

River Stour Trust

Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Saturday 17 January 2015 at 10.00 am

Those present: Andrew Richardson (AR), Chair, Mike Finch (MF), Gareth Cole (GC), Mick Rogers (MR), Sue Brown (SB), Roger Brown (RB), Brian Cornell (BC), John Baxter (JB)

Jane Rogers (JR) Trust Administrator

Apologies: Emrhys Barrell, Jim Lunn

Observers: Gordon Denney (GD), Pam Johnson, James Parkinson

Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 November 2014 were approved, subject to minor corrections.

Proposed Roger Brown, Seconded Brian Cornell carried unanimously.

After discussion it was agreed that there were no confidential items to be redacted.

Treasurer's Report

This report had been circulated before the meeting. GC commented that the trend line overall was positive, with profit to date on the financial year of £16,651.00. 2014 had seen a lot of expenditure, including purchase of a new boat and new security equipment for both buildings.

The expenditure on the new gates for Flatford Lock had been kept separate from the main expenditure. To cover the cost of the new gates, the Trust had contributed £16,000 from the Special Projects Fund. A VAT refund will be due on the expenditure for the lock, which will be credited to the Special Projects Fund, to seed fund the next lock project. There are also ring-fenced funds for work on Stratford Lock. A legacy of £500 has been put into the Small Projects Fund, to be used towards the cost of the Granary Refurbishment.

It was agreed that a Strategy Meeting be held before the end of March, to make plans for the future, building upon the existing Plan. The Administrator is to arrange a meeting. **Action: JR**

GC reported that he had met with an architect, who was drawing up plans for the Granary refurbishment, and for the car park at the Visitor Education Centre (VEC). There would be no cost for the work linked to the VEC. It is proposed that the existing disabled access ramp be demolished, an external lift installed, and further parking spaces created. The architect brought with him Mark Geddes, who is a flood defence expert, to look at the need for a Flood Defence Topological Survey. Such a survey would be expensive. No-one at the meeting knew the date of construction of the VEC building, so it was further unknown whether the building had been designed to a 20-year, or 100 year flood possibility. It was agreed that GC would look back through old papers to try and find the information. It was further agreed that the ramp was probably 50/50 soil and rubble and that any spoil from removing the ramp would remain on site. Flood drainage consent would be needed because the proposed alteration was within 8 metres of the river edge. **Action: GC**

The work party had filled in the puddle at the entrance gate to the VEC compound, using road planings, which had solved the problem. It was suggested that the area be extended inwards to improve access to the site. Road planings could be laid directly onto the shingled area, but areas of soil/grass would need to be laid down to geo-textile first.

The plans for the Granary refurbishment should be finished by the end of January and the estimated cost of the works would be between £25 and £30k.

Gift Aid – this was the next project which the Treasurer was going to carry out and the money would be put into the Small Project Fund towards the cost of the Granary refurbishment.

It is the aim of the Treasurer to use income to fund the running of the Trust, with major projects being funded from outside sources. It may be necessary to use Trust funds to seed projects, as in the case of the Flatford Lock project.

Cornard Lock Inspection – GC reported that Martin Childs had carried this out, and would not be charging the Trust for this work. (The cost should have been £150.) The lock was passed as fit for purpose. Mr Childs recommended that the Trust not purchase stop planks for the lock, in order to use it as dry dock. He said the cost of a diver to help fit the planks would be in the region of £2500 per day. He also recommended that the Trust buy in stop planks only when needed, as wooden planks would deteriorate in storage and would need a crane to place them because of their weight.

Flatford Lock completion – a plaque was needed to state who had contributed to the project. The administrator had received a quotation for producing this, and it was agreed that this should be followed up. Martin Childs had agreed to provide a suitable block of Ekki timber on which to mount the plaque, which would be placed on Trust land adjacent to the towpath, and set in concrete. **Action: JR**

Fund Raising – Martin Childs is part of a chamber music group, and has offered to organise a concert to raise funds for the Trust. It was proposed to hold this event in Hadleigh URC, which seats 160 people and has excellent acoustics. Hall hire would be £70.00 but it was felt that the Trust could sell at least 100 tickets at £15.00 per head. GC proposed to obtain a licence and run a bar at the event which would bring in additional funds. It was felt that advertising the event would be key and plans would be drawn up once a date had been agreed.

