



**British
Waterways**

**Notes of Corridor Issues Meeting
Held at BW Offices, Hatton
Thursday 6 October 2005**

PRESENT:

User Groups

David Pearce
Ann Banks
Tony Gallimore
Sue Day
Tony Hirst

Liz Payne
Colin Palmer
Adrian Stott
John Williams

David Kent
Rebecca Dixon
Beryl McDowall
John Crisp
Andy Wistow
Cedric Rainer
Hazel Rainer

Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs (observer)
Canal Boat Builders' Association
Horse Boating Society
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
(observer)
Inland Waterways Association
International Mountain Bike Association
National Association of Boat Owners
National Association of Fisheries & Angling
Consultative
National Federation of Anglers
Ramblers' Association
Residential Boat Owners' Association
Royal Yachting Association
Sustrans
Towpath Action Group
Towpath Action Group

British Waterways:

Simon Salem
Eugene Baston
Peter Wade
Jon Oakes
Zoe Wright
Amanda Strang

Marketing & Customer Service Director
External Relations Manager
Safety Advisor
Service Manager, Central Shires
GIS Specialist
External Relations Administrator

Apologies:

Alan Meegan
Mark Lloyd
Dr M A Turpin
Kevin East
Henry Whittaker
Howard Pridding
Barry Smith
Charlotte Edward
Dr Charles Trotman
Dr Stewart Clarke
Martin Jiggins
Richard Booth
Audrey Smith

Roger Squires
Neil Edwards
Vince Christie
Stuart Sampson
Terry Fell
Mike Bools
David Dunning

Amateur Rowing Association
Anglers Conservation Association
Boat Museum
British Canoe Union
British Horse Society
British Marine Federation
Canal Boat Builders' Association
Central Council for Physical Recreation
Country Land & Business Owners' Association
English Nature
Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
(Observer)
Inland Waterways Association
Inland Waterways Association
Local Government Association
National Association of Boat Owners
National Federation of Anglers
The Boating Association
The Boating Association

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

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Simon welcomed the group and introduced new faces.

1. REPORT ON ISSUES SINCE LAST MEETING

Any matters carried forward from last meeting are included within the notes.

1.1 Vegetation Management Update

'Veg Pledge'

BW provided an update on Vegetation Management and BW thanked users for continuing to report areas where vegetation management was required.

Users provided further feedback and highlighted areas where improvement is still needed. A full list of these suggestions will be circulated to waterways for BW to report back on at the next meeting. Amanda Strang

BW's commitment to ongoing vegetation management was reiterated. Staff will be reminded of vegetation management practices and waterways will be asked to report back during business planning. Simon Salem added that additional money (£6m) has been made available this year and next year for ongoing vegetation work.

It was recognised that access to offside banks is still a problem in some instances, either for safety or ownership reasons.

Users asked if BW had a strategy for dealing with invasive plants (e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Penny Knot Weed). Eugene Baston informed the group about BW's campaign to raise awareness of 'alien species', aimed to educate people to the hazard of introducing these types of plants (and reptiles) to the waterways. Users welcomed the initiative. BW confirmed EA and Defra's involvement.

Adrian Stott welcomed BW's handling of 'vet pledge' and wishes to see it continue.

Towpath Mowing Guidance

BW confirmed the final report following consultation is with the National Support Unit and Operations Managers to comment on. The results of the consultation will be published shortly and the guidance would be used in business planning rounds.

Local Action

Simon informed the group of Robin Evans visits to waterway units, in particular the River Stort where users can expect to see an improvement in the vegetation management.

Poor vegetation management was reported on the Macclesfield Canal from Macclesfield itself to Bovington, although Tony Hirst recognised that a lot had improved.

John Williams provided an example on the South Yorkshire Navigation at Kilmhurst where a fishing club had asked BW who's responsible for Vegetation Management. Simon responded that where BW has responsibility it will fulfil its duties.

National Actions

East Midland's responded to user concerns about the obstruction of flood warning lights that users should contact EA directly. In order to get the issue addressed on a wider basis, Simon suggested that both BW and users apply pressure on EA to resolve this issue.

Local Action

Report back on issues from March 2005

Access to the offside bank (East Midlands)

East Midlands confirmed that there were problems with vegetation covering flood marker posts. BW liaised with the EA and the landowners and was able to gain access to cut back the vegetation. On occasions BW are delayed in carrying out offside vegetation due to environmental consideration and difficulty in establishing the landowner.

Navigational Signs on 3rd party land

Yorkshire Waterways carry out yearly inspections on navigational lights, signs and markers to assess where vegetation works is needed on 3rd party land. If users have problems in the Yorkshire area, please contact Martin Walton, Maintenance Supervisor for River Ouse, Ripon, Ure, Selby by telephone (01977 554351) or email (martin.walton@britishwaterways.co.uk). British Waterways can only access 3rd party land when the EA and landowners allow.

