

**Notes of the National Users' Forum meeting held on Thursday 12 September 2013,
1030-1230 at The Bond, 180-182 Fazeley Street, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 5SE**

Present:

Association of Pleasure Craft Operators
Boat Museum Society
British Marine Federation
Canal World Forum
Commercial Boat Operators Association
Inland Waterways Association
National Association of Boat Owners
National Bargee Travellers Association
Non-Aligned Boating
Ramblers' Association
Residential Boat Owners' Association
Roving Traders Association
Royal Yachting Association
Wooden Canal Boat Society
Canal Boat Magazine
Waterway Images
Waterways World

Tim Parker
Mike Turpin
Brian Clark
Richard Powell
Peter Hugman
Les Etheridge
Mike Rodd
Pamela Smith
Lesley Jordan
David Blackburn
Alan Wildman
Alison Tuck
Tony Roome
Chris Leah
Martin Ludgate
Harry Arnold
Andrew Denny

Tony Hales
John Dodwell
Richard Parry
Caroline Killeavy
George Ballinger
Jeff Whyatt
Roger Hanbury

Canal & River Trust Chairman
Canal & River Trust Trustee
Canal & River Trust Chief Executive
Canal & River Trust Head of Community Engagement
Canal & River Trust Head of Engineering
Canal & River Trust Senior Waterway Manager
Canal & River Trust Head of Governance Services

Apologies:

Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
BMF Tourism
British Canoe Union
British Horse Society
British Rowing
Canal Boat Builders' Association
Country Land & Business Association
DBA Barge Association
Electric Boat Association
Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Horse Boating Society
National Community Boat Association
Sport & Recreation Alliance
Steam Boat Association of Great Britain
Sustrans
The Angling Trust
The Boating Association

Paul Le Blique
Nigel Hamilton
Paul Owen
Heather Clatworthy
Gary Harris
Jim Matthias
Charles Trotman
Nigel Lee
Tony Rymell
Phil Prettyman
Sue Day
Trevor Roberts
Simon Butler
Mark Rudall
Martyn Brunt
David Kent
Colin Tuck

1. Welcome and Introductions.

Tony Hales welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He hoped that the venue and format of the meeting would be conducive to a constructive dialogue on the range of issues on the agenda which Richard Parry then briefly introduced.

2. Chief Executive's Update.

RP had now been in post for 2 months. Over the summer he had been able to spend time out and about and had met about one-third of staff, many volunteers and users in a series of visits to each of the waterway units, and a number of weekend events. He had been struck by the pride, passion and longstanding enthusiasm which placed the waterways at the heart of many people's lives.

He referred to the considerable achievements of the Trust in its first year –

- growing brand awareness
- 13 active Waterway Partnerships
- 5000 Friends signed-up and regularly donating
- the growth in volunteering with, for example, 372 volunteer lock keepers engaged during the summer
- nearly 30 community adoption schemes in place
- 24 companies participating in volunteering so far this year

On the funding side, the recent award of £12m for towpath improvements from DFT Cycle Fund was a major achievement. Progress with the Google Tracker was going well helping to raise the profile of waterways, and, amongst other bids, we had received Stage 1 approval for a £1m investment at Gloucester Waterways Museum. The move to annualised hours for waterways staff was a marker for the change going on within the Trust.

RP also outlined the continuing work on major project delivery and the progress towards reducing a number of D and E assets – those in poor or bad condition. These stood at 15%, down from nearly 30% over the last 10 years, and the Network Stewardships Score which is also showing steady improvement. These improvements had been achieved despite a reduction in major works spend which was down about 50% since 2004/5 due to reduced government grant. However, with the step-up in Government Contract funding and improved commercial income, total resources available to the Trust would rise from £108m in 2012/13 to £124m in 2015/16. This would enable increased spend on major works and dredging spend in 2015/16 of £8.4m, with further increases expected in future years.

RP outlined his immediate priorities after 2 months in the role:

- **Review and develop the Trust's strategic direction - a year since the launch:**
 - **Work with Waterway Partnerships to establish clear local strategies and support local action plans**
 - **Develop our 'road-map' for volunteering, fundraising and other new aspects of Trust activity**
 - **Shape our new Business Plan to address our strategic priorities and respond to customer needs, making best use of additional funding**
- **Create positive relationships with boaters and other users, and ensure communication and consultation is as effective as it can be**

In conclusion, RP emphasised the unique opportunity we have to work together to create a positive future for our canals and rivers and the people who value them in the formative years of the Trust.

Discussion

In response to a question from **Peter Hugman, Commercial Boat Operators Association**, George Ballinger confirmed that our asset management process includes an analysis of asset failures across the asset grades A, B, C, D, E; data analysis on embankments and culverts confirmed that it is predominantly D and E assets that fail, with a lesser number in grade C.

