

**Notes of the 5th National Users' Forum meeting held on Wednesday 25 February 2015,
1030-1300 at The Bond, 180-182 Fazeley Street, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 5SE**

Present:

Association of Pleasure Craft Operators	Tim Parker
Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs	Paul Le Blique
BMF Tourism	Nigel Hamilton
Boat Museum Society	Mike Turpin
British Canoeing	Kevin East
British Horse Society	Heather Clatworthy
Canal Boat Builders Association	Paul Smith
Commercial Boat Operators Association	David Lowe
DBA Barge Association	Nigel Lee
Historic Narrow Boat Club	Phil Prettyman
Inland Waterways Association	Gren Messham
National Association of Boat Owners	Mike Rodd
National Bargee Travellers Association	Nick Brown
Ramblers' Association	David Blackburn
Residential Boat Owners' Association	Alan Wildman
Roving Traders Association	Alison Tuck
Royal Yachting Association	Tony Roome
Steam Boat Association of Great Britain	Keith Ward
The Angling Trust	David Kent
The Boating Association	Jon Skinner
The Yacht Harbour Association	Libby Gordon
The Wooden Canal Boat Society	Nick Lowther
Canal Boat Magazine	Martin Ludgate
Elected Council Member, Private Boating	Ann Farrell
Elected Council Member, Private Boating	Ivor Caplan
Elected Council Member, Private Boating	Vaughan Welch
Canal & River Trust Chairman	Tony Hales
Canal & River Trust Trustee	John Dodwell
Canal & River Trust Chief Executive	Richard Parry
Canal & River Trust Technical & Operations Director	Vince Moran
Canal & River Trust Property Director	Stuart Mills
Canal & River Trust Head of Fundraising	Ruth Ruderham
Canal & River Trust Head of Customer Service	Ian Rogers
Canal & River Trust Welfare Officer, Boating	Sean Williams
Canal & River Trust Head of Governance Services	Roger Hanbury

Apologies:

Association of Continuous Cruisers	Steve Jay
British Marine Federation	Brian Clark
Country Land & Business Association	Charles Trotman
National Community Boat Association	Bob Ratcliffe
Sport & Recreation Alliance	James Allen
Sustrans	Martyn Brunt
Canal Travel	Richard Fairhurst
Towpath Talk	Janet Richardson
Waterway Images	Harry Arnold
Elected Council Member, Private Boating	Clive Henderson
Elected Council Member, Boating Business	Nigel Stevens
Canal & River Trust Marketing Director	Simon Salem

1. Welcome and Introductions.

Richard Parry welcomed the group to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He outlined the agenda for the morning.

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting (10 September 2014).

The Notes of the meeting on 10 September 2014 had previously been circulated.

3. Chief Executive's Update (Richard Parry).

Richard Parry talked through his presentation. In reviewing the current year, 2014/15, he noted:

- a 2% annual increase in lock usage
- 290 visits recorded between April and December 2014
- 17m individual visitors in the past year recorded between April and December 2014 and we are on target to exceed 350m in the year 2014/15
- income in the current year up £10m on the Plan due to strong property performance
- active donors now fast approaching 10,000
- c.£93m spent on waterways, up 10%

Looking ahead he noted that the **grant agreement** will provide an extra £10m enabling further increase in spend in 2015/16.

Looking at **public engagement**, he noted the success of the winter open day programme with about 9,000 people attending, for example, 2,000 at City Road Lock, Islington and 1,000 at Aldermaston on the K&A in January.

The **Volunteering programme** was continuing to develop well with an expected 400,000 volunteer hours to be achieved this year. There were now 85 community adoptions in place and over 35,000 children had been reached through the volunteer 'Canal & River Explorers' programme.

RP then outlined the progress on **towpath policy** following the May 2014 "Sharing Towpaths" consultation which had received over 2,000 responses. Following this, the Trust was now rolling out the "Share the Space, Drop your Pace" campaign. Volunteer Towpath Rangers were now being engaged to promote safe and considerate towpath behaviour and "Better Towpaths for Everyone" had been launched as our national policy for sharing towpaths. This was endorsed by a wide range of partner organisations.

The policy sets out 9 principles of towpath use. Central to these is priority to be given to the slowest moving and those using the waterway. In support of this, the Trust would continue to improve the towpath infrastructure; £15m had been spent in the last 2 years. Better signage and a new design guide had been developed.

