

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

Minutes of the Full Meeting of the Forum held at the British Waterways,
Willow Grange, Watford on Wednesday 18 October 2006 at 1.00pm

PRESENT

Howard Pridding	Chair, British Waterways Advisory Forum
David Fletcher, CBE	Vice Chair, British Waterways Advisory Forum
Ann Davies	British Hire Cruiser Federation
Audrey Smith	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council (Observer Status)
Barry Smith	Canal Boatbuilders Association
Cedric Rainer	Towpath Action Group
David Kent	National Federation of Anglers
Dean Maragh	The Association of Canoe Traders
Edward Burrell	The Barge Association
Henry Whittaker	British Horse Society
Ivor Caplan	Residential Boat Owners Association
James Bryan	National Community Boats Association
John Fletcher	Inland Waterways Association
John Williams	National Association of Fisheries & Angling Consultatives
Kevin East	British Canoe Union
Malcolm Wood	Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs
Nigel Hamilton	APCO Hotel Boat Section
Philip Prettyman	Historic Narrowboat Owners Club
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society
Tony Burnip	Boat Museum Society

British Waterways

Tony Hales	Chairman
Robin Evans	Chief Executive
Simon Salem	Marketing & Customer Service Director
James Froomberg	Commercial Director [Item 5 only]
Eugene Baston	External Relations Manager
Cornel Howells	Company Secretary
Nigel Crowe	Head of Heritage (item 6 only)

Also Present

Roger Hanbury	The Waterways Trust
Sophie Fowler	The Waterways Trust

Apologies

Beryl MacDowall	Chairman, RBOA
Rebecca Dixon	Rights of Way Policy Officer, Ramblers Association
David Pearce	AWCC
Colin Palmer	International Mountain Bike Association
Andy Wistow	Sustrans
Sam Bourne	The Yacht Harbour Association
Mark Lloyd	Anglers Conservation Association
Tony Dunn	Steamboat Association
Alan Meegan	Amateur Rowing Association
David Dunning	The Boating Association

Dr Charles Trotman	Country Land & Business Association
Martin Jiggins	Historic Narrowboat Owners Club
Dr Michael Turpin	Boat Museum Society
Nigel Stevens	British Marine Federation c/o Shire Cruisers
Neil Northmore	RYA
Colin Hill	APCO

1. **MINUTES OF THE FULL MEETING HELD ON 17 MAY 2006**

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

2. **MINUTES OF AGENDA MEETING HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2006**

Sue Day raised a point for clarification on Minute 3.3 "Safeguarding Heritage" of the Agenda Meeting. It was agreed this would be dealt with at the next Agenda Meeting and a correction issued.

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST FULL MEETING**

Nigel Hamilton recalled the action at the last meeting (Minute 4) for BW to provide more information on its property income. Robin Evans felt that there was a balance to be struck in both the amount of detail that would be useful to BWAf members and the work entailed in providing this. The Annual Report and Accounts already provided an excellent source of information. The Chairman undertook to discuss this with Nigel Hamilton outside the meeting and put a proposal to BW.

HP/NH

On volunteers, (Minute 5) the Chairman confirmed there had been a meeting of the working group and it had drafted terms of reference. He would circulate these with the minutes of the meeting.

HP

4. **DEFRA GRANT CUTS**

The Forum considered a report prepared by BW's Chief Executive on cuts to its grant that were being considered by DEFRA for the period 2006/07 to 2010/11 and the anticipated consequences of this. The original baseline grant for 2006/07 was expected to reduce from £62.6 million to £55.4 million and could be held at this level or even a lower figure to the end of the CSR period in 2010/11.

The Chairman invited views on how the Forum should respond to this situation, which affected all users of the waterways and included the Environment Agency navigations. He suggested that BWAf as a strategic body would leave lobbying to its individual members. Its own role should be to write to the DEFRA Secretary of State (David Miliband) expressing its deep

concerns about the cuts. The approach was agreed and key points for inclusion in the Chairman's letter were identified:

- The contribution of waterways to the DEFRA Secretary of State's "one planet living" concept;
- Funding was required to deliver "Waterways for Tomorrow", which it was understood continued to be Government policy;
- BW ticked policy boxes across many Government Departments and initiatives;
- Value for money argument e.g. the water wasted through under investment in infrastructure;
- BW's contribution to flood control;
- Need for the Government to demonstrate its stated commitment to joined-up thinking.

The letter would be copied to Forum Members. It was suggested that lobbying by individual members should also include the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Local Authorities.

HP

Robin Evans felt it was important to separate BW's desire to be largely self-sufficient and the present cuts, which were imposed without any reference to BW's strategic plans. BW's ambition remained to have greater control over its own future, including by a contract with Government. He stressed the duty of BW to maximise returns from its assets and the £6bn of regeneration benefits BW had achieved. To continue this progress, it was vitally important that BW retained its property base. BWAFF Members support to this end was greatly appreciated.

5. PROPERTY PORTFOLIO

James Froomberg joined the meeting.

