

WATERWAY USER & SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Notes of meeting. Wednesday 24 October 2007

- 1 Jonathan Bryant welcomed people to the meeting.

The presence of waterways' press as observer was questioned. The press undertook not to publish any attributable material unless specific authority from the person concerned had been secured. Generally acknowledged that responsible press attendance was in the interest of waterways overall.

Apologies received from Bernard Hales of Heritage Afloat, Cathy Cooke of IWAC, Duncan Carter of The Central Council of Physical Recreation, John Hustwick of EBA and Martin Key of the Ramblers Association.

List of attendees attached at appendix

- 2 **Notes of meeting held on 3 April 2007**

Discussion about mooring tender trial postal options should have been referenced. Otherwise a true record. The intention to have commenced licence fee consultation earlier was noted.

- 3 **Matters arising**

Boat safety scheme Not controlled by BW but by a collective of navigation authorities. The scheme has advisory committees. Balance of funding for the scheme had changed and the navigation authorities have a requirement to keep this balance under review.

Progress on **lock gearing risk assessments, K&A lock gearing changes, stiff lock gates, verification of published gauge information and timetable for removal of pinch points** had yet to be communicated to WUSIG. This has been outstanding for many months. Vince Moran to chase BW technical department for commitment to absolute time frame. (Subsequently determined that this information would be available and distributed by end 2007) VM

BW aware stickers are being used but not with dates that would make them more meaningful. Similarly with high visibility plastic netting. VM

Roger Squires had submitted ideas for more opportunities for **user operated structures** to Eugene Baston. List to be located, circulated and discussed. LH

Regarding **dredging**, notes of a meeting between Adrian Stott and BW technical director had not materialised. Current dredging position to be determined with technical department. VM

Sally Ash's paper on electricity prepayment cards to be re-circulated. SA

Noted that BWAF heritage sub group had met and would make recommendations to BWAF on 7 Nov 07. Tipton Gauging station and disposal of heritage assets remained a concern.

Olympics discussed briefly. Legacy most important for waterways.

Noted that anglers were not adequately represented at the London meeting re cycling.

Promotion of local user group meetings to be monitored. JB

Cotswold and Droitwich restorations are priorities for BW's network enhancement. Network enhancement strategy is one of BW's six challenges for discussion by BWAF.

Lack of top lock walkways on Lea navigation questioned and would be investigated. VM

4 Consultation on future boat licence fees

Simon Salem introduced the topic. Timetable is not exactly that originally set out but proper process is in place with today's meeting a good opportunity to canvas views. Discussion re Simon Salem & Robin Evans' attendance at regional meetings. Agreed four locations nationally would be appropriate. SS

Agreed that waterways press coverage is a good way to encourage broader response to the consultation.

Proposal to move the leisure business licence rate closer to the private rate was questioned. Are some trade plates simple trying to avoid full licence rates? Sally Ash investigating this. SA

30% increase overall, a figure close to the Environment Agency proposed increase, was questioned. Shouldn't more fundamental licence reform have been considered before incremental increases? The bigger question is how much should boaters contribute overall to waterway running costs. Taking all known factors into account 30% increase seems about right to BW. DEFRA asks, why only 30%, but BW seeks to balance its forward plan as even handedly as possible.

Discussion re length, width and area of vessel as possible licence fee variables. Some people present consider license fees as, in effect, a tax.

Question raised about network access income received by BW from private marinas. The figure to be made available. This is in effect another boating contribution to waterway running costs. Good progress has been made in standardising network access charges across the network. SA

Relevant operating cost line in the consultation document questioned. Consultees would appreciate more clarity and transparency on finances.

Discussion on how to get non boating customers to contribute more to waterways running costs. This is at the heart of BW commercial strategy with property representing a substantial proportion of it. Anglers also contribute.

