

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

Minutes of the Forum's **AGENDA MEETING** held at the offices of
British Waterways, Watford, on
Tuesday 31 January 2006 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Constituency

David Fletcher Vice Chair, BWAf

Waterway Organisations

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|-----------------|--|---------------------------|
| John Fletcher | Inland Waterways Association | Walking/towpath access |
| David Kent | National Federation of Anglers | Angling |
| David Pearce | Association of Waterways' Cruising Clubs | Boating |
| Nigel Stevens | British Marine Federation | Trade |
| Henry Whittaker | British Horse Society | Horse users/ cyclists |

British Waterways

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|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| Tony Hales | Chairman |
| Robin Evans | Chief Executive |
| Simon Salem | Marketing & Customer Service Director |
| Eugene Baston | External Relations Manager |

Apologies for Absence

Howard Pridding, BWAf chair

1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Dave Fletcher, Vice Chair of BWAF, welcomed members to the meeting. He explained that Howard Pridding was unfortunately unable to attend this meeting because of urgent BMF business. He would formally de-brief Howard on the following day.

The Vice Chair took this opportunity to remind attendees that the purpose of this meeting was to review the outcomes of the last full meeting and establish the scope and framework of the next full meeting's agenda items. He thanked all BWAF members for their contributions to this meeting following the Chair's email of the previous week.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST FULL BWAF MEETING HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2005

Matters Arising

2.1 List of Constituency Members

It was confirmed that this list had been updated following the successful applications of Sea & Water, the Association of Canoe Traders and the Towpath Action Group to become members of the BWAF.

2.2 Restoration Strategy

The Vice Chair noted the recent success of the Cotswold Canals Partnership in securing HLF and RDA funding for the first phase of restoration. This was welcome news and highlighted BW's continuing commitments to restoration. The Vice Chair congratulated BW for their determination that the Cotswold Canals would be restored and encouraged them to press on with other restorations as discussed at the previous meeting.

The meeting considered the value of the debate that had taken place at the last full meeting. While it was noted that presentations from various parties had been helpful in illuminating the current challenges facing the restoration movement, it was felt that the ensuing debate would have been more useful if it had covered more detail and had reached some specific conclusions. It was also noted that this was the

first full BWAF meeting and in future efforts would be made to promote greater open debate and discussion as the meetings developed. It was agreed that the room layout should be conducive to participation in the discussions.

See 3.0

2.3 Waterway Standards

Simon Salem confirmed that the views expressed at the last meeting had been fed into the Customer Insight Programme and that this was still expected to be completed in Autumn 2006.

2.4 Consultation Process

The Vice Chair thought this debate had been helpful, and that, in particular, it had highlighted the limited statutory obligations on BW to consult. Nevertheless, BW's voluntary commitment to comply with best practice consultation procedures on proposed changes to policy was to be commended.

Robin Evans believed it was important to remember the role of the consultation process and for users to accept what this process is and is not. Ultimately, it was for the Board to decide on future policy direction, but that BW would maintain the first principle of consultation as being to enter into dialogue with interested groups with an open mind as to what the outcomes might be.

3. RESTORATION STRATEGY

Attendees explored the merits of the debate that had taken place at the last full BWAF meeting. Nigel Stevens felt that the discussion had revealed nothing that was not already known before. It was agreed that the Chair would encourage future debates to be more open and informed, with a deeper exploration of issues.

HP

Simon Salem reported on the reaction he had received at the IWA's Sandwell conference in November, where he had outlined the possibilities of establishing a Waterways Restoration Alliance. The general feeling expressed by conference attendees was that such an Alliance would not work. The Vice Chair was disappointed with this reaction. He felt the underlying reason for this was because individual campaigning groups only wanted to focus on their own schemes and

were reluctant to see the bigger picture of the restoration movement in the 21st Century, or lend support to other schemes where their own support may be diminished. It was clear that the BWAF should work towards providing BW with a wider view and support for such an Alliance that broke through what some attendees considered to be a parochial view.

The meeting felt there was a danger of funding bodies and other third parties turning away from supporting waterway restorations if there was a plethora of funding applications made from individual restoration groups without co-ordination.