East Midlands Waterways also carry out an annual programme to but are reliant on landowners allowing access to the land which is often on an ad-hoc basis, please contact Richard Walker, Maintenance Supervisor for River Trent by telephone (01636 675753) or email (richard.walker@britishwaterways.co.uk)

Vegetation Management on the River Lee & Stort

British Waterways London confirmed that not all the 'Veg Pledge' had been met on the River Lee & Stort due to a backlog in vegetation management. British Waterways London will be producing a plan to show areas designated as a SSSI or falls under the Hedgerow Act and therefore will not form part of vegetation management.

Vegetation on the Peak Forest Canal

All towpath side complete, BW have ongoing maintenance programmes which included methods for killing the roots of nuisance vegetation. Offside work to commence this winter.

Trees at Grove Road

BW had undertaken a lot of tree management around this area. BW would ask if anyone has specific problems with vegetation to contact the local office and discuss the matter directly with them so that they can act promptly.

Chainsaw License

Last November it became apparent in West Midlands that a small number of staff had chainsaw licences that had expired and clarification on BW's guidance and industry standards was needed before continuing. The lost time in tree cutting, amounted to less than a weeks work for one team of three people.

During the last year West Midlands have increased the number of staff holding chainsaw licences considerably and have spent £30k improving the chainsaw skills of 22 of our people, meaning that over a third of West Midlands bank staff now have appropriate chainsaw qualifications and improved skills. In addition BW will be further supplementing the work undertaking by our teams, by spending a further £170k employing contractors to remove trees that have been surveyed as potential hazardous.

1.2 Towpath Surfaces

Users expressed concerns about the use of brick chip stone for towpath surfaces. This was

felt to create hazards for towpath users.

Eugene Baston advised the meeting that BW's Design Manual provided staff with guidance on the types of surfaces available and where they should be used. This will be re-issued and promoted to staff in CD and hard copy form. The CD will be circulated to meeting attendees for comments up until the end of November.

Roger Butler

Jon Oakes outlined the role of Local Authorities in towpath improvement and 3rd party funding and how this contributed to waterway corridor improvements. This led to the creation of local towpath improvement work priority lists.

BW will continue to channel efforts into ensuring that towpaths are suitable for all visitors to the network, according to local environmental circumstances.

Colin Palmer commented that the Countryside Agency guidance on paths for shared users is a document that BW may like to review. Amanda to download and circulate to the group.

Amanda Strang

BW to review wear resistant paths for areas where cycling is encouraged to reduce the effect of wear and tear on the towpaths. Jon Oakes commented that waterway supervisor's look at the priority list in terms of maintenance and services teams would be happy to take views of customer to feedback into this process.

Towpath Surface on River Lee & Stort

British Waterways London was not aware of concerns raised on the installation of new towpath in Hertford & Ware and invited users who have any concerns to contact Jon Guest, Operations Manager for British Waterways London directly.

1.3 Installation of Barriers

Jim Langridge, Senior Sustainability Advisor for BW's National Support Unit introduced work undertaken by The Fieldfare Trust on 'motorcycles on towpaths' and provided an overview of the work. BW would be producing internal guidance for staff.

Users provided positive feedback on the pros & cons of barriers and their installation.

BW recognises that barriers are a problem and can also restrict access unnecessarily. The draft guidance would be circulated to users for comment up until the end of November.

Amanda Strang

Jon Oakes stressed the importance of BW's ongoing work with local police to tackle towpath misuse. BW would ask users to ensure problems are reported to the police but also to report these problems on a Visitor Incident Report Form.

Colin Palmer added that the Welsh Assembly have asked LA's to provide sites for motorbikes to use and therefore believes this should be on a political agenda.

It was noted that the network is not currently accessible to horseboat but BW are making staff aware not to implement things to make inaccessible.

Installation (design, placement and obstruction)

BW Policy on signage

BW has a policy on fencing (to fence or not to fence) which includes signs, although does not specifically mention placement of signs.

North West Waterways – notice boards

The BW signs at Portland Basin were removed around the 30 September. BW are still talking to Thameside regarding their fingerpost and will advise when an agreement with them has been reached.

2.0 Health & Safety & BW Staff

Users provided examples of instances where activities had been prevented due to Health & Safety constraints. Users asked BW to work with them to make activities safer. It was confirmed that service teams would be able to help in a pragmatic way.