<p>Could BW devise a tariff card through which higher licence fee payers receive higher level services? Difficult but worth considering. Should BW offer lower standards in order to keep licence fees low? BW's six challenges cover such questions. For further discussion by BWAF, with DEFRA and consultation at the appropriate time.</p>	<p>SS SA</p>
<p>The current status of low intensity trading licences to be checked.</p>	<p>SA</p>
<p>Regarding the process for formal consultations, BW follows the cabinet office guidelines, Jonathan Bryant is now the designated consultation co-ordinator.</p>	
<p>5 Towpath</p>	
<p>Simon Salem sought further guidance on his cycling note that followed a group towpath walk - Mile End to Islington. Pedestrians are recognised as having priority.</p>	
<p>Cycling permits scheme considered unworkable. Anglers, who pay to use waterways, have obligations imposed on them whereas cyclists do not. Inland waterway networks do throw up anomalies given open public access to them. Further consultation to be undertaken.</p>	<p>SS SS</p>
<p>Cyclists & anglers should find ways to accommodate each others interest & BW should do more to facilitate this through, for example, waterscape.com.</p>	
<p>Availability of statistics on injuries caused by cyclists on tow paths to be checked. Noted that both Sustrans & BW are keen to encourage more cycle use of towpaths, including through major lottery applications that will permit appropriate arrangements to suit local circumstances. Some towpaths are better suited for cyclists than others – cycling by-passes / parallel routes could be possible in certain locations particularly with local authority support. A passing rule e.g. cyclists on non waterside or vice versa may be worth considering. Pedestrians should have priority at tow-path pinch points.</p>	<p>VM SS</p>
<p>BW had removed a number of motor-cycle barriers to permit the passage of towing horses. Useful evaluation / consultation following on from this. To be communicated to waterway general managers.</p>	<p>VM</p>
<p>Useful discussion regarding towpath surfaces and suitability for types of use / heritage considerations etc.</p>	
<p>6 Vegetation management</p>	
<p>Strong view expressed that the BW wide <i>veg pledge</i> commitment had not been met. Had it been in full, there would be no trees growing out of towpath edge. Several reports were given of areas where there had been no cut at all since the pledge. Also of severe overgrowth visibility problems at bends and boating approaches to structures. BW staff had informed some customers that they had been instructed to cut but given no budget to do the work.</p>	
<p>Whilst there had been problems with vegetation contractors in one or two instances, Vince Moran confirmed that the pledge had not been abandoned. An annual <i>edge to hedge</i> cut and cutting vegetation to ensure visibility at risk points, are important elements of safety standards which will be mandatory for all waterway units from April 2008.</p>	<p>VM</p>

Marking of cills is another mandatory safety standard around which waterway units are planning their programmes of work.

Clear, simply expressed standards such as this will be a future feature of all waterway operations. In addition to safety, the standards will include people and performance elements. They will be reviewed annually and make use of Sally Ash's Sept 2006 working group results once the basic standards had been fully met. Further consultation, including user groups, will be undertaken as appropriate. The standards will be published.

JB

Both regular line management processes and external survey / mystery visits will form part of monitoring against the standards. Independent audit was also suggested.

SS

7 Invasive plants

Discussion on problem of floating pennywort & other invasive species. River Soar is being cleared slowly but future floods are likely to be a set back. In some areas it is virtually a losing battle, particularly since EA cannot clear all weirs and streams.

Useful book on the subject available from Colin Palmer. Principal difficulty for BW is resource and understanding the requirements for funding such work within the steady state financial model.

8 Storm & flood damage 2007

BW is exposed to around £8m additional cost as a result of summer 2007 flood damage. South Yorks more severe than Gloucester. Within last week a breach on the Mon & Brec has created further demand for major emergency works. Intense pressure on BW resources at the present time.

BW's on the ground emergency response to floods was very good but systems for advance warnings need improving. Reference to the Environment Agency's flood warning web site did not help as it is silent on navigation. Improvements to be put in place.

SS

The rivers Soar / Trent / Ouse rainbow traffic light system work well.

Noted that badgers and burrowing / nesting can create problems for bank stability in extreme cases. BW inspection processes would identify problems that may require attention.

VM

9 Comprehensive spending review

Overview of the chancellor's pre-budget statement does not give room for much optimism on future levels of grant. Outcome will be clearer in a few weeks. Defra has not come forward with any post flood assistance and is unlikely to do so for the Mon & Brec breach.

10 Moorings

Tender trial website would be live within a few days. The plan is to capture feedback on the effectiveness of the tender process and move it through to formal consultation in around six months. Up to 400 moorings may go through the process in this one year trial period.

The general view of the meeting opposed both mooring tenders & auctions per se but some suggested that open auction could be preferable to sealed tenders. Simon Salem felt that sealed tenders do offer advantages at this stage, namely documented visibility of all bids rather than just the highest. An auction run in parallel to tenders was argued for. To be considered

SS

Overuse of visitor moorings by BW plant craft to be investigated with waterway units. Also incidents of canal side residents seeking to prohibit legitimate visitor moorings in the vicinity of their property. Noted that some waterside residents opposed noise from both boats and working boatyards. The latter particularly is a concern though new marinas are helping in this regard.

VM

Question of boats apparently moored permanently on the towpath was raised. Some have established gardens and stores and claim permission has been granted. Position to be checked with general managers of waterway units.

VM

Suspect boat names and index numbers to Sally Ash to assist with November's licence / moorings survey of boats on BW waterways.

ALL

BW commitment to increase off line moorings (e.g. new marina unit) and reduce on line moorings was confirmed. In parallel BW is seeking to deal with unauthorised residential situations, though some present doubted BW's resolve to see this through. BW would need to work closely with local authorities in this sensitive area.

