

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

Minutes of the Full Meeting of the Forum held at the
Offices of DEFRA, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR on
Wednesday 17 May 2006 at 1.00pm

PRESENT

Howard Pridding	Chair, British Waterways Advisory Forum
David Fletcher, CBE	Vice-Chair, British Waterways Advisory Forum
Audrey Smith	Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council (Observer status)
Cedric Rainer	Towpath Action Group
Colin Hill	Association of Pleasure Craft Operators
David Kent	National Federation of Anglers
David Pearce	Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
Dean Maragh	Association of Canoe Traders
Henry Whittaker	British Horse Society
James Bryan	National Community Boat Association
Kevin East	British Canoe Union
Martin Jiggins	Historic Narrowboat Owners' Club
Michael Turpin	Boat Museum Society
Mike Palmer	Waterways Recovery Group (Observer)
Nikki Crowther	International Mountain Bike Association UK
Nigel Hamilton	APCO Hotel Boat Section
Nigel Stevens	British Marine Federation c/o Shire Cruisers
Rex Walden	Residential Boat Owners' Association
Roger Squires	Inland Waterways Association
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society

British Waterways

Tony Hales	Chairman
Robin Evans	Chief Executive
Susan Achmatowicz	Board Member
Campbell Christie	Board Member
Simon Salem	Marketing & Customer Service Director
James Froomberg	Commercial Director
Derek Cochrane	Regeneration Director
Eugene Baston	External Relations Manager
Cornel Howells	British Waterways Company Secretary

Before the meeting commenced, the Chairman paid tribute to Margaret Fletcher of the IWA, who had died. The meeting held a minute's silence to remember her. The Chairman would send the Forum's condolences to John Fletcher.

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed members to the second full meeting of the BWAf. He welcomed the strong turnout of the BW Senior Executive Management Team. He particularly thanked Tony Hales, Campbell Christie and Susan Achmatowicz for their attendance commenting that he considered it important for BW non executive Board Directors to play an active part in the Forum.

1. MINUTES OF THE FULL MEETING HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2005

Following a proposal by David Fletcher, which was seconded by Henry Whittaker, the Minutes of the previous Full Meeting were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING

On membership applications (Minute 3) the Chairman confirmed that both Sea and Water and the Association of Canoe Traders had been admitted as members of the Forum.

Following a suggestion by Susan Achmatowicz, it was agreed to consider the Cyclists Touring Club as a prospective member of the Forum.

The Forum reaffirmed its decision that representatives of the waterway magazines would not be invited to attend Forum meetings. The magazines would be fully briefed on the Forum's proceedings immediately following the meeting.

On Minute 6, Simon Salem confirmed that any further comments from Forum members on standards were welcome and would be taken forward as part of BW's Customer Insight Programme Consultation.

On Minute 9, David Fletcher explained why heritage had been deferred as a discussion topic until the next meeting. This decision by the Agenda meeting did not represent any downgrading of heritage but reflected its desire to ensure there was opportunity to review each selected topic in depth. It would be the lead topic at the next meeting.

3. RESTORATION STRATEGY

The Forum received a presentation on Restoration from Derek Cochrane, BW's Regeneration Director. This covered the four major restorations of Liverpool Link, Manchester, Bolton & Bury, Droitwich and Cotswolds, wider issues going forward and the Big Lottery Fund.

The meeting then considered three strategic issues on restoration posed by Robin Evans.

- Is prioritisation of Restoration Schemes desirable or necessary?

From the Funders perspective, he felt this was emphatically the case – it meant resources could be targeted effectively. The enthusiast would say no, however – they wanted their scheme first. BW saw both points of view but felt prioritisation was necessary for its own purposes.

Responses from BWAFF members included support for the necessity of prioritisation from the funders point of view. Also that re-openings gave momentum and attracted media attention and political support.

- How can some restorations be supported collectively by the waterways movement without affecting the chances of others?

Robin suggested that there was a collective responsibility to promote waterways and waterway restoration. When a project achieved serious consideration by major funders then it deserved national support.

Members pointed out that some fora for collective action already existed e.g. Northern and Southern Canals Associations. The Anderton Boat Lift Appeal and Lichfield and Hatherton were cited as model examples of collective action. It was felt that making better use of these fora was preferable to establishing a restoration alliance.

- Should BW lead on prioritisation?

The answer from BW was no. It only felt the need to prioritise for its own purposes.

Robin added that by the same virtue BW did not need to be the lead in all projects. The Bedford & Milton Keynes Link demonstrated what could be achieved without BW's leading role. Whilst BW would not abandon anyone, limited resources meant it would not always take the lead.