Simon Salem explained that BW has a duty to ensure that all activities that take place on the waterways are conducted in a safe manner and that BW had recently reviewed the 3rd party events procedure and guidance to make it as simple as possible whilst complying with BW's legal responsibilities.

Simon Salem asked users where they have specific concerns about BW's risk assessment criteria that cannot be resolved locally to report it directly to him.

BW asked users to provide views on safety on the waterways to Amanda Strang to co-ordinate for next meeting.

3.0 Cycling

Colin Palmer of The International Mountain Bike Association (UK) provided a mountain biker's perspective on cycling on towpaths.

- There are around 5.5 million mountain bikes in the UK, but it was estimated that only 1% are towpath users;
- Casual cyclists perceive the towpaths as hazard areas and adventurous cyclists class the towpaths as too easy.

IMBA endorsed BW's Waterways Code and the specific section for cycling and offered to publicise the Code to individuals and cyclists in general through cycling publications.

Simon Salem confirmed that BW does not have a policy to re-name towpaths as cycle ways. Where BW has maintained standards for cyclists BW will promote their use accordingly.

Discussion took place on the need for 3rd party liability insurance for cyclists. IMBA confirmed they encourage members to obtain liability insurance and a large majority have insurance under household policies.

BW agreed that little progress had been made in the last few years on managing use of towpaths for cycling and in particular where conflict could occur with users. BW welcomed this new input from cycling groups and would arrange a meeting with cycling bodies and other user groups to devise a joint action plan.

Users and British Waterways agreed that cyclists need educating to follow BW's procedures and understand user conflict but recognise that it is largely the lycra clad cyclists that are a problem and others added that cyclist may not understand what speed they are going and suggests a speed limit which presents other problems.

Eugene / Jon
Oakes

4.0 Waterways 2025 Vision

Simon Salem explained to the group the background to the publication of *Waterways 2025* and added that at BW's Annual Meeting BW had agreed to review the document.

Adrian Stott provided a brief history of waterway restoration project publications prior to *Waterways 2025* and requested that users are involved in deciding criteria process and the application of the criteria for setting priority projects.

Meeting attendees agreed that this was worthwhile but should be joined up with the work of AINA¹ and IWAAC. It should be fully inclusive of all restoration projects which may encourage LA's to support projects.

BW confirmed the review will attempt to engage a wider waterway movement and embrace everyone's restoration ambitions and not just those of boating groups.

BW will carry out pre-consultation with its users. Further discussion regarding the review will take place at the BWAFF on Tuesday 11 October. BWAFF

5.0 Angling Strategy Update

Angling representatives expressed concern over the lack of action from BW over recent years on angling. Simon Salem agreed with the angling representatives and explained BW's commitment to improve the situation. BW would meet with NFA and NAFAC regarding the Angling Strategy.

Jon Oakes provided a brief history of the Angling Strategy and explained BW's current position:

- £50k was earmarked to carry out local projects in West Midlands & Central Shires.
- Four projects have been identified for increasing opportunities for youth and disabled angling. These projects would provide promotional opportunities both internally and externally, leading to further projects as a result. Although at this stage NFA & NAFAC, dismissed the projects seeing them as an attempt to show BW is keen to develop angling but which bear little resemblance to the strategy

BW had also had discussions with the Big Lottery Fund to re-connect areas of waterways where community mass deprivation was a problem. The Big Lottery Fund is interested in this type of social inclusion project for funding in 2006 onwards. This bid could potentially lead to a portion of money being dedicated to angling as a means of re-engaging local communities.

Users suggested that any Strategy should take account of all users to help reduce conflict.

It was agreed that better communication of angling championships is needed between the angling clubs and local boaters. NFA would provide Amanda Strang with dates of 2006 Angling Championships so that these could be widely publicised. David Kent

Eugene Baston suggested that other groups could improve their understanding of individual user group issues by participating in activities, e.g., anglers could go boating, and vice versa. Users

Angling representative commented that whilst money is being spent on angling now this should have been in place over the last couple of years. Angling representative expressed their disappointment at the lack of action taken by BW to encourage and support angling.

John Williams asked what has happened to the agreed strategy which was on the table a couple of years ago. Simon responded that BW have failed to engage with anglers over the past few years, BW have not made the Angling Strategy work and need to decide which parts can be rescued, changed or modified. BW is willing to start again and is keen to set up date for meeting to take place to kick start Angling Strategy.

David Kent commented that NFA wherever possible notify other parties of angling

¹ (Eugene Baston explained that the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) represented 27 navigation authorities and that the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council (IWAAC) was a government appointed body acting in an advisory role to all navigation authorities)

championship. Other Users commented this does not always happen and often results in conflict. BW recognised clearer communication is needed.