SS

Availability of residential moorings in marinas discussed. Relatively few marinas encourage these.

Figures for new marina berths created vs reduction in online berths in last twelve months to be provided

SS

11 Boat sinking incidents

Higher incidence of problems in locks over last two years (15-20 each year). Improved reporting may influence this figure but (new) private boat owners and inadequately briefed hire boaters are considered to be an ongoing problem. BW has ensured that all cills will be clearly marked as part of its safety standards. BW boating handbook is well regarded but not communicated sufficiently well. Emailed pdf's could help. Also more focus on inductions by hire companies.

SA

12 Red diesel & taxation

Discussion on current government consultation which closes end October 07. Important to encourage more private owners to respond. BMF view was that a single low sulphur fuel solution may be the best overall. Others supported the continued use of red diesel as per option A.

ALL

13 **Volunteers**

BW wants to encourage as much volunteering as possible but it must be undertaken safely. For H&S purposes, individual volunteers are regarded as BW employees (if BW directly supervises) or groups of volunteers as contractors. BW personnel in waterway units will always need to make local decisions on competence based on local monitoring.

BW head of safety, Tony Stammers, is very willing to discuss H&S with volunteers - as are local safety officers. ALL

Noted that a former community worker is currently preparing a report on any barriers to volunteering that may present themselves within BW.

14 **AOCB**

Question of dredging raised again. Is BW taking this sufficiently seriously? £7m annually currently spent on dredging. VM

The installation of waterside bollards at a north west location to prevent vehicles falling in the canal was questioned as they would prevent passing of tow ropes. To be investigated. It was likely that vehicles should not be using that path. VM

Structure and content of meeting considered about right. JB

15 **Proposed 2008 meeting dates**

Fridays not considered suitable for user group representatives.

Wednesday 16 April 2008, Wednesday 12 November 2008

APPENDIX Those present at WUSIG meeting 24 October 2007 marked *

Adrian Stott	*		Jonathan Bryant	*	<i>British Waterways</i>
Alan Meegan		<i>Amateur Rowing Association (ARA)</i>	Kevin Blick		<i>Canal Boat</i>
Andy Soper		<i>DBA</i>	Kevin East	*	<i>British Canoe Union</i>
Andy Wistrow		<i>Sustrans</i>	Liz Horne	*	<i>British Waterways</i>
Barry Smith		<i>CBA</i>	Martin Key		<i>Ramblers Association</i>
Bernard Hales		<i>Heritage Afloat</i>	Mike Bools	*	<i>The Boating Association</i>
Beryl McDowall	*	<i>RBOA</i>	Mike Turpin	*	<i>Boat Museum Society</i>
Cathy Cooke		<i>IWAC</i>	Neil Northmore		<i>RYA</i>
Cedric Rainer	*	<i>Towpath Action Group</i>	Nigel Hamilton	*	<i>APCO (Hotel Section)</i>
Chris Cattrall		<i>Canals & Rivers</i>	Paul Bryan	*	<i>National Community Boats Association</i>
Chris Leah		<i>Wooden Canal Boat Society</i>	Phil Prettyman	*	<i>HNBOC</i>
Colin Palmer	*	<i>International Mountain Bike Association</i>	Richard George		<i>Cyclist's Touring Club</i>
David Dunning		<i>The Boating Association</i>	Richard Fairhurst		<i>Waterways World</i>
David Kent	*	<i>National Federation of Anglers</i>	Roger Squires	*	<i>IWA</i>
David Pearce	*	<i>AWCC</i>	Sally Ash	*	<i>British Waterways</i>
Duncan Carter		<i>The Central Council of Physical Recreation</i>	Sam Bourne		<i>YHA</i>
Edward Burrell	*	<i>DBA</i>	Sam Clarke	*	<i>BMF & CBA</i>
Hazel Rainer	*	<i>Towpath Action Group</i>	Simon Salem	*	<i>British Waterways</i>
Henry Whittaker		<i>British Horse Society</i>	Stuart Sampson	*	<i>NABO</i>
Howard Anguish	*	<i>NABO</i>	Sue Day	*	<i>Horse Boating Society</i>
John Baylis	*	<i>IWA</i>	Terry Fell		<i>National Federation of Anglers</i>
John Hustwick		<i>Electric Boat Association</i>	Tony Boston		<i>Commercial Boat Operators Association</i>
John Williams	*	<i>NAFAC</i>	Vince Moran	*	<i>British Waterways</i>
Chris Daniels	*	<i>Waterways World</i>	John Robinson	*	<i>Heritage Afloat</i>
Howard Smith	*	<i>AWCC</i>	Sue Cawson	*	<i>HNBOC/Saturn Project</i>