



**British  
Waterways**

**British Waterways Advisory Forum – Agenda Meeting  
Held at BW Offices, Watford  
Friday 9 September 2005**

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**PRESENT:**

**Members:**

Howard Pridding (Chairman)  
David Fletcher (Vice Chairman)

Terry Fell (National Federation of Anglers)  
Stuart Sampson (National Association of Boat Owners)  
Roger Squires (Inland Waterways Association)  
Henry Whittaker (British Horse Society)

**British Waterways:**

Tony Hales (Chairman)  
Terry Tricker (Board Member)  
Robin Evans (Chief Executive)  
Simon Salem (Marketing & Customer Service Director)  
Eugene Baston (External Relations Manager)

**Apologies:**

Barry Smith (British Marine Federation)

## **1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

Howard Pridding opened the meeting. He regretted that the trade representative was unable to attend and explained this was because of other commitments.

He explained that the members had met briefly prior to this meeting and discussed possible agenda items. It was recognised that by its nature, BWAF was a broad church and that while some issues would be of interest and/or concern to a number of members, others would be of relevance only to single constituencies. He emphasised the two-way nature of the Forum for debate.

Robin Evans stated BW's willingness to consider all matters raised through the Forum, but stressed this should focus on strategic matters. This was a true opportunity for stakeholders to engage with BW as outlined in the *Improving Openness & Accountability* consultation.

## **2. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

### **2.1 Applications for Membership**

Howard detailed the approaches he had received from two organisations to become members of BWAF following the success of the Inaugural Meeting. He explained his view that he felt such consideration should be initially based on the membership criteria as described in the Forum's Constitution. Terry Fell agreed that the chairman should be mandated to make the initial decision.

Tony Hales suggested that a small membership sub-group should be formed, and after discussion about the need to consider the number of members an applicant had, it was agreed that this would proceed, with business conducted primarily through email. Howard added that he intended to establish various e-group forums to deal with business outside of formal meetings, and would arrange for such groups to be established. **HP**

## **3. POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS**

### **3.1 Future Restorations**

The BMF/BWAF representative member, Nigel Stephens, had asked the Forum to consider issues relating to past and future restorations, with particular emphasis on the experiences of managing the Rochdale Canal following recent restoration work.

Simon Salem warmly welcomed this suggestion and felt this agenda item would be a good basis for BW's intended review of its *Waterways 2025* document.

Terry Tricker commented that an analysis of the Rochdale Canal restoration was a very good example: with hindsight he believed BW may have gone about the restoration in a different way.

Robin commented that there needed to be a clear objective for the outcome of the debate. He suggested this be clarification on BW's handling of requests for support for restoration projects and a clear understanding of where BW should apply its limited resources.

Simon supported this comment, adding that improving understanding of how BW prioritised its commitments and the criteria it used to make its decisions was key to greater understanding and overall support amongst the waterways community.

Roger Squires suggested that consideration of Government principles and strategy, as embodied in PPG documents, should also be undertaken. He referred to the recent news concerning the Lichfield & Hatherton, where PPG had apparently been ignored.

David Fletcher stressed it was important for the future success of all restoration projects that BW did not preclude some in favour of others. Howard agreed, adding that communication of BW's approach to overall restoration was key, while communications strategies concerning individual projects should note the impact they may have either directly on the project concerned, or by default, on other projects.

Robin agreed with this overall view, but a focus on restoration could not be to the exclusion of recognition of the whole of BW's involvement in the waterways. Priorities must take account of other customer and business needs not necessarily attached to restoration projects.

Tony stated that, in principle, BW should support all projects but must have clearly communicated criteria describing how resources will be allocated according to projects' relative chances of completion.

Simon suggested that agreement on strategies of communication should be based on a determination of the entire waterways movement's agenda for future restorations, and not just limited to navigation interests.

Roger concurred, and added that the current IWAAC report on restoration projects could form the basis of such agreement.

Stuart Sampson felt it was important that local waterways' groups were involved in this debate. Howard, while noting the value of wider involvement, felt this would be difficult to do at this strategic level. However, he was confident that the proposed way forward was an excellent start in gaining wider involvement and understanding from all quarters of the waterways movement.

It was agreed that Nigel Stephens would be asked to produce a paper for the forthcoming meeting which considered the difficulties associated with the newly restored Rochdale Canal. BW would respond using the Cotswold Canals as an example of a current restoration scheme.

**Nigel  
Stephens**

Robin confirmed that BW will provide:

- Details of the process by which BW's Board give approval for restoration projects;
- An overview of current funding opportunities and climate, with a focus on the HLF and Big Lottery Fund criteria;
- A short paper on the lessons BW considers it has learnt from after completing the recent set of restorations;
- A short paper on how a future communications strategy would embrace the entire waterways movement and take account of this variety of needs.

**BW**

### 3.2 Towpath Management for all Users' Benefits

Howard opened this subject by asking whether BW had scrapped its policy concerning the need for cyclists to register and show a permit when using towpaths. It was felt this was a good example of where potential conflict between different types of users existed, and where BW could play an active role in developing harmony.

Robin responded by admitting he had thought about discontinuing the policy because it was unenforceable, but had been persuaded that it worked in some areas where sufficient resources allowed wider educational campaigns to be conducted on the towpath. Nevertheless, he welcomed the proposed debate as a means of helping BW to provide a safe and pleasant environment for visitors.