It was suggested that Mr Childs' company be offered Honorary Membership of the Trust in recognition of his services to the Trust. Proposed: MF, Seconded **GC**. The Administrator to write to Mr Childs. **Action: JR**

Flatford Lock

RB reported on a conversation he had had with Mr Derek Tripp, at Flatford on the situation concerning the sluices alongside the weir. There was apparently a difference of opinion between the National Trust, who own the sluices and the Environment Agency about responsibility. Mr Tripp felt it would be difficult to resolve the situation. Currently the lock gates are locked open, to deal with the winter flow, but this is not the best option for the well-being of the gates. Further discussion would be needed between the Trust and the Environment Agency. GC said that he would talk with Ian Bliss of the EA. **Action: GC**

MF commented that the EA had put nothing in writing about use of the lock and the tilting gate, either at Flatford or Dedham. LRG had been in the habit of using the lock at Flatford during the summer without the tilting gate. Concern was expressed about low water levels affecting the drying out of the gates. SB suggested that a letter be sent to the EA stating our intention to close the lock gates at the start of our operating season. The Trust's preferred option would be to keep the gates closed at all times.

GD reported on another conversation with Mr Tripp, who is of the opinion that the tilting gate should not be used, as that area never flooded. The water should not be controlled by the tilting gate, but allowed to overflow into the old Dedham River.

JB suggested that the Trust should talk to Paul Separovic of the EA, who has responsibility for both the Ouse and the Stour.

MF stated that the EA wanted to do away with tilting gates.

GD commented that the lock gates would leak when initially closed, but would settle as the timbers took up water. SB said she believed that the EA had damaged Dedham Lock gates, and worried that they might also damage the gates at Flatford

MR stated that the LRG regularly used to use the gates at Flatford, even if only to exercise them when running the river trips.

AR felt that the Trust should write to the EA stating our intentions with regards to the use of the lock gates. **Action: MF** – to write to Paul Separovic of the EA, copying in the local EA representatives, offering discussion.

GC said that Martin Child was interested in using the article on the work on Flatford Lock in his trade magazine.

Dedham Lock

No movement at the moment on the state of affairs at Dedham Lock. The EA had not been in touch with the Dedham Mill Management Committee.

JB stated that LRG were not concerned with the delays to work at Dedham, to which MR agreed, provided that continuing permission to use Kathleen above the Dedham lock was granted by the EA, and that a safe landing stage could be created in the lock area. No complaints had been received about the use of Kathleen during the past two seasons, but lots of praise for the services offered.

The Council was reminded that, in order to have full permission to use two boats on the lower stretches of the Stour, changes would need to be made to bye laws, and this might result in having to have a Public Enquiry.

GD mentioned the possibility of local opinion forcing us to leave the river, but JB offered reassurance that local connections in favour of our activities were protecting the Trust.

The idea of using Dedham Lock as a landing stage was raised; this would require EA permission.

Stratford Lock

RB stated that he wanted to progress a pick up point at Stratford. JB had had a meeting with the Essex Footpath Group on site; because a bridge is involved in our plans, consultation with the Highways Department would be needed. The Highways Department indicated that a structural survey of the bridge would be needed, because of our plans to cut into the handrails. JB was trying to meet with a Mr Chris Woodruffe to discuss the situation. He will pursue the matter and report back to Council as he felt that this was not a structural matter. **Action: JB**

Having a landing stage at Stratford St Mary would enable the Trust to extend its range on this stretch of the river, increasing the possibility of greater revenue. A waterbus service might become a possibility. Discussion would be needed with Milsoms, if we wanted to run from Dedham up to Stratford. The best site at Stratford would fall on privately owned land, and such a thing would not be possible. GC agreed to keep the landowner informed of our plans. **Action: GC**

Funding is available to carry out work already agreed on the lock site this summer.

GD volunteered to undertake training in the use of a chainsaw; he would be trained in ground work, and in cutting trees of no greater diameter than 15". Cost estimated to be approximately £1200.00.

