

River Stour Trust

Meeting of the Council held on Sunday 15 March 2015, at the Visitor & Education Centre, Great Cornard, at 10.00 am

Those present: Andrew Richardson (Chairman, AR), Mike Finch (MF), Gareth Cole (G) Roger Brown (RB), Susan Brown (SB), Jim Lunn (JL), Mick Rogers (MR), Emrhys Barrell (EB, via Skype), John Baxter (JB), Jane Rogers (Administrator, JR)

1 - Apologies were received from Brian Cornell.

2 - Identification of confidential business – none.
Several items were added to the published agenda.

3 – Minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2015
With one spelling correction, these were accepted as a true record of the meeting.
Proposed: GC, seconded JL, unanimously accepted.

It was agreed that these Minutes contained no confidential items and could be published in their entirety.

4 – Matters arising from these Minutes, not covered by the agenda – none.

5 - Treasurer's Report

This had been previously circulated. GC apologised that not all figures were available as the book keeper had been engaged on preparations for the VAT inspection. This had passed satisfactorily with an agreement reached about reclaimable VAT on work carried out by the Trust and a substantial claim had been made successfully. MF circulated a document about VAT and Charities which helped to explain our position. GC said that we would have to accept the ruling that we could only reclaim 80% of the VAT spent in rebuilding locks. MF pointed out that our policy of free use of our structures on the river would have to change if we wanted to claim the full 100%.

Discussion followed about who used the river and could be asked to contribute towards the cost of maintaining the locks and it was agreed that the matter would be referred to the Annual General Meeting of the Trust. GC stated that he did not believe the Trust should charge for use of the locks. SB reminded Council of the existence of a Lock Maintenance Fund, to which contributions could be added from those paying to use the locks.

MF quoted an earlier decision of Council that River Stour Boating CIC would be given training in the working of the new lock gates at Flatford so that they could take parties from Flatford to Cattawade.

The Accountants had provided a spreadsheet for the book-keeper to make it simpler to sort out what percentage of VAT could be claimed back for what, which promised to be very helpful.

The final payment of £2000 had been received from Veolia, and would be lodged in the Special Projects Account. This money would now be allocated to the purchase of a Versadoc Raft.

JL thanked the Treasurer for all his hard work in obtaining the grants for Flatford Lock, and for working with the VAT inspectors to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

6 – Future of EA Navigations

EB reported that he taken an opportunity to talk with John Dodwell, a senior member of the Canal & River Trust (CRT), to put in motion our approach to the CRT about the role of the Trust in the future

of the River Stour. Mr Dodwell knows the river and of the Trust's early work in the restoration of the Granary, but was not aware of the work done at Great Cornard, Dedham and Flatford. He had forwarded information to the CEO of the CRT, Richard Parry, but no response had been received yet. EB also mentioned that he needed to track down another team within the CRT and would report progress on this.

EB presented a paper to Council (copy attached to these Minutes), on subjects the Trust should include in its representation to CRT, to which items were added as follows:

Item 2 – tree cutting

Income from boat licences - licensing would need to be enforced

Portages and legal rights of access to them

Classification of structures into either navigation or flood defences; the ownership of such structures

Income received from various water authorities arising from the sourcing of drinking water from the river, at Wormingford (water for Braintree), Langham, Stratford Mary, |Brantham and Cattawade (all providing water to Abberton Reservoir), and at Hanningfield, upstream of the head of navigation for water for SE Essex. There are also links to a pipeline from the Great Ouse – Denver to Kirtling Green, near Newmarket. It was pointed out that none of the water from the Stour goes out to sea. It was suggested that the fee from Anglian Water et al might be in the region of £2m.

Importance of the tourist attraction to the area. Dedham Vale AONB estimate some 750,000 visitors arrive each year to view the area around Dedham and Flatford, where Constable, Munnings, Gainsborough painted; this figure was approximately 6% of visitors CRT thought visited the Canals and River towpaths of the country.

It was agreed that amendments to the byelaws governing use of the river was key to the whole process.

MF pointed out that the current byelaws would allow Trusty II or a similar replacement to operate anywhere on the river.

GC pointed out the short terms aims of the Trust were the locks at Stratford St Mary and Dedham. Medium terms aims were added in the form of opening up the stretch of river between Bures, Henny and Nayland.

The long term aim was reiterated as the eventual opening up of the length of the navigation to boats.

