

River Stour Trust Council

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13 August 2015

Those present: Andrew Richardson (AR) in the chair, Mike Finch (MF), Gareth Cole (GC), James Lunn (JL), Mick Rogers (MR), Roger Brown (RB), Sue Brown (SB), Gordon Denny; Jane Rogers (JR, Trust Administrator, taking notes)

Apologies: Emrhys Barrell

Observers: James Parkinson, Pam Johnson, Ian Whale

Resignation: John Baxter had resigned from Council. Council expressed its regret at his decision and their thanks for his contributions whilst a trustee. Mr Baxter remains a member of the Trust.

GD made a statement on the use of email as a means of communication, and the need for confidentiality. The Trust has a policy regarding etiquette whilst using email, and the Administrator was asked to circulate this document to Trustees. Action: JR

Identification of Confidential Business on the agenda – none

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 June 2015

The correct version of the Minutes having been identified, these were proposed for acceptance by MF, seconded by GC. RB abstained, but the Minutes were approved by the remainder of the Trustees present.

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 2 July 2015

After amending some minor points, the acceptance of the Minutes was proposed by MR, seconded by JL and approved unanimously.

Some items in the Minutes were identified as confidential, and redacted from the Minutes to be published on line. The redacted version was proposed by JL, seconded by SB, and approved unanimously.

Matters arising from Minutes, not already on the agenda – none

Treasurer's Report – already circulated.

Plans for the Granary refurbishment were being drawn up; GC would speak to the architect in the next few days to check progress. Implications of the costs of repairing Cornard Lock on the Trust's

funds were discussed. Martin Childs Ltd had given us a discount on the costs of repair. Concern about the price were voiced by RB. It was noted that GC, MF and AR had discussed the price, and given the need to repair the lock quickly, had agreed the price.

A further grant of £5,000 was available for the Granary refurbishment, provided that GC remained as Treasurer. GC had agreed to this condition.

Without paying for the repair to Cornard Lock, the profits to date for this financial year were around £20,000.

Visitor and Education Centre – Flood Defence Consent had been received for the planned removal of the access ramp and GC would talk to the architect again about the plans for this work.

Section 106 money for boat purchase – GC reported that no progress had been made.

Section 106 money for the bridge on the footpath – Babergh Council were now involved, the Angling Society concerned had reformed their committee and things were now looking more hopeful.

Lock handles for Flatford Lock – Martin Childs Ltd had been asked for more lock handles; these had been chased but Martin Childs was on holiday. When asked, Ian Whale reported that one paddle on Flatford Lock was still much stiffer than the others. This would be followed up. RB had made an additional handle which IW would take to Flatford.

Pension for Administrator – GC and MF were looking into this and would consult a local financial advisor. The cleaner, who is also employed by the Trust, may also be eligible for a pension scheme, and this would be investigated. GD suggested an alternative adviser and also mentioned a Government Scheme. This would be kept in mind when agreeing a suitable scheme. Action: MF and GC

Discussion followed on the need for further administrative support, and the question was raised as to whether the Trust should continue to grow, or should wind back. AR requested a profile for a part-time worker. GC agreed to look at the position at the end of the financial year. GD questioned the need for a pension for a part-time worker.

Thanks were expressed to JL for his support over the current busy period.

Granary pricing for 2016-2017. It was agreed this would be looked at after S2C as the office was too busy currently to carry out the appropriate research.

Commission from Jam Tartz was still outstanding, and the Administrator was asked to contact the company again, and report back to GC. Action: JR

AR stated that if the situation was not resolved within one month, the Trust should consider finding an alternative company to manage the bar.

Sudbury to the Sea

Sweepers – AR passed the names of two volunteers to SB; it was also suggested that people on the waiting list should be looked at, provided they had sufficient experience.

AR also has a photographer, who wishes to come and take action shots at Langham Flumes.