In support of these developments, a **towpath code** had been developed with 3 themes:

- share the space
- drop your pace
- it's a special place

Turning to **Boating**, RP noted the licence fee had been increased from April in line with our commitment to restrict licence fee increases to the rate of inflation.

RP also noted the increase in uptake of winter moorings (37% up on 2013/14), something which we hope to further develop in the winter of 2015/16.

He also described other recent announcements including:

- the new boat licence terms and conditions – designed to clarify the Trust’s relationship with boaters
- the new approach to boats without a home mooring which is built on the approach to new continuous cruisers which had been in place for the past 12 months. Key components include regular communication with those who are not moving sufficiently; and non-renewal of licences for those who fail to satisfy us that they are meeting the requirement to cruise

This approach will be rolled-out to all 5,000 boats without a home mooring from May 2015. Short-term licences would be offered in some cases to give boaters time to establish an acceptable range of movement. The Trust will continue to help those who find it hard to meet the requirements to find a solution. This approach had support from key boating and waterway organisations

In **other developments**, RP described

- the national short-term visitor moorings framework which provided a consistent process for assessing the need for change to short-term (less than 14-day) moorings. All future changes would be supported by evidence and local feedback. In addition, the norm would be that visitor moorings revert to 14-day moorings in winter, unless otherwise stated
- the benefits of the new web licencing system which would enable boaters to manage their details online and reduce the need for form-filling and postage. For the first time, new customers would be able to apply for a licence online and this facility would also be available as a smartphone app. All boaters coming up for renewal would be invited to use the new website

RP went on to describe developments following the **moorings sales consultation** held in the Autumn of 2014. Proposals are now being implemented including, the higher proportion of moorings offered at a fixed price; retention of auction sales in areas of high demand; and other changes to reflect comments made in the consultation. There had also been a **moorings price review** and as a result of this

- 35% of sites will see no rise or a reduction in price
- 32% will increase by inflation only
- 25% will increase by 3 and 5%
- 8% will increase by more than 5% - mainly in London

In other updates, RP outlined the new **Operations & Asset Management directorate**. Changes to waterway management were designed to improve customer service and public engagement. The new national approach to asset management and work planning would get more work done and provide efficiency.

On **HS2**, RP noted the successful negotiations concerning the Fradley Junction route alignment thanks to successful joint working with the IWA and local groups. Discussions on Phase 2 would continue.

RP also noted current **TV coverage** including “Barging Around Britain” with John Sargent, “Great Canal Journeys” with Timothy West and Prunella Scales, “Rivers” with Griff Rhys Jones, and “What Canals Did for Us”, likely to be broadcast in August/September 2015.

Finally, in an **update on governance**, he noted

- the appointment of 2 new Trustees – Allan Leighton and Ben Gordon
- 3 new Partnership Chairs – David Hagg (South Wales & Severn), Brenda Harvey (North Wales & Borders) and Bob Pointing (North West)
- the forthcoming elections planned for 2015 in preparation for the new Council to be in place by March 2016, and
- the new Trust Handbook to be published in March 2015

In questions, RP agreed to clarify the position for Roving Traders in relation to long-term moorings.

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

4. **Operations and Asset Management Update (Vince Moran).**

VM talked through his presentation and highlighted the £93m total expenditure on **waterway maintenance** in the current year, which was £4.5m more than anticipated at the start of the year, enabled by improved commercial income.

He outlined the **100 projects completed** so far during the year:

- embankments and culverts £5.6m
- locks £5.6m
- bridges and aqueducts £3.8m
- water management £3m
- tunnels and cuttings £2.2m
- bank protection/towpaths £1.2m
- dredging £7.1m, and
- emergency works £1.2m

VM illustrated these with images of work in progress and work completed. He also highlighted some of the **work undertaken by volunteers** including re-laying of the towpath on the Caldon Canal following dredging.

On **emergency works** he highlighted the problem at Dutton Embankment on the Trent & Mersey, now repaired at the contractors cost due to a work defect, as well as damage caused by third parties to a swingbridge on the Peak Forest Canal, and bankside repairs on the Rochdale Canal.

On **general works**, he noted that 3,500 notifications had been repaired from a targeted list of 4,000. These works involved safety and customer service issues. As always, there is continuing focus on planned, preventative maintenance including paddlegear greasing, vegetation management, signage and cleaning. He also added that the winter stoppage programme was broadly on plan.

VM then illustrated some of the work done to improve offside vegetation where over £1m had been invested in the last 2 winters. He also noted the £1m spent on customer service improvements across the waterways including service station upgrades, mooring improvements, water points and waste disposal facilities. He paid tribute to the work undertaken by the volunteer lock keepers.