EB suggested that any meeting with the CRT should include Simon Salem, their director of marketing and communications, as the Stour Valley is a very marketable asset.

7a – Strategy Meeting – 8 March 2015

GC circulated a report based on conclusions reached at the Strategy meeting. It was agreed that this document, would form a paper for discussion and approval at the Annual General Meeting. AR stressed the need to be seen to be open about our plans and decisions.

7b – Flatford Lock Re-opening

AR reported that he had received no response from Griff Rhys Jones about availability, so it was agreed that a date be fixed in early May, subject to the availability of the Field Study Centre at Flatford, for either a mid-week day or a weekend. The Council would then consider who else might be invited to perform the opening ceremony.

7c – Annual General Meeting

The AGM will take place at The Granary, on Wednesday 24 June, at 7.00 p.m. The administrator was asked to arrange for the bar to be open. **Action: JR**

8 – Lighter inspection and repainting

It was planned to lift John Constable out of the water during the last two weeks in May, subject to weather conditions, when an inspection of the hull could confirm whether or not anti-foul paint had been used on the hull, in addition to the epoxy tar known to be there.

Discussion followed on which timbers to buy to make the supports for the boat while she was out of the water. Research was to be done and prices brought to the Council meeting in April. **Action: RB, MF**

9 – Dedham Lock Refurbishment

The EA still had to meet with Dedham Mill Management Committee. MF reported that he had written to Paul Separovic about the use of the tilting gates, hoping to involve the EA's navigation department in the debate, but the letter had been passed on to the flood defence department who want to call another meeting about the matter. This has yet to be arranged. It was noted that the EA had planned to remove the tilting gates at Flatford this year.

10 – Stratford St Mary Lock

RB reported some good news – the EA had confirmed in writing to Gordon Denney that material removed from the lock chamber could be used along the banks to complete our consented works.al for this.

Three working days had taken place, on two of which 11 volunteers were present, and a further day on which four volunteers were present. Progress was made in clearing brambles and other scrub from the site, and disposing of waste material. Chicken wire on the walkways was also removed. Pipes on the site would be removed once a boat trailer was available to carry them.

A former member of the Trust had asked to borrow a boat trailer to move material to Felixstowe. After discussion it was agreed that this should not be permitted, because of the risks involved in damaging our property and the administrator was asked to write to the person concerned about this. **Action: JR**

11a – SBOC

The SBOC meeting will take place on Saturday 21 March at the VEC at 10.00 am.

Boat launching is scheduled for Friday 20 March, subject to the availability of Pat Corps and his vehicle to tow the trailers.

JL had volunteered to close off the Quay Lane car park early on Friday morning and the administrator was asked to notify the Quay Lane Trust accordingly. **Action: JL and JR**

11b – LRG

Two meetings had been held, a committee meeting on 4 March, and a pre-season get together on 5 March. Discussions were held concerning programmes, the updating of training programmes and the state of the pathway at Flatford. Damage had been caused by a number of EA vehicles regularly going up and down the pathway. There was now a deep drop at one end of the bridge, making it inaccessible for wheel chair users. It was understood that there was a weight limit on the size of vehicle using the bridge. It was agreed that MF would write to the EA at Chelmsford concerning this matter. It was also noted that this damage had occurred in February and was not related to any of the work carried out in the replacement of the lock gates in October 2014. **Action: MF**

12 – Granary Refurbishment and decking

It was noted that the decking along the jetty had been replaced by the working party, and MF was going to add rubber fendering to the edges. **Action: MF**

The work party list of tasks now included:

Work on Henny Jetty

Work on FJ's jetty at The Granary

Renovation of the walkway along the edge of the Granary decking

Work on the jetty upstream of the lock at Gt Cornard

It was noted that the EA had closed the portage point at the lock at Gt Cornard, which was putting extra load on the Trust's jetties.

It was suggested that the Stratford St Mary work party could do some work at Henny and Cornard. SB was asked to approach them. **Action: SB**

Granary Kitchen and Toilets refurbishment

GC was to contact the architect in the next few days to discuss modifications to the plans. He would also take the opportunity to progress plans for the extension to the car parking area at the VEC.