Terry (Fell) endorsed the view that cyclists posed specific problems for a range of users. In his capacity as angling representative he recounted various instances where conflict had been caused by cyclists travelling too quickly along towpaths where anglers were based.

Robin accepted these examples, but reinforced the view that such individual behaviours could not be managed, and that the cycle permit system was unenforceable. He believed that a fundamental change in peoples' behaviours led through a robust communications programme could have some positive effects, and noted the role of volunteers in achieving an 'on the ground' presence that BW was unable to provide. Terry (Tricker) added that consistent and unified messages from other users could potentially have more impact than simply BW encouraging considerate usage of towpaths.

Terry (Fell) responded that his organisation had offered for its bailiffs to act as volunteer wardens on the Kennet & Avon Canal. This had been rejected by local BW management on the grounds of safety and liability. Robin, while noting he was not aware of such rejections, stated his embarrassment that such offers had not been pragmatically viewed and acted on. He was determined that BW must be clear on how it would remove perceived barriers to engaging with volunteers

Terry (Tricker) felt that through the BWAF the subject of effective towpath management leading to increased footfall could be raised at other levels of local government etc, acquiring greater momentum than BW alone could commit to the issue. He suggested that the agenda subject specifically concerned with volunteers should be deferred until a future BWAF meeting to enable BW time to resolve the barriers that currently prevented many proactive volunteering opportunities.

Howard commented that the encouragement of self-regulation was a potential route through which improvements could be achieved. He referred to the use of water bikes as an example. Henry Whittaker spoke of the British Horse Society's success in engaging with wider organisations to deliver mutual benefits. He described his view that there were two ways to engender greater understanding and harmony between visitors, using a combination of membership organisations and individual peer pressure. This had led to partnership activities and volunteer mobilisation.

It was agreed that Henry would produce a paper outlining this approach for consideration at a future Corridor Issues meeting and subsequently by the BWAF.

**HW**

### 3.3 Waterway Standards

Howard outlined the concerns expressed that BW was not currently managing its

maintenance programme to a set of agreed standards with users. This included activities such as dredging programmes, towpath maintenance and visitor enhancements. He suggested that BW produce a statement on its work on Waterway Standards.

Robin responded that BW was currently working to the established 'Sim Standards' while work was being undertaken to align future Standards to the needs of individual visitor segments. He welcomed an exchange of views on the development of these future Standards.

Roger commented that should BW move towards a contract with Government on delivery expectations, such Standards would need to be clear and manageable for assessment on BW's progress in meeting the Contract requirements.

Robin encouraged the BWAF to contribute to a strategic policy position on future Standards. Howard agreed to gather the BWAF member views.

**HP**

Robin agreed that BW would produce a short paper on the development of the new Standards to date.

**BW**

### **3.4 Network Capacity & Congestion**

Howard spoke of members' concerns that at some points on the network there was increasing congestion. It was felt this was a worthwhile debate on future management actions to control problems associated with over-popular stretches of waterway.

Simon requested that the debate adhere to a strategic approach, and not one that considered individual operational actions. Robin echoed this view; the strategic matter was how BW managed congestion overall, and suggested that the debate should be centred on how far BW should go in restricting the effects of congestion. This could be as far reaching as charging for use of certain waterways, for example.

Stuart agreed that this was a valuable issue for debate, including the extent to which BW applied measures to restrict congestion. Roger supported this view, and added that the affordability of boating was another matter for debate. Terry (Fell) stressed that policies must be workable and not adversely affect existing users' enjoyment of their various pastimes.

Howard agreed that it was for members to develop a paper based on user views.

**HP**

### **3.5 Consultation Processes**

Howard outlined some concerns that had been expressed relating to the ongoing licence fee & structure consultation document. While it was noted these concerns existed, it was felt that any BWAF debate should consider the strategic matters of BW's various consultative mechanisms.

Stuart added that there was concern about the way the consultation was being conducted, and not what was being done.

Robin agreed there were concerns and that BW would produce a paper outlining its overall approach to consultation.

**BW**

Howard agreed to provide a distillation of members' views on BW's procedures for consultation.

**HP**

### 3.6 BW's Property Portfolio

Robin raised this matter as a possible area for future debate, based on the comments made at the Inaugural Meeting and in other arenas. While it was noted by members of the meeting that this was an important matter, it was felt that, at this time, it would not be worthwhile to take forward this matter to the forthcoming meeting.

Roger asked that the subject be reserved for a future meeting, with the issues of protection of heritage and insensitive developments brought to the agenda.

**All**

David endorsed this suggestion, adding that the outcome should be a means by which BW could adequately communicate its policies with regard to these matters.

### 4.0 Conclusion

Howard agreed to write to members confirming the date, time and venue for the full meeting. Eugene would advise him of these details, and it was noted that, for security reasons, confirmation of final attendees had to be given to DEFRA no later than 1 October.

**HP / EB**

On the basis of the meeting's discussions, the following items would appear on the agenda for the full BWA meeting scheduled for 11 October: Waterway Restorations; Waterway Standards; Network Capacity & Congestion; Consultation Processes.

It was further agreed that papers for the meeting would be circulated to members immediately before 3 October 2005.

**HP / EB**

The date for the next meeting was confirmed as being 11 October 2005, midday for lunch with the meeting commencing at 1pm.

The meeting concluded for lunch at 12:10.