Adrian Stott commented that BW needs an angling strategy for BW not just for anglers to get views of everyone in it. A good example of angling on offside which would reduce conflict. Angling not working very well on waterways at the moment and added that BW research what other countries / navigations do to manage anglers / boaters.

6.0 Visitor Safety

6.1 Visitor Incident report forms update

Peter Wade provided an update on Visitor Incident Report Forms and the data collected during the first year of operation. In the period 1 October 2004 to 5 April 2005 BW had received 57 completed forms and from 6 April to 30 September the number had risen to 315 in total.

Peter Wade explained that the Visitor Incident Report Form does not replace reporting issues to police but acts as a tool to gain police support and track trends.

BW will provide Visitor Incident Report Forms to Angling Representative to include in newsletters and other publications. It was felt that anglers could actively help report anti-social behaviour because of their presence on the waterways. BW invited all user groups to help distribute and promote the forms and reminded everyone that the forms could also be filled out on line at http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk/images/visitor_incident_report_form_6-10-04_tcm6-97491.pdf

6.2 Location identification

Zoe Wright, GIS Manager presented work carried out in West Midlands on identifying problem areas of anti social behaviour. These were then mapped and enabled BW to identify 'hot spots' and make changes to areas to make them safer for visitors.

A discussion took place regarding emergency services and their ability to locate specific places on the canal network. It was suggested that BW include grid references on all existing signage.

Peter Wade agreed to research methods of location identification for emergency services and report back at the next meeting.

Peter Wade

A general point was made about old signage on the waterway which needs updating with new phone numbers. Jon Oakes explained that this was done when signs expired; in the meantime, phone diverts existed for unused numbers.

David Kent commented that if NFA have signs then BW and NFA can work together to add grid references on signs.

NFA/ BW

7.0 Any Other Business

Amanda Strang would issue with the notes of the meeting the presentations made by Peter Wade and Zoe Wright.

Local Consultation – BWML Consultation Procedure

BWML's customer base specifically directed at the paying customer at each marina unit.

Two meetings per year are held at a local unit and either all main customers i.e. moorers, operators, lessee's are invited or their nominated representatives. BWML is working towards a representative forum across the group which will also invite community representatives/councillors. BWML's business activity is an aid to the local community and the community a major influence on BWML's growth.

The meetings to date have been well attended and BWML have been well received and the methods of consultation as been via the following:

1. Twice year customer forum meetings.
2. Encouragement to receive customer comment cards.
3. BWML improvement/project programme displayed in the local marina window to obtain comment and recommendations.
4. Prior to appointing contractors on major programme works BWML undertaken a representative working group meeting to finally decide actions.
5. BWML is working with the customers to be nominated for the RYA Customer Service Blue Flag Award. Sawley is the only inland marina within the Industry to achieve this standard all other BWML units are targeted to obtain the standard within two years. A major influence to obtain this standard is customer recognition for customer service and consultation. The award is recommended by the customer not BWML and can therefore be also taken away by the customer.

On-trent Initiative

BW has ongoing contact with OnTrent particularly via our Environment and Heritage Manager.

The OnTrent Initiative is a partnership of various organisations (governmental, voluntary, commercial) along the whole of the River Trent (i.e. nr Stoke to the Humber Estuary). Easiest way to find out what the objectives are is to look at the website- www.ontrent.org.uk

Broad aims are to conserve and enhance natural and historic environment of the River Trent, and involve local communities.

BW's involvement (perceived lack of..) dates back. The initiative has been around for at least five years, but only in the last year or so got much steam up. As BW own very little land along the Trent, this limited BW direct involvement with the partnership in the past. BW are now very much involved, particularly in the last 6 months, helping put a bid together to HLF Landscape Partnerships Fund.

If the bid is successful it will fund a 12 months post to develop outlined projects along the Trent between Newark and West Stockwith biodiversity, built heritage and archaeology and access improvements. The project officer would be based with East Midlands Waterways. Some of the projects will clearly not be on BW property, but will contribute to conserving the wetland or historic features, and increasing access to sites for example by provision of new moorings, new signage and interpretation, improvements to the Trent Valley Way.

Much of the work of the Initiative, apart from the HLF bid, consists on influencing planning as it affects the river, guidance for landowners along it. An Action Program was produced in Feb 2005.

www.waterscape.com **Links**

Waterscape.com already list user groups per waterway, thus:
http://www.waterscape.com/Chesterfield_Canal/contact_info/, the website also has links to national organisations:
http://www.waterscape.com/boating/buying/buy_find_out_more.html. Any organisation that is not currently listed can be added by contacting Kirsty Dobson via feedback@waterscape.com.

SUMMARY

Simon closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

Date of next meeting 29 March 2006