

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

Minutes of the Full Meeting of the Forum held at the British Waterways,
Willow Grange, Watford on Wednesday 9 May 2007 at 1.00pm

PRESENT

Howard Pridding	Chair, British Waterways Advisory Forum
David Fletcher, CBE	Vice Chair, British Waterways Advisory Forum
James Bryan	National Community Boat Association
Edward Burrell	The Barge Association
Ivor Caplan	Residential Boat Owners Association
Cathy Cooke	Inland Waterways Advisory Council (observer status)
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society
John Dodwell	Commercial Boat Operators' Association
David Dunning	The Boating Association
Kevin East	British Canoe Union
Ian Ferguson	The Barge Association
John Fletcher	Inland Waterways Association
Nigel Hamilton	APCO Hotel Boat Section
Colin Hill	APCO
Martin Jiggins	Historic Narrowboat Owners Club
Cedric Rainer	Towpath Action Group
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Barry Smith	Canal Boatbuilders Association
Nigel Stevens	British Marine Federation c/o Shire Cruisers
Mike Turpin	Boat Museum Society
Henry Whittaker	British Horse Society

British Waterways

Tony Hales	Chairman *
Robin Evans	Chief Executive*
Simon Salem	Marketing & Customer Service Director
Jim Stirling	Technical Director*
Eugene Baston	External Relations Manager*

* up to and including item 3

Apologies

Alan Meegan	Amateur Rowing Association
Mark Lloyd	Anglers Conservation Association
Dean Maragh	Association of Canoe Traders
David Pearce	AWCC
Andy Soper	The Barge Association
Ann Davis	British Hire Cruiser Federation
John Williams	National Association of Fisheries and Angling Consultatives
Beryl McDowall	Chairman, RBOA
Neil Northmore	Royal Yachting Association
Tony Dunn	Steamboat Association
John Hustwick	Electric Boat Association

1. MINUTES OF THE FULL MEETING HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2006

The Minutes of the previous full meeting of the Forum were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST FULL MEETING

Howard Pridding explained that he regretted that he had not written to the Waterways Minister as specified because the campaign had moved on. He suggested that the issue of the heritage constituency would be discussed as part of the second agenda item which was about the future of BWAf.

3. BW FUNDING & ASSET/NETWORK MANAGEMENT

BW's Chief Executive, Robin Evans, summarised the current position which BW had reached in terms of funding for the period 2007/08 to 2010/11.

His presentation explained:

- The current cut (c/w 2005/06) and the cut last year (2006/07) were disappointing but not a major problem.
- The concern was the 'direction in travel' of the grant, the likelihood the cuts won't be restored and the pace at which it might decline in the period 2008/09 – 2010/11.
- Defra as a department had many difficult issues to deal with including funding pressure and new strategy focus on climate change.
- There was no agreed grant settlement currently. Any settlement would probably now not be clear until the last quarter of 2006.
- BW had been commercially successful in 2006/07 (and hoped to be this year). This would mitigate some but probably not all of the effects of grant cut.
- RE stressed the need, to build relationships with the new officials now in place.
- Currently there was differences of interpretation of the financial and asset condition data between BW and the Department.
- The important thing was to help new officials (and potentially a new minister given likely government changes) understand not just the **cost** but the **value** of the waterways.

In discussion, a number of points were raised:

- BW were asked who the new civil servants in the waterways team. (Martin Hurst and Sarah Nason).
- Tony Hales was asked how the Board felt about the Minister's oral evidence session on 23 April. He explained the Board had been concerned and were

pleased that BW had been able to explain the position clearly at its second oral evidence session on 8 May.

- BW were asked whether a Conservative government would be supportive. Tony Hales and Simon Salem explained how a good understanding had been developed with senior Conservatives since 2005. The sale of BW property was no longer on the Conservative agenda.
- BW were asked about how users could build a positive focus on the value of the waterways. Getting this positive message out was very useful and should be done by user groups to politicians and officials.
- Some user groups cautioned against 'backing off' from putting pressure on government.
- BW were asked if RPI – 5% was the worst case scenario. It was confirmed that other scenarios were modelled including a worse one. BW confirmed that in the period to 2010/11 BW would be short of c£45 million in the period 2007/08 to 2010/11 c/w 2002 projections if RPI -5% was assured.

