

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

Minutes of the first full meeting of the Forum held at the offices of
DEFRA, 1A Page Street, London SW1P 4PQ on
Tuesday 11 October 2005 at 1.00pm

PRESENT:

Howard Priding	Chairman, BWAF
David Fletcher	Vice-Chairman, BWAF

Waterway Organisations

Bill Hall	Steam Boat Association of Great Britain
Cedric Rainer	Towpath Action Group
Colin Hill	Association of Pleasure Craft Operators
David Pearce	Association of Waterways' Cruising Clubs
Geoff Ashton	British Hire Cruisers' Federation
Captain Gordon Daly	Royal Yachting Association
Ivor Caplan	Residential Boat Owners' Association
John Williams	National Association of Fisheries & Angling Consultatives
Kevin East	British Canoe Union
Martin Jiggins	Historic Narrowboat Owners' Club
Dr Michael Turpin	Boat Museum
Nicky Crowther	International Mountain Bike Association (UK)
Nigel Hamilton	APCO Hotel Boat Section
Nigel Stevens	British Marine Federation
Paul Bryan	National Community Boat Association
Rebecca Dixon	Ramblers' Association
Roger Squiries	Inland Waterways Association
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society

British Waterways

Tony Hales	Chairman
Robin Evans	Chief Executive
Simon Salem	Marketing & Customer Service Director
Eugene Baston	Customer Relations Manager
Cornel Howells	Company Secretary, British Waterways

Observer

Audrey Smith	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
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Apologies for Absence

Alan Meegan	Amateur Rowing Association
Andrew Burge	Commercial Boat Operators' Association
Charlotte Edwards	Central Council for Physical Recreation
Henry Whittaker	British Horse Society
John Fletcher	Inland Waterways Association
John Hustwick	Electric Boat Association
Mark Lloyd	Anglers Conservation Association
Neil Northmore	Royal Yachting Association
Simon Talbot-Ponsonby	Sustrans
Terry Fell	National Federation of Anglers

1. **CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

Howard Pridding, Chairman of BWAF, welcomed everyone to the first full meeting. He thanked Professor Jowell for his work in establishing the Forum and commented that it was now up to everyone involved to ensure it worked as an effective two-way channel of communication between BW and its users. He stressed three over-arching themes for the Forum as it went forward: its independence, its inclusiveness and the strategic level of its work. Finally, he stressed his own role as Chairman was an independent one.

2. **MINUTES OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING HELD ON 11 MAY 2005**

Following a proposal by David Fletcher, which was seconded by Stuart Sampson, the Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting were approved.

There were no matters arising.

It was agreed that the target date for issue for future Forum Agendas and papers should be fourteen days before the meeting.

EB

3. **MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS**

The meeting considered Paper BWAF/01/05 setting out options to allow members notice of membership applications and to establish a final approval process. Two formal applications had been received: from Sea and Water and the Association of Canoe Trades.

It was agreed to adopt the second option whereby the Chairman was to circulate details of applications to all BWAF members inviting comments prior to his/her approval or rejection. Two weeks would be allowed for the receipts of comments from members.

The Chairman also referred to approaches from two waterway magazines regarding attendance at BWAF meetings. It was agreed that this was not desirable and that instead the Chairman would speak to the waterways press after meetings. Press releases on BWAF matters might also be issued by BW on behalf of BWAF on occasions and information would be included in its accountability website.

HP

4. **COMMUNICATION WITHIN BWAF**

It was agreed that internal communication within the Forum would be by e-mail. Constituency Groups and time-limited working groups would be

needed on occasions. Eugene Baston would review the arrangements for this with the Chairman.

EB/HP

5. **RESTORATION STRATEGY**

As an introduction to its discussion on BW's restoration strategy, the meeting viewed a presentation by Nigel Stevens on his experience of the restoration on the Rochdale and Huddersfield Narrow Canals. He concluded that the work was essentially incomplete and identified the problems arising from this from his own perspective in running a business on the canals and for BW in trying to maintain them as though they were normal canals. He then identified the things that needed to be done and how they might be achieved. He suggested that this could best be achieved by the establishment of a body with a wide ranging membership charged with getting both canals into a fully operative and productive condition. His detailed observations were set out in a paper, which was circulated to the meeting.

The meeting also considered three papers on waterway restoration provided by BW:

- A discussion paper on funding opportunities and communication strategy (BWAf/02/05);
- A formal approval process on restoration for adoption within BW and publication to stakeholders (BWAf/03/05);
- A paper on lessons learnt from the Cotswolds (BWAf/04/05).

Robin Evans welcomed the opportunity for a debate on where restoration should rest in terms of BW's overall priorities. The argument that restoration benefited the community and they should, therefore, pay for it no longer held the weight it did with ever growing pressure on funding and competing priorities. BW was being increasingly asked to contribute more and hence, the need to review priorities and get the balance right. What should come first – maintaining what had been done already or taking on new commitments? The Rochdale presentation illustrated the issue well – should BW continue spending £1½ million annually, knowing that this was not making matters materially better?

Waterway organisations welcomed the BW papers and generally supported the conclusions they made. It was felt that despite the current unpromising economic realities, every effort should continue by BW to

convince Government, Local Authorities, RDAs and others of the contribution of canals to the overall canal corridor. BW confirmed in that regard that its cost/benefit analysis had been welcomed by HLF as exemplary. It was suggested that funding for urban/rural renewal could be factored into the contract with Government.