Looking ahead, the detailed expenditure plans for the coming year were now being finalised and the headlines would be published shortly. In the next year, the new nationally-organised Direct Services Team would take on responsibilities for stoppages and high priority notification remedial works. The Waterway teams would focus on customer service, volunteering, and community engagement. National contracts would cover vegetation management, dredging, and waste disposal. The Priority Projects Programme – previously known as the Major Works Programme – would have a similar scope as in prior years and continue to be run centrally supported by in-house technical expertise and our contractors.

In discussion, VM confirmed that where we have third party funding contributions, for example, as in the Sutton Weaver swingbridge, this is in addition to the quoted £93m spent on waterway maintenance and forms part of a total of about £11m this year secured by the Enterprise team from the third party sources. These monies are provided for specific works and are restricted in their application to designated projects which include much of the towpath improvement works undertaken.

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

5. Property Plan (Stuart Mills).

SM set out the challenge he has to **grow income** over time to contribute to the cost of looking after the waterway network, identifying 3 areas each to be grown ahead of the rate of inflation (CPI):

- capital value of our investments
- investment income
- utility income

SM then outlined our **investment portfolio** which includes:

- property assets
- non-property assets (managed by Partners Capital)
- joint venture investments

Trustees had agreed an **investment policy** 2 years ago and had established an Investment Committee to support and scrutinise investment planning. As part of the DEFRA grant agreement, a Protector had been jointly appointed by DEFRA and the Trust to give independent assurance on the management of the endowment portfolio transferred to the Trust.

SM then went on to review **investment performance** and noted that capital growth was comfortably ahead of the CPI+1 target and had been in each of the years since 2011/12.

He described the **utilities business** which generates a sizeable part of our income – £25m per annum from, amongst other sources:

- rights to lay cables on our land
- surface water drainage
- sale of surplus water
- innovative green and sustainable energy

Total income from all our investment can be lumpy from year to year and, for example, in the current year 2014/15 a sizeable one-off receipt had inflated income as noted in earlier presentations. Overall, however, the smoothed trend was growth in income at roughly 4 times the rate of CPI.

SM then reviewed some of the recent successful **property investments** including Waitrose at Northwich, an investment now generating c.£450,000 per annum, and a Doncaster Retail investment generating c.£250,000 per annum.

He also described the Trust's **development at Icknield Port Loop**, a proposal to develop 1,100 residential units, to include mooring and waterspace activity. Development of the site would generate capital receipts to be reinvested for income. The Trust and the other landowner (Birmingham City Council) is currently looking for a development partner.

Finally, in this part of his presentation, SM described the Trust's involvement in **joint ventures**, illustrating this with the proposed development at Marsworth near Tring which is nearing completion and will generate a one-off income receipt of £750,000. He also described the joint venture development at Brentford Lock, which has so far generated a profit of £4.5m with perhaps a further £10m to come over the next 5 years.

SM then moved on to look at **management of heritage and property**, noting the process we have in place for heritage assessment before disposal or development. This included:

- use of external advice
- the advice of the Heritage Advisory Group
- where appropriate, the use of restrictive covenants, and

- in the light of this advice striking an appropriate balance between financial outputs and conservation

The Trust does not have the resources to keep everything of heritage interest in our direct ownership.

SM illustrated the approach describing a lock cottage at Cropredy which had been restored and retained by the Trust as a key heritage property. He also described plans for The Roundhouse in Birmingham, adjacent to the Fiddle & Bone pub due to open in March. It was hoped that the Roundhouse would be developed in partnership with the National Trust to promote walking, cycling, boating and wider community engagement on the waterways in central Birmingham. An application would be made to HLF to support the restoration.

Finally in this section, SM illustrated some of the **challenges** with the Trust's property at **Hartshill** – challenging commercially with poor access, but also a very significant historic operational building. Here the Trust is looking for uses which will develop community engagement and bring in social enterprises, noting that there is already a cookery school on site.

In discussion, SM noted that our **investment property performance** was **benchmarked** against the Investment Property Database (IPD) which was an industry standard benchmark. The Trust has consistently exceeded IPD over the last 5 years.

He also noted that the property market has had an exceptional year and that CRT is targeting greater than market performance this year. It was noted that SM is held to account on his performance against the IPD benchmark.

