



Canal &
River Trust

Notes of the 10th National Users' Forum meeting held on Wednesday 18 April 2018, 1030-1300 at The Bond, 180-182 Fazeley Street, Birmingham, B5 5SE

Present:

Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs, Paul Le Blique
British Horse Society, Rachel Fraser
British Marine Federation, Brian Clark
British Marine Federation Tourism & Elected Boating Business Representative, Nigel Hamilton
British Marine Inland Boating, Russell Chase
British Rowing, Paul Lorenzato
Canal Boat Magazine, Martin Ludgate
Commercial Boat Operators Association, David Lowe
DBA, The Barge Association, John Booker
Historic Narrow Boat Club & Elected Private Boating Representative, Phil Prettyman
Inland Waterways Association, Ivor Caplan
National Association of Boat Owners & Elected Private Boating Representative, Stella Ridgway
National Bargee Travellers Association, Pamela Smith
Ramblers Association, David Blackburn
Residential Boat Owners' Association, Alan Wildman
Roving Canal Traders Association, Andrew Mills
Royal Yachting Association, Philip Aspey
Waterways Chaplain West Midlands, Rev Richard Alford
Wooden Canal Boat Society, Chris Leah
Canal & River Trust, Elected Boating Business Representative, Andy Tidy
Canal & River Trust Private Boating Elected Representative, Vaughan Welch
Canal & River Trust Private Boating Representative, Andrew Phasey
Canal & River Trust Chief Executive, Richard Parry
Canal & River Trust Chief Operating Officer, Julie Sharman
Canal & River Trust Chief Investment Officer, Stuart Mills
Canal & River Trust Asset Improvement Director, Simon Bamford
Canal & River Trust Head of Technical Support, Peter Walker
Canal & River Trust Head of Boating, Jon Horsfall
Canal & River Trust Strategy and Engagement Manager (Boating), Matthew Symonds
Canal & River Trust Waterway Manager West Midlands, Ian lane
Canal & River Trust National Press Officer, Fran Read
Canal & River Trust Governance Administrator, Brenda Adams
Canal & River Trust PA to Julie Sharman, Sarah Willetts

Apologies:

Boat Museum Society
British Canoeing
British Marine Inland Boat Building
Canal Travel
Canal World Forum
Country Land & Business Association
Electric Boat Association
Friends Gloucester Waterways Museum
Horse Boating Society
National Community Boat Association
National Farmers Union
Sport & Recreation
Steamboat Association of Great Britain
Sustrans
The Angling Trust
The Boating Association
The Yacht Harbour Association

Towpath Talk
Waterway Images
Waterways World
Waterways World

(Notes from the previous meeting were available to collect at the Registration desk)

1. Welcome & Introduction – *Julie Sharman*

JS welcomed everyone and introduced herself as the new host in her capacity as the Chief Operating Officer since November 2017, explaining that this was part of the new organisational changes currently underway.

JS explained how the business had changed since the last NUF meeting in April 2017, highlighting several points:

- health & safety performance had generally improved, with the exception of infrastructure-related injuries which were still in need of improvement
- a few issues with water resources due to the weather and our reservoirs having shallow catchments which take a long time to re-charge (following a wet winter, they are full now)
- we've celebrated festivals – Halloween, Diwali, Pride, and open days
- we've exceeded targets in education, adoptions and volunteering

Challenges include:

- Marple lock failure and stoppage
- cancellation of an open day due to the weather
- and the Middlewich breach, although customer response has been excellent

A recent drowning in Manchester had prompted an online petition for barriers around the canals – JS suggested that people present might want to speak up on behalf of the waterways on this issue by promoting a counter view to that expressed in the petition. If they are minded to, write to the [Manchester Mayor](#) – Andy Burnham (the.mayor@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk).

2. Organisational Changes – *Julie Sharman*

JS noted that we're on a journey for re-negotiation of the contract with government in 2021. Public awareness of what we do is still not strong. Our core message is still that we care for the waterways, but we want to add more value, and are in a position to do so with 50% of the population on our doorstep. JS explained the reason for the forthcoming logo change and presented the new regional structure chart.