A general discussion then followed and points included:

- Derek Cochrane expanded on the community, heritage and volunteering elements of restorations. He emphasised the weight that funders particularly HLF and the EU placed on these quality elements. Some funders required a volunteer co-ordinator.
- Competitiveness was a key feature of EU and Government funding schemes and would be enshrined in schemes. It was accepted that this was not just for BW but that everyone interested in waterways should work together to maximise the opportunities;
- Reference was made to the IWAAC restoration list. Audrey Smith described this as a statement of stages of readiness for restoration, not prioritisation and advised that the next review would be issued in a couple of months;
- It was suggested scheme outputs should be widened to include, for instance, horse riding routes. The Northern Reaches was already examining the options for this. The relevance of the Agenda for health was increasingly recognised;
- It was felt that one successful rural regeneration scheme would help the case of others. Derek Cochrane referred to an Access to the Natural Environment Big Lottery application which BW was working on with a consortium involving the National Trust and others;
- Urban renaissance and rural regeneration was suggested as a useful typology: it was important not to merely import the values of the town to the countryside;
- BW was ideally placed for European Structural Funding since its agenda and that of the Government matched.
- The continuing importance of volunteering after completing restoration was highlighted especially in regard to the Huddersfield and Rochdale.

Summarising the discussion, the Chairman highlighted four key themes:

- Prioritisation was essential for funders;

- No general alliance was needed;
- Instead, we need to better understand and utilise the fora that already exist;
- Members should spread a unified message about the importance of restoration and the benefits to stakeholders.

4. PROPERTY PORTFOLIO

James Froomberg, Commercial Director, BW gave a presentation on “BW and Property”. This included details of its major property joint ventures, ISIS and Wood Wharf. The Chairman invited questions on the basis that there would be a full debate at the next meeting. Points included:

- Benchmarking (based on the private sector approach) should include generating less controversy;
- There needed to be a balanced approach that safe-guarded existing communities and also introducing new wider benefits through planning gain;
- Heritage criteria were needed; the HnBOC booklet “*Disappearing Heritage*” would be circulated with the October Meeting agenda;
- The impending standards advice leaflet should incorporate all user needs, including horseboats. It was also welcomed as a means of avoiding the pitfalls and mistakes of the past;
- The BW planning roadshows were welcomed.
- BW confirmed that it took full advantage of opportunities to steer local authority funding into waterways including Section 106.
- BW also confirmed that the lessons from Granary Wharf had been learnt with an improved ISIS consultation process and a more cohesive BW/ISIS relationship.
- It was suggested BW might issue a property supplement with its Annual Report;
- BW undertook to provide more information on its property income and how this was used in the business for the next meeting;

The Chairman thanked James Froomberg for his presentation. The points raised would be taken forward to the Agenda Meeting.

5. VOLUNTEERING

Mike Palmer of the Waterways Recovery Group gave a presentation on “Barriers to Volunteering”. He identified these as principally legislation, management and problem volunteers.

Mike expressed the view that BW had recently become more negative in its attitude to volunteers and they tended to be treated as low-skill contractors which was not appropriate. He felt that BW needed to identify what made a volunteer different and integrate this into its management approach.

He asked BW to identify the issues which underlayed this approach e.g. was it fear of dangerous volunteers, lack of understanding of volunteer motivations, too many pitfalls, worry about changing management approach or lack of resources? He added that it was not all gloom – there were also good schemes led by BW.

Robin Evans responded that BW did appreciate the wider benefits of volunteers, including cultural and for visitor numbers and there was not apprehension about them; the issue was of achieving a consistent approach. He had hoped that TWT would have achieved more through its Elsee Fairburn's initiative. But BW was now demonstrating its commitment with a Director and a senior manager having specific responsibility for volunteering. Towpath Tidy was a good example of getting it right and that would continue to grow.

Robin continued that Health & Safety was an impediment at present but this should not be the case. He did not believe that the Trade Unions were an issue; but they rightly expected to be kept informed of intentions. BW needed a clear understanding of the risks and benefits and a consistent approach throughout.

In the discussion, Members highlighted the wider benefits provided by volunteers other than in restoration. Also the older volunteer was now a major resource. Reference was made to angling bailiffs and the wide variety of skills their role entailed. The need of volunteers for recognition and the lesson from the past of not taking over work they had started was also highlighted.

Tony Hales noted the support of the meeting for volunteers and the range and scope of opportunities e.g. why not have ten thousand community wardens? A process was needed, however, to translate this into a set of strategic principles and a plan to take them forward. The Chairman endorsed this view and undertook to liaise with Derek Cochrane and Mike Palmer to draw up terms of reference for a small working group which members would be invited to join. Audrey Smith referred to the existing IWA/BW WOW Partnership as one element of this.

6. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman advised that the requirement to hold an election for the office of Vice-Chairman as required under the constitution had inadvertently been overlooked (Para. 20). Arrangements for this would now be confirmed.

Howard also indicated that, as required by the constitution, his period of office as the first Chairman ended at the close of the next meeting. He gave advance notice that the election of a Chairman would need to be dealt with at the next meeting.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Full Meeting was confirmed to be 18 October 2006, commencing at 1.00pm. The next agenda meeting date would be confirmed. Suggestions for topics in addition to safeguarding heritage, towpath management and promoting freight were invited.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.