On **non-property investment**, Partners Capital, have been appointed on the basis of a percentage fee related to the scale of investment rather than investment performance. The contract is on a 12-month notice and this gives an incentive to ensure that performance is sustained and the contract continues.

At **Icknield Port**, SM confirmed that the Trust has a 75% holding with the other 25% held by Birmingham City Council who are enthusiastic partners and keen to see the site developed out. The Trust had acquired residual landholding from the Homes & Communities Agency to give greater control over how the site would be developed. As the development is completed, the Trust will sell, take a receipt and reinvest for income but retain an interest in operational facilities – moorings, an operational base, and the headbank to Rotton Park Reservoir. It will seek to ensure that the developer takes on towpath maintenance, litter clearance and other cleaning functions at no cost to the Trust.

In response to questions about the **investment in heritage property**, SM confirmed that at Cropredy we had invested c.£80,000 and that at another property in Cheshire we had invested £250,000 to completely restore it.

The “**slow regeneration**” approach taken at Hartshill will be replicated at other sites where appropriate. SM would be pleased to hear of viable ideas for the development of heritage property, involvement in social enterprises, or other ideas to bring historic properties back into use.

Several participants welcomed the **positive approach taken to heritage property** and the evident understanding of heritage issues. It was recognised that sometimes treatment of safety issues could cause major concerns but overall it was important for the Trust to get positive messages out about the heritage work and help to raise the Trust's reputation. In this regard, it was felt that the Trust's investment in the museum at Ellesmere Port should be publicised to demonstrate commitment to this historic site and to the Museum.

In a question about the **Protector**, Tony Hales confirmed that the Protector's annual report is made to DEFRA and the Trust concerning the performance of investment activity. The Protector has no responsibility for reporting on the condition of waterway assets.

Finally, it was noted that the **Planning and Development teams** have clear procedures for consultation with the community and waterway groups. There was a strong focus on pre-consultation before

development proposals were crystalised with the aim of ensuring that all those who should contribute were properly involved.

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

6. Fundraising and Enterprise (Ruth Ruderham).

RR talked through her presentation explaining that she would cover both voluntary giving and also the work of the Enterprise team led by Julie Sharman.

RR noted that the **face-to-face fundraising** was now progressing well and we are fast approaching 10,000 active Friends, the majority recruited face-to-face by our fundraisers. Typical gifts are £5 per month and rates of retention are good.

We are also developing other propositions to engage, for example, the Naturewatch Guide, which had secured nearly 700 Waterside Watch supporters. The "Readymade Waterway Days Guide" to our top destinations had secured 430 Friends. Both campaigns were estimated to have a reach of about 20m people and will have contributed to more waterway visits.

RR confirmed that the Desmond Foundation had made a major pledge to support England's first **Coast to Coast Canoe Trail**. £1.3m is committed and is expected to engage more than 10,000 young people.

Three major donors are also supporting the **Stratford to Stratford Youth Arts Project** and private donors were funding the installation of **The Line**, a worldclass sculpture, along the Meridian Line in London.

In the **corporate arena**, **M&S** had confirmed a third year of support through their Big Beach Clean-up in April. The **People's Postcode Lottery** have doubled their annual donation to the Trust to £250,000. Our work with **Google** will extend to their cultural institute which will include our digital archives in their virtual museum.

RR also confirmed that **Rolls Royce** is going to support the development of a new education programme – Brindley Brainwaves – to be delivered by youth volunteers to 7-14 year olds, and **Sport England** will fund a 2-year post for a Sports Participation Manager to attract more people to sport on the waterways in the South East.

Trust fundraising is also providing an important income stream with over £200,000 of **new funding** planned for 2015/16. Grants include £51,000 from the **Wolfson Foundation** for the restoration of *Mossdale* at the National Waterways Museum, and £100,000 from the **Esme Fairburn Foundation** to fund environmental volunteering around Manchester and Birmingham.

Turning to the work of the **Enterprise team**, RR confirmed that:

- the team was on target to secure over £11m this year plus a further £2m of funding delivered by others on our waterways
- £10m over 2 years from the **Department for Transport** for towpath improvements in Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester
- **HLF** funding for the Grantham Canal and Gloucester Waterways Museum
- **HLF** funding for the 'Windows on the World' project at the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port

Looking ahead, bids were in the pipeline for:

- the Montgomery Canal
- the Pocklington Canal
- the Guillotine Gate at Carpenters Road Lock, East London
- restoration of the buildings at Finsley Gate in Burnley

We are also bidding for a further £9m of funding from Government for towpath improvements.