AR would also arrange to collect the keys for the Scout Hall from the contact at Sudbury Office Supplies. Action: AR

The alterations to the outside lights on the Granary were still outstanding. Action: JR to chase

Access to the picnic site at Cattawade for the event – Ian Whale reported that the Lower River Group had commissioned a gate for the site, but as they were not happy with the design it had been referred back to the designer. A permanent gate will need planning permission.

It was noted that Essex and Suffolk Water had again given the Trust permission to use their land adjacent to the picnic site as car parking space for the event. RB agreed to do some work to this area, and it was agreed to ask the contractor who cuts the picnic site, to mow the car park area as a one-off in the week preceding the event. It had been suggested that parking bays were marked out with spray paint in an attempt to control and maximise the use of the space available. Action: RB and Ian Whale

The event was now fully booked, and SB reported that plans were falling into place, although there was still a need for more volunteers. A meeting for all members of the crew would be held before the event.

Concern was expressed about low water levels at Stratford St Mary, and it was agreed to keep this under observation.

Boat Operations Manager

Following consideration of several possible candidates, AR announced that JL had agreed to take on this role for a probationary period of 18 months. This was proposed by AR, seconded by SB and approved unanimously.

Stratford St Mary Lock

Work had been ongoing on site. It was reported that the Versdock raft had proved very effective and had been capable of moving heavier equipment than had been anticipated. The current work programme would be completed before S2C. All that would remain to be done would be to empty the lock chamber ready for new gates to be fitted.

RB stated that he wanted to talk to Martin Childs about the next phase of work, and GC suggested that a site visit be planned, so that future plans could be discussed.

The existing plug to the channel had to be reinstated during work, and stop planks would be needed when emptying the lock chamber.

It was noted that the Tolhurst family owned the land on one side of the lock, right up to the edge of the lock, but not into the middle of the channel as was usual. It was agreed that a further meeting with that family or its representative would be needed to explain what the Trust was trying to do, and what would be needed in the way of co-operation from them.

GC offered to meet with Mrs Tolhurst. It was also noted that Andrew Sheldon and Nick Temple had spoken with the Tolhurst family in the past, and John Baxter had met with Mr Julian Tolhurst earlier in 2015.

It was noted that it would be important to ensure access to work on the installation of new gates and for future use and maintenance of the lock.

GD reported on a conversation he had had with Kevin Packard of Essex and Suffolk Water about their plans for refurbishment of their plant at the lock site. Plans had been put back from January 2017 to mid-summer 2017. Section 106 money was mentioned, and GD agreed to follow this up, keeping GC informed. Mr Packard expressed the need for his company to contribute to the community.

It was also noted that many of the bodies concerned with Dedham Vale were keen to spread the visitor load further along the valley to ease the load on Dedham and Flatford. Having suitable landing stages and the lock at Stratford would contribute to this aim.

JL contributed information about the history of this part of the river, saying that barges had been running here as late as 1938, with markings on the bollards showing signs of usage. SB agreed to ask a Mr Carter for his memories. JL offered to investigate the route of the old tow path.

Dedham Lock – no progress to report. It was agreed to put this project on hold for the present, and await further developments from Dedham Mill Management Committee and the Environment Agency.

Ian Whale expressed concern that the lock was deteriorating and would become a drainage issue. It was noted that, historically, the developers of the Dedham Mill site claimed ownership of the lock site, but did nothing about maintaining the structure. Further concern was expressed at EA plans to remove the tilting gate within the lock chamber.

SB suggested that the Trust should write to the residents of the Mill, but MF and GD thought this might prove counter-productive.

The Lower River Group reported a lot of local support from Dedham residents for their activities. They felt that if the opportunity to work on the lock was lost for 2016, it would be important to pursue this for 2017. The option of a floating dock with possible access had been mentioned.

MF said that he would write again to DMMC, expressing regret at the breakdown in communication, and stating that the Trust would be ready to talk again whenever the occasion would arise. It was felt that the real issues lay between the Environment Agency and DMMC. It was felt that the dust should be allowed to settle before making approaches through known contacts. Dedham AONB might be an ally in resolving the situation.