On the question of existing and new commitments, the meeting suggested this was not a case of either/or but of endeavouring to optimise both i.e. get the restoration right and maintain the re-opened canal. David Fletcher felt that a bigger funding cake was available on that basis.

BW representatives confirmed that they would continue despite the difficulties to make the case for funding vigorously and welcomed the support of the waterway organisation in this.

Waterway organisations welcomed the approval process in giving a realistic appreciation of what people could expect from BW, also in recognising that support for projects would come mainly from local and regional sources and in not defining the criteria too precisely.

Responding to the suggestion that an over-prescriptive approach by English Nature made some restorations unviable, BW indicated that it sought to work positively with English Nature and maintain constructive relations at the highest level. This meant that issues at local/regional level could more easily be resolved as experience on the Montgomery Canal had illustrated recently.

The appointment by BW of a Director with responsibility for restoration was welcomed.

The Chairman thanked members for their contributions to the debate. Understandably no firm conclusions had been drawn from this first review but work towards this would continue in correspondence. He particularly welcomed views from members on the proposed Waterway Restoration Alliance.

ALL

6. WATERWAY STANDARDS

The Forum considered Paper BWAf/05/05 from British Waterways giving an update on work to review waterway standards. The Chairman invited initial views on the topic and noted BW's intention to involve user groups further in its thinking as it progressed.

Robin Evans invited views on whether the basis for standards should be structural condition or use and enjoyment. He recognised that the latter was contingent on the former but acknowledged BW was struggling to establish meaningful criteria that reflected users' concerns and needs.

Comments in the discussion which followed included:

- A rounded approach, based on more than purely technical standards, would be welcome;
- Fit for purpose was a helpful perspective;
- Some structures were user unfriendly;
- User experience did not always accord with the standards given e.g. channel depth or towpath vegetation. Standards should be objective and adhered to;
- Accountability i.e. reporting of performance, was important as was reflecting statute, and contract with Government should cover these issues;
- The standards could be communicated more effectively.

Robin Evans welcomed the initial views. He felt on communication, that the challenge was to achieve standards that were easily translatable and relevant. He concluded that BW would take these views forward into its Customer Insight Programme Consultation, which it planned to complete by Autumn 2006.

SS

7. WATERWAY CAPACITY/CONGESTION ISSUES

The Chairman referred to BW's request for advice from members on how it should tackle the issue of congestion. In the review that followed, a wide range of contributory factors to congestion were identified (structural, economic and behavioural) and physical and marketing and educational initiatives to alleviate it were suggested. Points included:

- more effective management of movement included educating and informing people to spread the load;

- physical/structural improvements including bigger and easier operated locks. Also innovative engineering solutions e.g. double sets of lock paddles;
- economic measures included differential charging and carrot and stick;
- etiquette and making the wait comfortable helped, also better information for those in the queue;
- there needed to be more marketing of the northern waterways and planned siting of marinas there;
- excessive linear moorings needed to be tackled;
- canal society volunteers might help spread the workload e.g. operating locks;
- canal events should be better publicised so that users can avoid adding to the congestion.

Robins Evans welcomed the contributions and confirmed that BW would respond to the overall message to be radical and innovative. The offer of voluntary help in congested areas including to operate locks was welcomed, recognising that any issues e.g. health and safety would be properly addressed. He added that Derek Cochrane's new responsibilities included volunteer help and he would be approaching user groups about this.

8. BW's CONSULTATION PROCESSES

The Chairman introduced Paper BWAf/06/05 explaining the background to BW's consultation processes. This concluded that BW recognised that the current licence fee and structure consultation had caused concern and welcomed a debate within BWAf on its consultation processes so that improvements could be made in the future.

In the discussion, waterway organisations expressed concern that the tone of the licence fee consultation had been dogmatic and overbearing and that many had seen the outcome as a *fait accompli*. Simon Salem responded that BW had felt it would be helpful to try and simplify a complex issue; organisations were also free to respond in any way they

wished and many had done so. BW had learnt from this episode and it would endeavour to be more accessible on such complex issues in the future. Eugene Baston added that this should be seen in the context of BW's good progress on consultations generally, since the moorings consultation in 2002.

Robin Evans added that it was BW's view that it had a responsibility to manage the waterways, to raise issues in a forthright way and on occasion to make uncomfortable decisions.

Further points in the discussion which BW undertook to consider were:

- there should be pre-warning of consultations and earlier soundings of waterway organisations;
- consultations could be better tied in with the consultative meeting dates schedule e.g. boating issues group in the case of the current consultation;
- there could be consultation with local user groups when engineering contracts had been let or canalside developments were planned;
- a list of BW's formal consultation obligations would be published under "Accountability" on its external website.

SS

In concluding, the Chairman welcomed BW's receptiveness to the comments made and to take the suggestions for improvement forward. He added that waterways groups should not be afraid of BW having a strong view and of challenging it when justified.

9. **NEXT MEETING OF BWA**

The Chairman asked for feedback from members by e-mail on the first BWA Meeting.

ALL

Issues for discussion at the next meeting were agreed to include:-

- property portfolio, volunteering and safeguarding heritage;

Dates for BWA and Agenda Meetings in 2006 would be included with the meeting minutes.