Yes

Murray Geddes – Service Manager

Q. What is the attitude of the planners?

Ian McDonald – IWA Leicester Branch

A. As this is being done on a national level, we will be able to co-ordinate the process much better.

Murray Geddes – Service Manager

WATER MANAGEMENT

A summary of Neil Owen's PowerPoint presentation is available as a separate document.

Q. Are the Scada kiosks vandal proof?

Bob Martin – Old Union Canals Society

A. Not vandal proof, but vandal resistant

Q. If a farmer has an abstraction licence do they need to display a yellow sticker?

Beryl McDowall – RBOA GU Leicester to Market Harborough

A. Yes

Neil Owen – Water Engineer

Q. Are BW looking to sell water and is this a money-making exercise?

Roger O'Dea – IWA Northampton Branch

A. There are some projects that can utilize water and produce an income, e.g. air conditioning units at Birmingham and a water supply system to supply Bristol Water.

Neil Owen – Water Engineer

Murray Geddes added that any extra income earned from water is obviously using only surplus water.

Q. What about sewage treatment works at Whilton?

Sarah-Jane Page, Weltonfields Narrowboats Ltd

A. We do still get a feed from the sewage treatment works which averages 25-30 ml per week.

Neil Owen – Water Engineer

Q. The Gumley feeder has a large hole in it. Has there been a feeder study carried out?

Bob Martin – Old Union Canals Society

A. There has been a feeder study, but more money is needed to complete it. Some historic feeders have been abandoned.

Neil Owen – Water Engineer

Q. What happens if a flood occurs?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. There will be no adverse effects if the feeder has been abandoned.

Neil Owen – Water Engineer

Q. What are you doing about the leak at Kibworth top lock?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. This is being dealt with by local staff.

Neil Owen – Water Engineer

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Matthew Routledge followed up from the last meeting that the extra money to tackle the backlog of overhanging trees and bushes would be used on the Oxford and Leicester sections this year, with other areas to follow at a later date. The work would take place in January, February and March with the aim of finishing by 15th March.

Q. How do you plan to deal with floating pennywort at Leicester?

Beryl McDowall – RBOA GU Leicester to Market Harborough

A. The previous problems we have had with invasive plants such as duckweed on the Brownsover Arm have recurred. Checks are being done and spraying usually controls the problem.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Q. Do contractors have an obligation to clear up pruned hawthorn from the towpath?

Peter Witting – Cyclists Touring Club

A. We have had to cut many of the hedges by hand whilst waterway wall assessments are done to check whether they can take the weight of the machinery following the deaths on the Kennet & Avon. We do our best to clear up as much possible, but it would be impossible to pick up every piece and the extra cost would be prohibitive.

Steve Allen – Morley Allen Canal Contracts Ltd

Matthew Routledge stressed that these are rural towpaths and hawthorn is a native species, therefore we must strike a balance and users must have realistic expectations.

Q. Does the towpath hedge always belong to BW?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. The vast majority were planted by the canal companies and are therefore owned by BW.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Q. Is a farmer allowed to cut the other side of the hedge?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. The farmer, like anyone else, is within his rights to prune trees and bushes that overhang his land, but he should show due care and attention. We try to liaise with farmers as much as possible.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Q. Are you going to complete the Leicester section?

Mary Matts – Foxton Boat Services

A. A decision will be made when the quotes come back from contractors.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Tabled question:

The towpaths can be an important and useful link to country walks, or cycle rides and of course to all users of waterways. In some places (Husbands Bosworth/North Kilworth) the path is precarious and, in muddy conditions, virtually unusable.

Bob Martin – Old Union Canals Society

A. We will not be able to deal with it in the immediate future. The grant we receive is for maintaining the navigation, not the towpath. We have had some success in doing deals with local authorities and other land owners and have used some of our non-grant income, but BW are only usually able to carry out patch repairs.

Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager

Helen Sime, Supervisor GU North, explained that her team have been trying to get something done in this particular area for 4 years, but it has been difficult to find a solution as it is not possible to drive in piles due to underlying stone. Any solution is going to be more costly.

Q. Is this a case for looking at partnerships?*Ian MacDonald – Leicester Branch, IWA*

A. Absolutely. Northants Canal Partnership, Canal and River Partnership (CARP) are partnerships in existence. If you know of a councillor who would be prepared to help, show them the state of the towpath and point out that BW receives no maintenance grant for this work.

*Matthew Routledge – Operations Manager***Q. Some of the profit from the Braunston Boat Show was used to rebuild local towpaths. Why can't some of the profit from the Crick Boat Show be used in the same way?***Sarah-Jane Page, Weltonfields Narrowboats Ltd*

A. There was only £6,000 profit from Crick which will be ploughed back into the network.

Murray Geddes – Service Manager

Matthew Routledge added that approximate costs are:

Piling £150 per metre

Towpath rebuilding £50-£100 per metre.

We have recently completed Spiceball Park at Banbury which is a great improvement, but we have 230 miles of canal and need to prioritise areas.

MEETING DATES FOR 2006

Wednesday 8 th March	Strategic User Group	Milton Keynes	7.30 pm
Tuesday 13 th June	User Group	Braunston	7.30 pm
Wednesday 14 th June	User Group	Tring	7.30 pm
Tuesday 3 rd October	User Group	Banbury	7.30 pm
Wednesday 4 th October	User Group	Foxtan	7.30 pm