

**Notes of Corridor Issues Meeting
Held at BW Offices, Watford
Wednesday 14 July 2004**

PRESENT:

User Groups

Sam Clarke	Association of Pleasure Craft Operators
David Pearce	Association of Waterways' Cruising Clubs
Adrian Stott	Barge Association, The
Henry Whittaker	British Horse Society
Barry Smith	Canal Boat Builders' Association
Charlotte Edward	Central Council for Physical Recreation
Dr Charles Trotman	Country Land & Business Association
Dr Stewart Clarke	English Nature
David Morgan	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council (Observer)
Derek Armstrong	Horse Boating Society
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society
Roger Squires	Inland Waterways Association
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Ivor Caplan	Residential Boat Owners' Club
Sarah Perry	Ramblers' Association
Cedric Rainer	Towpath Action Group
Hazel Rainer	Towpath Action Group

British Waterways:

Simon Salem	Marketing & Communications Director
Eugene Baston	Customer Relations Manager
Peter Wade	Safety Advisor
Jonathan Brickland	National Ecologist, National Support Unit
Amanda Strang	Customer Relations Administrator

Apologies:

Alan Meegan	Amateur Rowing Association
Ann Davies	Association of Pleasure Craft Operators
Andy Soper	Barge Association, The
Ian White	Director of Technical Development, British Waterways
Audrey Smith	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
Tony Hirst	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
Geoffrey Rogerson	National Association of Boat Owners
John Williams	National Association of Fisheries & Angling Consultatives
Rebecca Dixon	Ramblers' Association
Beryl McDowall	Residential Boat Owners' Association
Vince Christie	Local Government 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 everyone for attending the meeting at Watford and apologised that the meeting could not take place at Hatton. Introductions then took place.

1. REPORT ON ISSUES SINCE LAST MEETING

1.1 Railings on Structures

Simon circulated an excerpt from BW's Design Manual (Landscape) that described best practice for use of barriers and railings. Users were encouraged to provide instances where railings / fencing has been erected which appears contrary to the design manual.

The use of the Design Manual guidance would be re-communicated to all relevant staff. Local Authorities and adjoining landowners would also be advised on BW's guidance. Simon Salem/Judith Grice

Adrian Stott and Sue Day suggested that where new fencing was to be erected consultation should take place with local user groups whenever possible.

Simon would advise Service Managers of this wish.

Sue commented that joints between railings should always be flush to prevent snagging of ropes.

1.2 Update on Progress towards a National Reporting System

Peter Wade circulated a PDF of the Visitor Incident Reporting Card and explained how it would be used. An initial print run of 5,000 cards was planned; these would be issued to all Waterway Units and bankside personnel and the initiative would be supported through a marketing and awareness campaign. A central Freepost address would be used.

Adrian suggested that a PDF of the incident reporting card be published on www.britishwaterways.co.uk to extend access. It was agreed to do this, with an email link included for online reporting of incidents. Eugene Baston

It was noted that while the cards were intended for the recording of anti-social behaviour incidents as well as physical injury and mishap, the wording did not make this explicit. It was agreed that this should happen during this design stage. Attendees kindly offered to help with distribution of the reporting cards to their members. Quantities to be supplied when ready. Eugene Baston

Roger Squires spoke for all attendees when he welcomed this development.

1.3 Openness & Accountability Update

Simon outlined the progress made towards implementing the Openness & Accountability proposals confirmed in January. Mechanisms for the formation of the National Consultative Council were now in place, and a draft constitution was being prepared. It was hoped that the NCC would be formally constituted in the Autumn, but Simon assured the meeting that should this not be possible, the annual National User Group meeting would still be held.

The revised Internal Complaints Procedure was already delivering benefits to complainants and BW from a streamlined and well-defined process.

While Ivor Caplan believed that the ICP was working well, he expressed some concern that BW's resources could become stretched through having to deal with minor complaints. Simon acknowledged these concerns and agreed that careful monitoring of the level and nature of complaints was essential if the ICP was to continue to work well.

1.4 Local Consultation

David Pearce welcomed the publication of minimum standards for local consultation and the publications of these and other details at www.britishwaterways.co.uk/accountability. Discussion ensued about the dates of local user group meetings, the format of the agenda and presentations.