Following JS's presentation, questions included:

- contact details for Trust employees being made available once a new structure was in place
- information regarding the Regional Advisory Boards
- continuous cruising - Jon Horsfall agreed to have a one-to-one discussion following the meeting
- how our users could support our brand change
- should there be a compulsory boating sub-group within the Regional Advisory Boards? JS advised that areas varied in users, so while she was happy for boards to have sub-groups, it shouldn't be mandatory, it should be up to individual regions to decide their priorities

3. Boating Look Ahead – Jon Horsfall, Interim Head of Boating and Matthew Symonds, Strategy and Engagement Manager (Boating)

JH discussed the London Mooring Strategy in which over 1200 people had commented. MS broke down the statistics of percentage of people in the consultation who thought the Trust's proposals compared with current satisfaction, showing them favourably.

MS talked through the plan of action for the Wide Beam Strategy to address their use on narrow canals. It will be a phased approach starting with communication and increasing to direct contact with boaters and further measures in the following years if deemed necessary.

MS advised that Licence evasion is down to its lowest level at 3.1%.

National boat count numbers were also shown.

The Licencing Review has been published which includes width for the first time. [Licensing Futures](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/national-consultations). The Trust had over 11,000 replies and there will be phased changes resulting from this. <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/national-consultations>

Regarding equalities, we receive about 20-30 requests for equality related adjustments per month and are currently trialling a new questionnaire to help processing and review of these requests.

Business licence automation is going well.

Following open questions, it was confirmed that further discussion is planned for this year concerning electric boats, historic boat discounts and business boating. Questions were raised about why boats without a home mooring were not tied into a licence fee and MS explained that this was a location-specific issue. Do we value business that are charities? – yes, that's why the charity discount still applies. What if anything is happening with unpowered craft in London? MS advised that some specific measures are included in the London Mooring Strategy (for example, water sports zones) and the Trust is going to update the boater's handbook to reflect this.

Tables were then asked to focus on 2 questions:

1. How can our customers help us build the highest level of support for the Trust?
2. What can the Trust do to build support amongst customers?

The outcome of both discussions are listed below, but in considering both questions, some responses fit into both categories.

Question 1: How can our customers help us build the highest level of support for the Trust?

- Present a balanced view about what the Trust does
- Avoid negativity during public forums
- Literature – print for hire companies to give to clients
- Encourage boaters to tell the public about the benefits the Trust generates – boaters could explain how the Trust looks after the canal
- Be clear in 'what it is the Trust wants in terms of support'

Question 2: What can the Trust do to build support amongst customers?

- Provide information to help explain what the Trust does and that the Trust is the body that is doing it
- Explain what would happen if the Trust wasn't there
- Hearts and minds – make people aware of what's there before its gone
- Make local people feel there are ways they can be involved with their waterway – this will help them feel more supportive
- Engage with local authorities/regional bodies

- How do we engage the customers who don't pay us directly (eg, towpath users) and balance the support from those who do (boaters)
- Get more people involved
- Have website system fit for modern age
- Easy downloads of documents
- Make website better for all customers to get information or service they want
- Give user groups the power to do things
- Explain what the Trust stands for
- Target themed opportunities such as plastic bottle boat challenge
- Licence holders become Friends automatically
- The Trust needs to do more of the good stuff it does with local people, eg, canal clean-ups and community initiatives
- Need to support and enable local activity – stop bureaucracy getting in the way
- Need to ensure local communication is good

All of these replies have been noted, as well as:

- should we make all licence holders 'Friends'?
- there are lots of trusts so we need to focus on brand to differentiate ourselves
- our customers should stop working against us and appreciate what we do then work with us to change the minor things
- link more with the heritage aspect (suggested after an attendee had recently received an informative talk from Nigel Crowe – our National Heritage Manager)
- have enough signage to let people know who looks after sections of the canals without being excessive
- tie our brand into national campaigns/successes
- have a local focus on our brand and connecting people with it

4. HS2 – *Peter Walker, Head of Technical Support*

PW introduced himself and the work of his team. He explained that the Trust's position regarding HS2 was neutral, enabling meaningful discussions at a high level with HS2 staff, especially when their proposals affect our waterways.

He outlined how HS2 might affect our waterways in several areas if it were not for our negotiation, and how we interact in any protests, citing the example of Lichfield: HS2 wanted to build in an area where the current Lichfield restoration project would ultimately link with our network. Once HS2 had built their segment, they would not have allowed a restoration project to continue around their newly built section, so our team were able to persuade HS2 to compromise by having them agree to build a part of the canal themselves, allowing the restoration to continue and still enabling the network link.

The Trust will shortly be recruiting staff to work on his project, with their costs being funded by HS2.

PW suggested that boaters could be our eyes and ears around the network. Work has already commenced but we would encourage boaters to report anything that didn't appear to be right.