Action: GC

13 – Canoe Racks

The canoe which was found outside the compound fence had now been claimed by a member. Attempting to replace it on the rack highlighted the inadequate size of the racks for the number of canoes being stored there, and on the racks at The Granary. A further complication was the risk involved in using the top level of racking as this was considered unsafe in Health and Safety terms. It was agreed that there was a need to rebuild the racking to reflect these issues. It may be possible to locate extra racking in front of the veranda at the VEC and on the bank alongside JC's jetty at The Granary. Storage possibilities under the VEC building were discussed but clarification was needed about the implications of this in relation to flood safety. RB offered to research this. **Action: RB**

It was agreed that a derelict canoe which had been in store at the VEC for some years, and which had never been claimed, would be disposed of. **Action: JL and MF**

It was also agreed that the administrator would write again to the owner of the Windermere skiff, which was stored on the bank at the VEC and which was deteriorating badly, to request that he take action about it. A time limit for this action was suggested. **Action: JR**

14 – Correspondence

MF reported that no reply had been received to his letter to Irvan Forbes of the EA concerning the use of Kathleen on the river between Dedham and Stratford St Mary. It was agreed that MF would try to contact someone else at the EA to obtain a response; season; he was asked to mention that the Trust had received no adverse comments about the boat being on the river. **Action: MF**

15 – Administrator's Report

This had been circulated prior to the meeting. JR reported that the broken windows in the Granary had been repaired; that the new telephones had been installed at the VEC and were working well; that Sudbury on Show had been manned by a team of volunteers led by AR and had recruited a volunteer to the lock working party. A meeting had been held with the tearoom volunteers and everything was in place ready to open at Easter. The tearoom volunteers were also willing to help with catering for John Constable cruises later in the season. A summary of Granary viewing for the year to date was also submitted.

Members of the Trust had been invited to attend the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Forum Conference on 25 June. One of the afternoon activities on offer was a trip on John Constable between the VEC and Henny, with a cream tea served at the VEC.

16 – Membership Report

Martin Childs having accepted the invitation for his company to become an Honorary Corporate Member, the Council approved this membership and accepted the report on renewals and cancellations.

17 – Any Other Business

A – Sudbury Canoe Club had asked to use the toilet facilities at The Granary during their weekly meetings on the river. It was agreed that the facilities at the VEC could be made available to them, but that use of the Granary was precluded by the number of exclusive bookings made there. The Administrator was asked to write to the Canoe Club with this decision. **Action: JR**

B – Terms and Conditions for use of the Granary and the VEC. It had been noted that Clause 18 of the current terms and conditions for both venues precluded the use of portable oil and gas cookers and hog roasts. As the Trust had several times used a barbecue at the VEC and had given hirers permission to use hog roast equipment, and implicit consent to the use of portable stoves, it was agreed that it was necessary to review the T&Cs, to reflect this. AR agreed to undertake this. In the interim one hirer was asked to produce his own risk assessment regarding the use of portable stoves and was restricted in their use, which had to be a minimum of three metres from the building.

Action: AR

C – Purchase of Versadoc

RB queried some of the figures in EB's document concerning the amount of Versadoc cubes needed. This having been resolved, it was agreed that EB should purchase 16 sq metres using the double-size cubes, together with a tool kit and four anchor points. Stanchions were still being investigated.

Action: EB

D – Foamex boards for Francis J

The administrator circulated prices for Foamex boards for FJ, and EB offered to find alternative prices as these seemed rather high. **Action JR and EB**

E – Car stickers

Various designs were circulated for each member to mark their choice and it was agreed that the majority decision would be adopted and ordered. **Action: JR**

F – Visit from members of St Ives Council

St Ives Council are planning to restore their old Riverport and were interested in John Constable. Their visit was interesting and they would like to take JC up to St Ives for a short season to put her on show, and to use her to demonstrate what could be gained from a restoration of their own. This was thought unlikely due to the cost.

G – Weedcutting at Nayland

It was agreed to give the people at Nayland who were interested in weed cutting on their stretch of the river, contact details for Green-Blue Marine (Jeff Burroughs) who does our cutting.

H – Distribution of Boat Trip Leaflets by LRG

LRG planned to distribute leaflets to as many pubs along the river as possible and wanted pos boxes for this purpose. The administrator was asked to research this. **Action: JR**

I – Website Links

JB reported that LRG were making contact with the National Trust, Dedham Parish Council and others to arrange website links. He was asked to liaise with Catherine Burrows, our webmaster about this.

18 – Date of next meeting

Wednesday, 22 April 2015, at 7.00 pm at the Visitor & Education Centre, Great Cornard.