He further stated that if he failed the course he would pay back the costs, or if he was unable to carry out chain saw work for less than five years, he would re-imburse costs on a pro rata basis. He would expect the Trust to purchase the chainsaw and pay for suitable personal protective equipment.

AR felt that this would also tie in with the push to become the Navigation Authority.

AR welcomed the idea of the Trust having its own Chain Saw Operative.

It was proposed by GC and seconded by BC that the course be booked. Approved unanimously.

Course details to be sent to the Administrator to make an application. **Action: GD and JR**

MR asked about disposal of timber. GC said that eco piles could be created on Trust property.

Versadoc

Some form of raft would be needed to float equipment across to Stratford Lock. Whilst the Trust has been able, in the past, to borrow a raft from Jeff Burroughs, it is not always available, and we would need the raft at the height of the weed cutting season when Mr Burroughs is very busy.

After discussion it was agreed that the Trust should continue to look for second hand Versadoc portions, but if none were available by the time the raft was needed then the Trust should buy new, at an estimated cost of £2700 for 16 square metres. GC was of the opinion that new should be purchased anyway, because of obtaining a warranty.

GC has asked the EA to initiate a Land Registry Search of the Stratford Lock area, in order to confirm who owned which parts of the land.

RB proposed a first meeting of a Work Party for Stratford Lock in April, to prepare to carry out work in July.

Martin Child has yet to produce his proposal for Stratford Lock gate renewal.

SBOC

AR had called an open meeting of the Sudbury Boat Crews for 31 January, as mentioned at the previous Council meeting, to try to revitalise the working practices of the group.

MR said that he would like to encourage more co-operation between the Sudbury and Lower River Group crews.

SB mentioned social events, to keep everyone together. Suggestions were made, including meeting at the Marlborough Head in Dedham, which has a function room, barbecues at both Cattawade and the VEC site, or possibly at the home of one of the LRG crew in Dedham.

Discussion was held about whether John Constable would operate as part of SBOC, or as a separate entity. No conclusion was reached.

BC suggested that David Kirkman be approached to take on training more crew members and skippers for John Constable, and it was agreed that he should do this. **Action: BC**

Lower River Group

Concern has been ongoing about passenger numbers and JB introduced a paper, requested at the previous Council meeting, for discussion. The paper proposed following the MCA Small Passenger Boat Code of Practice.

MF and JB felt that the Trust should follow the Code of Practice. The MCA ruling which came by letter in 2014 stated that the number of passengers should not exceed that which had been tested for.

The EA have so far not enforced the Code on the River Stour but are co-signatories to the MCA Code of Practice and have legal powers to impose conditions.

JB proposed that the Trust should again write to the MCA stating how we proposed to operate and requesting a definitive reply as to acceptance.

JB stated that he had talked with Paul Separovic of the EA about this matter, whose advice was that the Trust should write to the EA, to state its policy and ask that the EA not alter this.

GD asked if the Trust's insurance policy limited the number of passengers which could be carried at any one time, and MF replied that this was not the case.

Public Liability Insurance at Le Talbooth. It was reported that the jetty at Le Talbooth, which is the property of the hotel, was a source of potential hazard, particularly for ladies wearing high heeled shoes. Council was reminded that the Trust has third party liability insurance but, while it has a duty of care, it is unable to accept responsibility for the jetty. **Action: MR** and Ian Whale to talk to Milsom's Hotel Group.

Charters – it was hoped that now that Flatford Lock was working again, that it would be possible to re-start the charters for the RSPB birdwatching groups to go downriver to Cattawade. To this end it would be necessary to carry out some work to the 'jetties' at Cattawade to improve them.

Cattawade Site – further to the works needed on the jetties, work is needed to tidy the site, including the footpaths. A storage unit for equipment is needed. JB agreed to approach our neighbours to see if one of them was willing to provide a space for such a unit. **Action: JB**

AR pointed out the need for signage at the site.

GC said that £750 could be made available for work on the site.