It was agreed where possible the following would be adopted to the published standards:-

- User Group meetings mainly to take place before May and after late September. Service Managers
- Questions from the floor should be a standard item on the agenda.
- Presentations should be kept to a minimum taking up no more than 50% of any meeting.
- Any papers relating to the meeting to be circulated before the meetings to give attendees a chance to digest and provide feedback to BW at the meeting. Service Managers
- It was further suggested that it would be useful if workshop groups did not take up more than 10% of a user group meeting. It was felt that where workshop groups have been held these have limited the amount of useful discussion across a broad spectrum of different waterway users.
- Where possible user group meetings should be close to public transport links.
- Individual sets of meeting notes should be produced and not combined with those of other meetings held within a waterway unit.
- Consistency in presenting national issues at local user group meetings should be aspired to.

Simon said he would discuss these points with Service Managers.

1.5 BW Restructure

Simon reported that the restructure in terms of developing business plans and building consistency across waterway units was now complete. It was acknowledged that some areas of the business were still settling down, with colleagues getting to know new areas and responsibilities. Support was being provided and recruitment of staff for key posts within the organisation was ongoing.

Roger expressed concern over low staff morale encountered in some places. IWA felt that the restructuring process had not put sufficient effort in to maintaining staff morale during a period of uncertainty. IWA would be making reference to this in their response to DEFRA's end-to-end review. David Pearce & Stuart Sampson echoed the views of the IWA, and it was noted that the RBOA response would contain similar sentiments

Simon explained that BW was putting in a great deal of effort into helping to support staff and encourage greater motivation, but warned that this would not produce immediate results.

1.6 Cycling Permits

Covered under item 6 of the agenda.

1.7 BW Support Horse Boating

A draft operating instruction on Horse Boating was circulated at the meeting which stated a commitment to supporting Horse Boating where practical on the network.

Sue Day thanked BW for their encouragement but commented that horse boating should not be limited to certain areas as described in the draft operating instruction.

Simon asked the Horse Boating Society to discuss the draft operating instruction with colleagues and to provide feedback.

Roger suggested that at the next licence review a reduction should be considered for horse boating, equal to that of the discount available for electric boats. Simon agreed to consider such a reduction in the next fee review. Simon Salem

1.8 Update on Revisions to the Waterways Standards

Simon reported that Waterway Units would be assessing their waterways against the Standards and setting three year targets for implementation of the standards. These aspirations would be included in the annual business planning process.

BW expects to have finalised a document to circulate for further views by late winter / early spring.

1.9 Angling Strategy

BW to encourage Angling Clubs and local Service Team personnel to use www.waterscape.com to inform other users of angling matches.

Service
Managers/
Customer
Ops.
Managers

Simon reported that BW are currently in discussions with National Federation of Anglers (NFA) and National Association of Fisheries & Angling Consultatives regarding the future of the Angling Strategy.

2.0 NOTIFICATION OF CLOSURES OF TOWPATHS AND DELAYS IN RE-OPENING ACCESS ROUTES

The Towpath Action Group outlined concerns over inconsistencies in notification and re-opening of routes, including the provision of signed diversions where closures were in place. A discussion took place by the group about the signage of towpath restrictions / stoppages. A suggestion was made that:

- Where a closure of a national pathway takes place, a diversion should be set up together with a map of the diversion at either end whenever possible;
And
- Where a navigation stoppage affects the use of the towpath this should be clearly signed on the original notification and should be well communicated to affected parties.

Service
Managers/
Customer
Ops.
Managers

BW reported that they will commit to undertake the following:

- BW will be encouraging employees to look at www.waterscape.com to check on restrictions and stoppages in their areas and to communicate any unplanned stoppages to www.waterscape.com. Service Managers
- BW to ensure standardisation in stoppage notices both visually and the way in which stoppages are communicated and also to consider the adjoining waterway where the stoppage or restriction may affect other visitors. Ian White
- Effort should be made in general to improve communication of emergency stoppages. Service Managers

Eugene added that where BW can they will set up suitable / safe towpath diversions, however this is not always possible when negotiating with private landowners to gain edge of field access, for example.