In response to a question from **Chris Leah, Wooden Canal Boat Society**, RP confirmed that the Trust was working hard to develop its work with other charities, whilst also reflecting our own charitable responsibilities. The Waterway Partnerships help us to develop local relationships and our local focus is also illustrated by initiatives such as community adoptions.

In response to a question from **Les Etheridge, Inland Waterways Association**, RP said that his visits to the waterways had been informative and he was listening, learning and much encouraged by conversations with local groups. He was considering how we can build on the energy and drive of local people in developing the future of our waterways.

In response to a question from **Pamela Smith, National Bargee Travellers Association**, who highlighted the difficulties faced by non-compliant boaters who were unable to comply with the Section 8 Notices due to their circumstances, RP emphasised the need for fairness for all users of the waterways. Our approach would be humane, sympathetic and consistent whilst also respecting the needs of all waterway users.

A copy of Richard Parry's presentation is available [here](#).

3. Winter Stoppage Works (Jeff Whyatt).

JW made a presentation setting-out the scale of investment in maintenance and minor works - £21.4m, of which £6m is spent on stoppages.

A significant part of the stoppage programme is the lock gate replacement programme. In the current year, *circa* £450k will be spent on oak to enable 140 lock gates to be replaced, the majority of which are in grade E poor condition. In recent years, improved preventative maintenance has increased the life of lock gates from 24 to 28 years, with consequential cost savings.

JW outlined the process for planning stoppages which typically have an 18-month lead time; initial works are identified, costed and then included in the waterway business plan. The proposed plan is discussed with neighbouring waterways and the Navigation Advisory Group. Plans are then put out for consultation with discussions with customers prior to finalising at the end of August. The stoppage season commences in November, and works are completed by the end of March.

This arrangement represented significant improvement on previous practice and allowed comments to influence the pattern of work to minimise the impact on users. In the programme for 2013/14 recently announced, a total of 7 stoppages were amended after consultation.

JW outlined improvements planned and in place to improve communications. For example, customers can receive targeted alerts for specific canals, and Twitter is also used to update progress. There are plans to provide an enhanced search facility on the website by canal or locality, improved mapping functionality to give real-time updates and journey planning.

Finally, JW updated on the Restoration and Repair Works Campaign which last year provided free events at 13 stoppage sites nationally which attracted 9000 visitors. The events provided much positive media coverage, allowed the recruitment of 65 Friends, and provided the Trust with national coverage on BBC Breakfast and The One Show. In the winter of 2013/14, a total of 15 sites

will be open. The programme is again sponsored by Kier Group, previously May Gurney, and dedicated pages on the website will provide maps and support information.

Details of the Winter Works Programme are now live on the Trust website [here](#).

A copy of Jeff Whyatt's presentation can be found [here](#).

Discussion

Mike Rodd, National Association of Boat Owners, commented favourably on the new consultation arrangements for stoppages. The benefit had been felt for tripboat operations and he felt that co-operation had been excellent. In response to his question about how damage caused by users could be better addressed, RP suggested we should re-double our efforts to educate boaters and strengthen the briefings provided by hirers.

Richard Powell, Canal World Forum, commented favourably on his recent experience with the recent stoppage at Minworth, particularly the response of the Waterway Manager, Dean Davies, who had circulated pictures to help users understand the nature of the problem.

Harry Arnold, Waterway Images highlighted the role which could be played by the Partnerships in promoting the open days, and urged consultation with the Partnership prior to finalising dates and other arrangements.

4. Volunteering and Community Engagement (Caroline Killeavy).

In a short presentation, CK outlined progress made in volunteer participation, with volunteer days rising from 7000 in 2007 to 39,000 in 2012/13. In that time, the focus has moved to a stronger partnership with the community and much greater evidence of bottom-up approach in setting priorities.

The tasks had also broadened and in addition to established areas such as canal tidy and litter picks, volunteers were now engaged in all functions carried out by the Trust. For example, in the current year 372 volunteer lock keepers had been active on the system; each had been trained and the focus was on improving the quality of experience for boaters as well as recruiting new Friends for the Trust and providing information and inspiration for all users. The Trust also now benefitted from over 80 volunteers who were supporting our educational programme, *Explorers*, which is linked to the national curriculum and now covered the whole country. In addition, informal education was continuing in partnership with IWA.

In 2013, the Trust is trialling 20 Welcome Stations – 10 in place with another 10 to follow – where volunteers can meet and greet visitors and provide local information. These are based at sites where the Trust has buildings available – for example, Gunthorpe, Hatton and Braunston – and in some cases, portable “pop-up” facilities are being used. The programme is going well and it is hoped that it will be expanded in future years.

The Trust had also been successful in attracting corporate sponsorship. Partnerships were in place with M&S, HSBC, Barclaycard and BT. Each of these was providing profile for the Trust and also bringing significant numbers of volunteers onto the waterways, for example, over 1000 had volunteered with M&S and their work had been supported by substantial sponsorship.