JB requested leaflets to distribute around the Dedham/Flatford area publicising the boat trips. JR to provide. It may be necessary to reprint the leaflet. **Action: JR**

Badges – bankside volunteers at Flatford had requested a Trust badge to wear when on duty, and possibly to stitch to an outer garment. The Administrator was requested to obtain a quotation for 100 and 250 badges, which the Trust would fund. It was, however, agreed, that these would not be sold outside the Trust. **Action: JR**

John Constable

The vessel needs to come out of the water this season to be repainted. Discussion ensued on means to doing this. It was agreed that a crane be employed to lift the boat out from the lock, having removed the lintels, lower it onto shaped sleepers or appropriate boards, where it could be painted, any other remedial work carried out, then re-crane into the water. AR said any use of chainsaws must be by a qualified person. Two part Epoxy paint would be used, to match the original coating, approximate cost of paint £300. A decision on the need for anti-foul paint would be made once the hull has been inspected. Brian Cornell was asked to discuss with Brian Kennell (the original boat builder), the best way to support the hull whilst out of the water. **Action: BC**

Suggestions were made about possible means of support, but it was agreed to defer a decision until the next Council meeting. **Action: MF to add to agenda**

Granary Refurbishment

Decking – it was noted that the decking, which was estimated to be some 12-14 years old, had deteriorated, and had been removed following inspection. Various options for replacement were considered, with approximate costings. It was felt, however, that the posts were in a suitable condition to last for another 10 years.

It was agreed to wait for a sample of non-slip plastic ‘wood’, before a final decision was made.

In the meantime, in order to help with cleaning the remaining decking areas, an offer of a jet washer on long term loan from GC was accepted. **Action: GC to provide equipment**

Flatford Lock Opening Ceremony

AR had not heard from Griff Rhys Jones about availability and agreed to pursue the matter. **Action: AR**

LRG would prefer the Ceremony to be held in May, and this was noted.

It was also proposed that Kathleen was brought to Flatford for the event, but this was felt not to be necessary.

It was pointed out that the oak surfaces at Flatford Lock had become slippery over time. RB offered some aluminium strips which could be screwed on. The matter was to be further discussed.

Main Event Dates for 2015

Quay Open Day - The Quay Lane Trust had proposed an Open Day, involving all the organisations around the Quay Lane area. AR agreed to suggest some dates for the Administrator to consider in line with Granary bookings. A paper by AR would be brought to the next meeting. **Action: AR/JR**

Sudbury to the Sea (S2C) – it was proposed and agreed that this event should take place over the weekend of 12-13 September 2015, and that Sue Brown and Jane Rogers would co-ordinate the planning. **Action: SB/JR**

Teddy Bear Boat rides – 25 May 2015, with children carrying a teddy bear travelling free on boat trips from the Granary, as in the past.

Pirates on the Stour – 31 August 2015, with children dressed as pirates travelling free on boat trips from the Granary, as in the past.

Correspondence

The Trust's main insurance policy arranged through the IWA, had been renewed.

Administrator's Report

This had been circulated before the meeting. The following items were agreed

Granary Flooring – it was agreed that refinishing was necessary. **Action: JR to obtain quotes**

Beam Cleaning – it was agreed that this could be a job for a Work Party. **Action: BC**

Rotary Project for Schools – it was agreed that the Trust could participate. **Action: JR**

JR said that several padlocks were sticking and needed maintenance.

S2C Fee – it was agreed to leave the fee at £15.00 per craft for 2015, but to review the price for the 2016 event.

Advertising – AboutMyArea was considered and more information about circulation was requested before a decision was made. **Action: JR**

There was discussion about publicity in the local parish newsletters, on Colchester Borough Council's website, as well as the National Trust website. It was agreed that a Publicity Committee was needed to promote the Trust.

Membership Report

The report, as circulated was approved. The Administrator was asked to follow up on one member, who had not paid his subscription, but was occupying a mooring space. Membership of the Trust is a pre-requisite for using our moorage areas.

Date of next meeting

After discussion, it was agreed that more business was coming to Council for discussion, causing the meetings to become lengthy. It was agreed that the Council meet on a monthly basis in future, on the third Thursday of each month, at the VEC, starting at 6.00pm. The next meeting is on 19th Feb.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.15 pm