Delegates asked about possible lengthy closures. PW said that closures would be kept to a minimum, potentially overnight or for short periods of time only.

In answer to a question about noise protection barriers on the HS2 sections crossing our waterways, PW advised that these had been negotiated but would not be to the detriment of aesthetics - even transparent barriers had been considered to reduce impact. At our request, HS2 had produced views of where their structures cross our network from the boater's view-point but PW acknowledged their initial 'fly-through' video was far in excess of the 4mph speed limit of a boat! - so they are going to slow it down.

It was acknowledged that we don't inform people enough – especially boaters – about the work that we are doing on their behalf in projects such as these.

It was also acknowledged that some restoration projects are finding it hard to apply for grants where the HS2 path is not yet defined. PW advised that the Trust will offer its support but it was up to individual projects to engage with HS2 on this issue.

5. Investment – *Stuart Mills, Chief Investment Officer*

SM gave an overview of the Trust's investment activity and performance from 2012 to now. He presented on our strategy and diversifying portfolio, explaining why we spread the risk.

SM explained our sources of capital, reminding people that when assets are disposed of, heritage and operations are fully considered. He then explained what we do with the money and why. He also explained the Trust had recently taken some long-term debt and how the Trust will invest this and return further income for waterway maintenance in excess of the cost of the debt.

SM showed graphs of our past performance against the market benchmark, emphasising that long term performance was critical and our investments have performed extremely well since 2012. He briefly listed some non-property types of investments that we hold.

Questions arising included:

- ground rent – would the Trust be affected with proposed legislative changes? The answer was only moderately as the Trust's ground rents were largely not received from residential occupiers
- over-exposure to debt – no, the Board were happy that our current exposure was manageable, even in difficult market circumstances
- income from 3rd party developers when near water. SM explained that we are statutory consultees and negotiate with the developers for s106 contributions to improve the waterways, including facilities for boaters
- a question arising regarding Marple would be discussed outside the meeting

6. Winter Works Review and Year Ahead – *Simon Bamford, Asset Improvement Director*

SB noted that this time last year, we were talking about flooding projects! He then explained how our money was being spent. Looking forward, he detailed our priority works and explained why these are subject to alteration, eg. an emergency requiring the Trust to de-water the Earlswood reservoir due to reports of Catfish (an invasive species). In doing this it made sense to undertake some planned future works at the same time, pushing back less important work (we have a statutory requirement regarding reservoirs).

Simon highlighted the difficulties from the weather when undertaking winter works – slippery muddy banks, rising water levels, etc, which can delay projects for days at a time, making the stoppages longer than anticipated in order to safely complete the works. He explained that is why we need to consider summer stoppages.

Simon gave an update on Marple where the lock wall had moved. The opening date has now been pushed back to 25 May due to damaged brickwork and missing mortar evident when the wall was taken down. The Trust has taken this stoppage opportunity to complete future planned work at this time on the aqueduct and flight, which we have called the “Marple Makeover”. One of the delegates had been at Marple recently and said the work looked ‘stunning’.

An update on Middlewich was also given explaining that badgers had been sighted. On further investigation, it was found that young cubs were also living there so we needed to plan around their natural movements as a protected species.

A slide was shown to illustrate the vegetative and environmental work that had been delivered from our volunteers.

Simon emphasised our business approach to maintenance and repair investment as: programmes of work on, national grouting, national bridge painting and culvert inspections together with reservoir safety works. Project priorities for this year are: reservoirs (£3.8m), locks (£3.7m), embankments/culverts (£5.6m) and dredging (£8.3m). Also, those which are 3rd party funded such as Stainton Aqueduct and the Roundhouse.

An attendee commended the response to the Middlewich breach.

A question arose about Peel Holdings – negotiations with the Bridgewater Canal Company and Peel are in place to reach an agreement that is in the best interests of all. We will advise as soon as resolved.

7. Any Other Business – *Richard Parry, Chief Executive*

RP advised that despite the Trust's time and effort spent on the EA navigation transfer, negotiations with the Government appeared to be at an impasse, and that it wasn't a priority on their agenda at this time.

RP asked members to note that the Trust's Annual Public Meeting this year will take place on Wednesday 26 September, 1030-1230 at the IET Austin Court in Birmingham.

A copy of the combined presentations given at the meeting can found [here](#).

8. Date of Next Meeting.

Wednesday 3 April 2019, 1030-1300, at The Bond, Birmingham.