Finally, CK outlined the success of the community adoption schemes with 27 now in place. The Blisworth partnership illustrated how a locally-initiated canal festival could develop into a year-round adoption scheme, supported by the local community.

The Trust is developing a 10-year vision for volunteering. We want to step-up our engagement with volunteers and will do this by working with community groups. In developing our approach, we are open to new ideas and willing to accept change and help. To illustrate the new approach, CK introduced a short video clip highlighting the work of volunteers in the West Midlands reported on BBC Midlands Today. This illustrated how volunteers could be ambassadors and provide a voice and local face for the Trust.

Caroline's presentation can be found [here](#).

The meeting then split into two groups.

Group 1 considered, *“What are the key issues for the Trust to address as it grows its volunteer base?”*

Key points emerging included:

- Be flexible – not ‘one size fits all’
- Recognise volunteers could do more
- Volunteer contract is a two-way thing
- Make sure employees know what volunteers are there for
- Better training of those supervising volunteers
- Don't be too safety obsessive – know when to let go
- Learn from preserved railways
- Acknowledge that informal volunteering happens (eg, boaters pick up litter)

Group 2 considered, *“How can we ensure community adoptions deliver benefits for all users of the waterway?”*

Key points emerging included:

- The need to promote the Trust and waterways – for many, the waterway is the brand
- Let the volunteers decide where they would like to participate – don't impose
- Co-ordination is vital particularly in areas where there are sensitive issues to consider – wildlife habitats, heritage features
- Build on existing schemes, work with others, don't reinvent
- All skills are welcome – not just litter-picking
- Communicate to raise awareness – make use of MPs, local press, pubs, parish councils
- Find common ground for different groups to interact

5. HS2 (George Ballinger).

GB provided a briefing on the current status of HS2 – phases 1 and 2 – and their potential impact on the waterway network. He explained that the Trust is “at the table” with HS2 – a large organisation of c.1500 staff working on a complex and fast-moving project. Our approach was in line with the IWA key principles which guided our negotiation with HS2:

1. To protect waterway routes.
2. Minimum condition is replacement of navigation.
3. Presumption of betterment – if practicable – in the planning process.
4. Preservation of built and natural heritage.
5. No blight on existing canal restoration projects.
6. Advanced mitigation ahead of construction.

CRT has been assigned a lead interface manager and has set-up a Technical Approvals group. We have a Service Level Agreement in place with HS2 which covers technical appraisal costs but not

lawyers or lobbyists. We had the best planners and engineers in play to protect the interests of the waterways.

The Trust is neither for nor against HS2. Trying to prevent it occurring is unrealistic and our preferred method of influencing the plans is by a Side Agreement with HS2 contractually binding on the developer.

GB went through the key sites on the route explaining their interaction with the waterway network and illustrated the sorts of solutions that might be put in place to protect our interests. **His full presentation is available [here](#).**

At a number of key sites it would be necessary for the Trust to provide alternative design ideas to help secure solutions that would minimise impact and create spaces and places that were acceptable from socio/environmental perspectives. The potentially overwhelming impact of the railway engineering on the Digbeth Branch under the new Curzon Street Terminus in Birmingham, illustrated the scale of the challenge. At each location the Trust was negotiating alignments and design and construction details, to minimise visual intrusion as well as noise and vibration impacts on the waterway landscape and heritage which in many cases had been unchanged for over 200 years.

Finally, GB made a plea to everyone to work together. CRT was doing all it could to minimise the impact on waterways, its users, and those who love and support the network, and asked everyone to join together to ensure we present a united voice.

Discussion

Peter Hugman, CBOA, asked about the Woodlesford crossing on the Aire and Calder navigation, and GB confirmed that the headroom would be set appropriately for the navigation.

David Blackburn, Ramblers, commented that he was very encouraged by the presentation and the Trust's approach to HS2.

There was broad endorsement for the approach which the Trust was taking under GB's leadership and appreciation of the careful detailed work of the planning and engineering team. It was also recognised that the Trust and waterway organisations were natural allies and we need to continue to work with key players, such as local authorities, to ensure the waterways are properly respected and valued in the planning of HS2.

6. Any Other Business.

David Blackburn, Ramblers asked how the Trust was responding to speed cycling on canal towpaths which is promoted by a number of websites. RP suggested that we would continue to promote responsible shared use and the Trust was seeing some success from campaigns such as [Share the Space, Drop your Pace](#)

7. Closing Remarks.

RP thanked everyone for their participation. Any feedback on the meeting would be welcome, either to him or Roger Hanbury.

8. Date of Next Meetings, venues to be advised.

Tuesday 25 February 2014, 1030

Wednesday 10 September 2014 1030

The meeting closed at 1245.

Roger Hanbury
Head of Governance Services
Canal & River Trust
26 September 2013