Forum Members were invited to respond in more detail to his presentation on BW's property portfolio at the last meeting. Points in the discussion included the following:

- BW explained that REITS was not applicable to its business as a public corporation;

- Robin Evans acknowledged that Government, as owner, had the final say in regard to its property portfolio. BW needed to demonstrate the full range of benefits and value for money it extracted from this e.g. £6 bn of regeneration. It was felt that the Conservative Party now understood these;
- Tony Hales, responding to suggested change of status for BW, argued that this would unduly complicate matters, requiring primary legislation. If BW was to continue to generate more income, it needed more certainty – and not repeated grant changes in one year;
- BW explained that capital proceeds could not be converted to revenue but were re-invested in the business to create more income;
- Tony Hales described the appointment process for the three new Board Members with their strong commercial/property and regulatory background and the close involvement of BW, DEFRA and Scottish Executive in this;
- James Froomberg concurred with the suggestion on historic wharves and boatyards that novel ways needed to be found to retain the heritage and extract profit. BW was actively engaged in this, e.g. Section 106 and Planning Gain Supplement;
- BW acknowledged that it made mistakes and not every opportunity was always on its radar. It was redoubling its efforts to ensure nothing was missed. James Froomberg welcomed a steer from BWAFF Members where they felt this was still not the case;
- BW explained the rate of return it set for commercial investments. It had met or exceeded the Investment Property Databank Index over recent years – performing as well as the private sector commercially with all the other heritage, amenity and safety benefits it provided, was a major protection against interference;
- Amongst the commercial freedoms that it would welcome, ability to borrow was at the top of the BW agenda;
- Sue Day emphasised that rural communities should be approached differently to urban areas with the accent on revitalising them rather than regeneration;

- John Fletcher advocated the case for local user groups lobbying for waterside SPGs;

The Chairman thanked James Froomberg for an instructive session. He suggested that the understanding which BWAf now had of BW's property portfolio and its management should be communicated to as broad an audience as possible.

6. **SAFEGUARDING HERITAGE**

The meeting received a presentation by Sophie Fowler and Roger Hanbury of the Waterways Trust on "Sustaining the Waterways Heritage". Nigel Crowe, BW's Head of Heritage, was also present for this item.

The presentation, copies of which were circulated, addressed the principal issues of : What is heritage? ; Why is it important; What should we do about it and what are we doing about it? And finally, how can we improve?

A full discussion on the issues raised in the presentation then followed.

It was agreed that heritage, whilst recognised as an essential ingredient of the waterways experience, had to be approached in the context of limited available resources. This was exacerbated by the grants cut. This meant choices had to be made not only at a local level but also strategically e.g. Cotswolds restoration or protecting museums. With so many pressing priorities, it was agreed further debate was needed outside the meeting in order to come to some meaningful conclusions. It was recognised that members would have a widely varying capacity to participate in that debate.

Eugene Baston and Nigel Crowe would organise a meeting of interested members to discuss how BWAf could help BW to make these choices. This would include Nigel's state of the Waterways Heritage Report. It would further decide whether a new or updated waterways heritage publication was needed following on from "Our Disappearing Heritage". Something tailored to the planner/developer would also be considered.

Members who wished to participate were invited to notify the Chairman. There would be a report back to the next full Forum Meeting. BW agreed to provide a list of priority questions for the heritage meeting to consider.

EB/HP

The Chairman undertook to consider further the need for a BWAf waterways heritage constituency which had been raised on a previous occasion and would issue a note on this.

HP

7. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Following a ballot at the commencement of the meeting which was scrutinised by Audrey Smith, it was confirmed that David Fletcher had been elected Vice-Chairman to serve for a further term.

8. CHAIRMAN

The Chairman confirmed that no nominations had been received for the position of Chairman by the closing date of 15 September. He was prepared to serve for a further term. Following a proposal by John Fletcher, which was seconded by Harry Whittaker, this was agreed.

9. OVERVIEW BY BW CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chairman advised that Robin Evans had agreed to provide a BW "State of the Nation" address at the conclusion of each BWAFF Meeting.

Robin then gave a BW Financial Overview to October 2006. This showed a £5 million forecast surplus which would cover planned restructuring costs. This surplus was partly funded by a reduction in major works. He commented on performance in the individual business areas with steady progress in property and utilities. In leisure, evasion control was improving and mooring demand continued to be strong. On ventures, delays in planning was putting back the achievement of some of the expected income. Robin then looked at core waterway efficiencies and the drive to reduce overheads. Finally, he gave the latest information on number of visits and outcomes of visitor surveys.

Looking forward, Robin accepted the next few months would be a difficult time for BW with a statutory 3 month consultation period on redundancies. He was confident that BW would learn the lesson of the 2003 restructure and not allow its attention to be diverted from its customers.

Finally, Robin advised that Willow Grange had been sold to Barratt Homes with BW required to exit by the end of 2008. Whilst the proposed relocation of the office to Apsley had fallen through, a new search for suitable premises was underway.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

BWAFF members felt the arrangements for the meeting at Willow Grange had been good and generally welcomed BW's offer to hold the next meeting there.

The Forum expressed its appreciation of the contribution of Audrey Smith, who

was attending her last meeting as IWAAC observer.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 9 May 2007 at Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford

The agenda would include promoting freight. Towpath management would now be considered by the corridor issues group. Other suggestions were to be emailed to the Chairman before the next agenda meeting.

ALL