3.0 OFFICE LOCATIONS

Ivor commented that while he recognised the need for staff to be in a central location it removed them from the 'front-line' at the canalside where customers are now finding it difficult to make contact.

A suggestion was made by Roger that when BW are considering office moves, BW should look at the provision for front of house staff before choosing a location, based on customer and visitor needs. British Waterways

Adrian added that Openness & Accountability is working well with local issues, but not strategic issues e.g office moves and closures.

BW will look at where customer contact points are needed to provide this provision of front line contact without providing a full office function – users will be involved in this process. British Waterways

It was suggest that BW could look into partnership opportunities with volunteer organisations and other 3rd parties to provide a "franchised presence" on the network at outlets such as voluntary museums and canal trust properties. British Waterways

Roger commented that at Old Ford Lock on the River Lee there used to be a phone in the sanitary station for people to be able to phone the lock keeper at Limehouse to report any breakdown; this has now been removed. Could BW consider placing phones in strategic points which are connected up to a central point of contact for users to gain immediate help and advice. British Waterways

Eugene reported that on a recent visit to Fradley he believed this to be a sign of a model presence; an excellent information point, brand new visitor moorings and waterway facilities such as a shop.

4.0 THE WATERWAYS CODE

BW welcomed user views on ideas for updating the Waterways Code to recognise current user conflict and potential partnership opportunities in endorsement, distribution and promotion. All Users

5.0 RESTORATION PRIORITY

Adrian expressed strong views that the recent publication of BW Vision 2025 was not published in line with consultation process. A number of projects that Adrian considers important had been dropped from the restoration priorities. Simon and Adrian would meet separately to discuss these issues.

Simon Salem
/ Adrian Stott

Simon stressed that the publication of Vision 2025 and the exclusion of some projects did not mean that these would not be supported. However, in the current limited funding climate it was important to prioritise some schemes to provide a focus for the coming two decades.

Dr Stuart Clarke commented that English Nature is re-evaluating SSSI status sites, including the condition of those in disused lengths of the canals. The consultation on the Vision 2025 document would have been useful in this process.

BW will consider the process of pre-consultation prior to development of future plans across all areas of activity. Stuart suggested that such matters would be usefully discussed at future National Consultative Council meetings.

6.0 ANGLING / CYCLISTS IDENTIFICATION

Discussions took place as to the need for anglers and cyclists to display some form of identification. It was felt that there was an increasing number of anti-social incidents involving these groups and that identification for reporting purposes was necessary. It was noted that identification of boats, with index number and name, was already possible.

The Ramblers' Association expressed concern over free cycle permit which, they believed, led to some cyclists adopting a '*why have them?*' attitude.

Simon reported the current policy on cycle permits will remain.

Simon Salem

BW to put together a summary paper of how to deal with the identification of Anglers / Cyclists ahead of the next meeting.

7.0 PRESENTATION BY JONATHAN BRICKLAND – VEGETATION CONTROL

Jonathan presented a paper on the methodology behind towpath environmental management and the considerations that need to be taken into account. He outlined development of revised guidance which would be made available for full consultation when prepared.

Jonathan
Brickland /
Customer
Relations

Adrian and Stuart both commented that they had hoped to see BW's policy on control of all waterside vegetation, including overhanging trees. There are trees that have been left to grow to heights of 12ft which limits boaters' and walkers' view of the towpath edge.

It was reported by Sue Day that on the Peak Forest Canal towards Macclesfield the tree growth has got considerably worse over the last five years – the trees are now estimated to be 20ft tall. This would be investigated.

Eugene
Baston

It was noted that vegetation management in particular was noticeably poor in the West Midlands on the Trent & Mersey toward joining Wales & Border Counties waterways. This would also be investigated.

Eugene
Baston

It was agreed that policy towards all growth from waters edge to towpath, trees overhanging on the bank and control of vegetation growth in the navigation channel would be revisited and a timescale for achieving these goals produced. The document will be a 'draft operating instruction' ahead of the next meeting.

Simon Salem
/ Jonathan
Brickland

8.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing to add

9.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Amanda to look at proposed dates of next meetings for March and October and include date with the minutes.

Amanda
Strang

SUMMARY

Simon closed the meeting and thanked all for attending and pledged to detail the action points and pick up all the issues that were outlined.