BW's Technical Director, Jim Stirling, gave a presentation on Asset & Network Management. [Slides sent out with the minutes of the meeting].

The following points were raised:

- The importance of maintaining heritage as part of an asset management programme was stressed. Robin Evans said the inclusion of non-principal assets in our planning was partly driven by heritage issues. Robin Evans reminded the meeting that the Head of Heritage now formally scored and reported on the condition of heritage. It was agreed there was more joint working to be done.
- The question of whether the current asset plan was a good position to be in or an alarming one. Robin Evans explained it was a challenging situation which could be further improved by:
 - More efficient use of resources.
 - Improved commercial income (he gave increased income from surface water discharges as an example).
- In discussion user groups highlighted how close the network currently was to the 'tipping point' between improvement and degeneration. The model was very susceptible to fairly small changes in funding because of the speed of asset deterioration and the inflation plus growth in repair costs.
- The spend on dredging/piling was questioned. Jim Stirling confirmed that dredging spend had been and would be maintained a c£6m p.a. although this would gradually buy less as costs increased.
- The channel standards for dredging and the extent to which they are achieved was discussed. Jim Stirling said money was concentrated on the

areas in poorest condition.

- User groups asked if they should lobby Defra about the rising cost of disposing of inland waterway dredging. Robin Evans explained that generally government saw itself as mandated to achieve better environmental conditions and that sometimes meant rising costs.
- Robin Evans stressed that there was not an imminent threat to the viability of the network. There was still time to influence and change long term policy.

4. FUTURE ROLE OF BWAF

Howard Pridding introduced this topic explaining that the Forum was now 2 years old and it was time to take stock.

Items discussed were:

- Addition of Sustrans, TAG and HNBOC to constituency data.
- Minutes should be circulated to Directors and non-executive Directors SS
- Strong desire to see more involvement of non-executive directors in BWAF. Some should be at every meeting.
- Local user groups meetings had changed more community wide less nitty gritty boating (this was bad for many).
- Comments on the amount of bureaucracy involved in BWAF. It could be useful, for instance to have less agenda meetings and a more flexible series of meetings to deal with strategy issues as they arise.
- For instance there could be an email group for members so that issues of concern could emerge and go onto meeting agendas.
- If agenda meetings were abandoned the 'constituencies' could be abandoned too.
- It would be good to have flexibility to hold meetings that were topical – this might be more possible if there were no agenda meetings.
- It might also be possible if more use was made of communications technology to resolve some issues without meeting.
- Agenda meetings were no longer thought to be effective.
- Agreed that having the chair from the user side was a sufficient safeguard against BW dominating the agenda.
- It was felt that BWAF was and should remain strategic in focus.
- Chair would need to manage the email dialogue including agenda setting.

Agreed to put to BW:

- keep BWAF name and strategic focus
- fix two meetings per year but be prepared to have one or two more if

needed.

- remove agenda meetings & 'constituencies'.
- set-up and ensure use of email group (or similar)
- more non-executive participation
- do some PR to promote BWAF
- consider making the Boating Issues Meeting user owned also possibly local meetings (already done in Gloucester for example)
- improve follow up from meetings
- restatement of relationship between BWAF & BIM/CIM
- revise constitution – purposes are good but the administrative detail needs changing
- want some more meeting time without BW present
- formal paper to agree changes at next meeting with a vote needed to confirm them.

SS

SS said he would respond on behalf of BW to the points above.

5. WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN

Nigel Stevens reported on Waterways Ombudsman Committee it was working well in terms of oversight of process and as was intended.

He raised the issue of considering future appointment of BWAF nominees to SS Ombudsman Committee.

SS agreed to check this.

6. HERITAGE SUB-GROUP

Comments to Howard Pridding on 'Safeguarding Heritage' paper. (attached to minutes).

The Vice-Chairman would setup and chair a meeting of the working group.

DF

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

31 October 2007 in Watford (Venue TBC)