In discussion, it was confirmed that the Trust aims to **work with Canal societies** and that in reality competition with these societies had not proved to be a problem.

RR also drew analogies with the Woodland Trust which has a similar offer in terms of free access to its woodlands reserves and this was a stronger model than the National Trust for our fundraising proposition.

It was also confirmed that our **fundraising priorities** were focused on waterways where the Trust has responsibilities or land ownership, for example, the Montgomery and the Pocklington. For other schemes, the Trust was looking to work with canal and waterway societies in providing support and sharing experience.

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

7. **Customer Service (Ian Rogers).**

IR talked through his brief presentation, having joined the Trust some 18 days ago. He was still listening and learning and had been able to meet a number of colleagues at a number of sites in the course of his early induction.

IR was aware that there were some areas of good **customer service** and others where we needed to improve, particularly, he felt, in the context of our communications which could appear abrasive. He also welcomed the work which Dean Davies had completed during his interim role as Head of Customer Service. IR would be building on this to

- develop customer service standards across the Trust
- measure performance
- develop a national framework for visitor moorings
- improve visibility and alignment with the waterway teams on enforcement
- learn from the successful work on winter moorings
- build relationships with key customer groups

He confirmed that he would be pleased to hear from those who wanted to make contact - ian.rogers@canalrivertrust.org.uk

IR then introduced Sean Williams, who had joined the Trust 4 months ago.

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

8. **Welfare Office, Boating – 4 month review (Sean Williams).**

SW talked through a short presentation highlighting his **initial thoughts** about the role and the **issues** faced by more vulnerable boaters including:

- financial capacity
- substance and alcohol abuse
- mental health issues
- age concerns
- knowledge and awareness of local support services, and
- compliance with the Trust's licence conditions

He saw an abundance of local knowledge within the Canal & River Trust teams, as well as a high level of compassion from officers. Signposting to support services was generally already happening but there was no clear defined welfare policy or guidelines and there were different levels of knowledge of support services within each area.

SW saw his role as a **signposting service**, designed to help boaters make informed choices about the support they needed and the partners who could provide support. Canal & River Trust did not have the capacity, nor would it be appropriate to provide support directly.

SW's intention was to

- have oversight of the **welfare policy**
- communicate the policy throughout the organization
- develop engagement with national and local organisations and other agencies including charities and relevant bodies
- to facilitate multi-agency support where needed

Along with the policy, SW would be developing a **toolkit** and **FAQs** to help build our support and engagement with individual boaters and with key partners including:

- local authorities
- health services
- national charities
- boating organisations
- waterway chaplains
- and others who could assist

He would be making himself familiar with the **changes in the welfare services** including the new universal credit. As part of his service, he would challenge decisions and apply pressure where statutory support was not properly provided.

In summary, he saw the need to make sure the policy is worded correctly and that our responsibilities are clear. He recognised that we cover a vast network and the only way to proceed was to ensure that everyone involved has clear guidance. Cases of welfare support and vulnerability would initially be dealt with by local teams but he would be available to provide advice as needed.

In discussion, many participants expressed their delight and support for Sean's appointment and the work he has done in the short period since he joined the Trust and this was reflected in a round of applause. Particular reference was made to the positive comments also on social media.

Reference was also made to the anxiety some felt about the new approach to **boats without a home mooring**. However, it was confirmed that the Trust intended to implement a policy consistent with the law. There was widespread support amongst the members of many of the organisations represented at the NUF for properly implemented policy. Several spoke at length of the support from their membership, the lack of negative comment following the announcement, and their welcome for the initiative taken by the Trust to grasp what had been an issue of concern for some for a considerable period of time.

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

9. Any Other Business.

Keith Ward, Steamboat Association of Great Britain, raised a concern from his members about the availability of slipways for trailboats. RP indicated that he was aware of the need but would welcome examples of where there was a problem and this could then be considered by the Trust.

10. Topics for Future Meetings.

The following topics were suggested by those present, including:

- Tourism
- Volunteering and how we develop potential
- Museums and their future development
- Consistency, communication and consultation
- Towpath users and the policy on closures in connection with stoppage works
- Education provision for new entrant residential boaters

RP thanked everybody for their participation in a very constructive meeting and looked forward to the next meeting.

11. Date of Next Meeting.

Wednesday, 9 September 2015, 1030-1300, The Bond, Birmingham.

The meeting closed at 1300.

Roger Hanbury
Head of Governance Services
10 March 2015