It was agreed that the subject 'Restoration Strategy' should be revisited at the next full meeting and that BW's Regeneration Director, Derek Cochrane, should attend. BW agreed to present a paper covering the principles of a restoration forum, and in particular to pose key questions such as: DC

- Is prioritisation of restoration schemes desirable or necessary?
- How can some restorations be supported collectively by the waterways movement without affecting the chances of others? All
- Should BW lead on prioritising schemes?

It is planned that a full and open debate should follow the presentation and that a consensus be reached on the key principles.

4. PROPERTY PORTFOLIO

It was recognised that this topic was of great interest to many involved in the waterways, but that the scope of any discussion about BW's role within property development would have to be carefully defined to ensure a worthwhile debate took place.

Robin Evans felt that there was much mis-information circulating about BW's development of land alongside the network and that a future debate should seek to clarify the value of and synergy between the waterways and the adjacent land and property..

The Vice Chair also noted the stated desire to hold a deeper and more productive debate at the next full meeting, and as such three topics for the Agenda would be sufficient.

David Pearce expressed concern that some ill informed people still believed BW's property portfolio should be hived off and that further efforts to communicate the vital link between property and waterways were needed.

It was therefore agreed that BW would make a 30 minute presentation on its property portfolio (including ISIS) at the next full meeting, and produce material that could be taken away after the meeting. This would help to inform attendees and enable a focused discussion to take place at a future meeting. A senior property representative from BW would be asked to attend the meeting. BW

5. **VOLUNTEERING**

It was agreed that volunteering would be the third subject to be reviewed at the next full meeting.

Attendees would be asked to openly explain the perceived barriers to volunteering on waterways from all aspects of usage, along with providing ideas of how they could help through volunteering. The anticipated outcome of this debate would be the drafting of a set of strategic principles being agreed to facilitate all forms of volunteering. This would help BW to engage more effectively with volunteer bodies.

It was suggested that Mike Palmer, chair of Waterways Recovery Group be invited to present to the meeting his experiences of the voluntary sector, to prompt debate. HP/DF

David Kent stressed the need for the presentations to take account of all users interests in volunteering and not just boating interests. Henry Whittaker also expressed interest from the horse / cycling constituency and requested further details of the IWA insurance permit scheme. JF / HW

6. FUTURE AGENDA TOPICS

The Vice Chair asked that a note be made of other topics that had been requested to be considered so they could be covered more fully at the next agenda meeting and at the full meeting in the Autumn. These were:

- Safeguarding heritage
- Towpath management
- Promoting freight

On Promoting Freight, it was agreed this would be suitable for the full meeting in Autumn, with BW and the freight lobby each making a presentation on the role and opportunities for freight in the 21st Century.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Waterscape.com

John Fletcher enquired about the recent changes in direction for Waterscape.com, which had culminated in BW taking the operation in-house. He expressed concern that this would affect the level of sponsorship BW made available, since recent sponsorship activities had been under the branding of Waterscape.com.

BW provided a press notice from December 2005 (attached to these minutes) that explained why the decision had been taken and the new direction for Waterscape.com. Simon Salem made it clear that the level of sponsorship available from BW was not determined by Waterscape.com's activities; decisions were made purely on the effectiveness of any opportunity in further raising awareness of the waterways network as a whole.

7.2 Issues of safety

David Pearce asked whether there was a forum established across waterways users where matters of safety could be discussed and actions agreed that presented a common way forward. He felt that the work of regulatory and other third party bodies often failed to involve a broader church of waterways users, with the effect of creating regulation which affected more users than the original intention.

Nigel Stevens spoke of BMF's work with BW to produce risk assessments of boating, which had formed the basis of The Boater's Handbook. BMF was working with the Maritime & Coastguard Agency on the Hireboat Code, which would extend the audit of safety training for hirers.

BW welcomed the opportunity to establish a conference on waterways safety that could be attended by all interested parties, including voluntary and representative groups. The idea would be pursued, along with the suggestion that interested groups also be invited to attend BW's own annual Safety Conference. It could also be considered as a future BWAF discussion topic.

BW/All

8.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next BWAF meeting, which is a main meeting, will be held on 17 May 2006. Lunch would be available from midday and the meeting would be held in London (venue to be advised at a later date).

David Fletcher

Vice Chair