MF suggested that we apply to English Heritage to make concrete locks listed building, and an inconclusive discussion followed.

Flatford Lock – it was reported that Tim McGregor of the National Trust had passed on the issues concerning the flashes on top of the sluices at the Mill. The EA had declared the sluices inoperable but it was understood that four sluices were still working. It was noted that the EA required a safety system be put in place to allow their operatives to work on the sluices, but the National Trust had not agreed to this.

It was further reported that because of the high water levels at Flatford, Lower River Group had been running some water off.

The temporary repair to the bank by the bridge, carried out by the EA before the official opening of the lock in October 2015, had failed.

Sudbury Boat Operations Committee – no meetings since their July session.

It was reported that there had been an incident at The Henny Swan during a Saturday visit by all four boats, which had been reported in an adverse manner on Trip Advisor. Following a report from the administrator and a discussion the council approved a statement to be posted on Trip Advisor.

There had been an increase in canoe traffic recently. JL had spoken to a new company, River Explorer, who were hiring out canoes, to ask them to explain the mooring position at the Henny Swan. JL also agreed to speak with the owners of the Swan, about renewing the sign advising mooring rights on the jetty there. It was agreed that a sign maker be contacted to produce the new sign. Action: JL

Lower River Group

MR reported that life had been interesting recently. Trusty had run out of power whilst down at Flatford, but the real cause had yet to be determined. However measures had been taken the boat was back in action. MF and MR were to look into replacing the battery master switches. A new ignition switch was also available.

A crew from Sky Arts had chartered Trusty to film the winner of a competition as she viewed the river prior to creating a painting.

In conjunction with the Field Study Centre, LRG has also run a series of 'nature' trips towards Cattawade.

Eight new skippers had qualified in 2015.

Correspondence

Following an incident near Lady Island earlier in the summer, a complaint had been received about the conduct of one of our boat crew members. MF had replied with comments about fishing rights, and abuse of swans, which prompted a further letter. MF agreed to reply, reminding the correspondent about rules of the river, whilst not condoning in any way, abuse of animals.

A letter had been received from Sudbury Rowing Club, who would like to extend their jetty. AR had asked them to put poles into the channel to mark the area required, but this had yet to be done. It is unlikely to cause the Trust any problems.

The Gipping Trust had approached the Trust for advice on running trip boats. JL had replied to them offering support and advice. He and Tim Smith were happy to look after this project. Action: JL

The Canal and River Trust had sent an invitation to their Annual Meeting, to be held in London on 21 September. MF agreed that he would attend on behalf of the Trust; AR said that if he was available, he, too, would attend.

Administrator's Report

S2C administration was going well, with all places allocated, and loose ends being tied up. Catherine Burrows had undertaken much of this work, prior to her return to work on 17 August.

The First Henny Swan Supper Cruise had taken place, with no adverse reports. Two further trips were planned during August.

The tearoom was experiencing mixed fortunes at present due to adverse weather conditions.

The administrator reported that although the workload was still high, with the return of Catherine very shortly, things would improve and everything should be up to date before she hands over fully to Catherine by the end of September.

The Chairman expressed the thanks of the Trust to Jane for her work during her period of office as administrator.

Membership

The Membership Report was circulated. MF proposed acceptance, seconded by GC, and the proposal was carried unanimously.

Any Other Business

Appointment of new Boat Operations Manager – with the appointment of Jim Lunn to the post, it was agreed that a formal letter of thanks be sent to Brian Cornell, expressing appreciation of his work for the Trust in that role.

It was agreed that a formal announcement of the new appointment be sent out to all boat crew members. Action: JR

Fire Extinguishers – SAS had condemned some of the fire extinguishers in the two buildings and had yet to quote for replacements. Action: JR to chase.

It was agreed to explore the possibility of foam filled extinguishers suitable for use on electrical equipment being obtained for the boats. Action: AR

Date of next meeting: Thursday 10 September, 7.00 pm at the VEC.