

RST Council

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 10 December 2015 at The VEC, Great Cornard, at 7.00 pm

Those present: Andrew Richardson (AR, in the Chair), Mike Finch (MF), Jim Lunn (JL), Mick Rogers (MR), Gordon Denny (GD), Mike Harrington-Spier (MHS), Roger Brown (RB), Susan Brown (SB), Emrhys Barrell (EB, via Skype); Jane Rogers taking notes

Apologies for absence: Catherine Burrows (CB, Administrator)

Observers: John Morris (JM), Ian Whale (IW), Pam Johnson (PJ), James Parkinson (JP)

### **Identification of Confidential Business - Life Memberships**

#### **Minutes of meeting held on 12 November 2015**

These were accepted as a correct record of the meeting. Proposed: MF, seconded MR, approved unanimously

It was agreed that these Minutes could be posted on the website, as recorded.

#### **Matters arising from those Minutes, not covered by the agenda for this meeting – none**

#### **Treasurer's Report – MF**

Bank balances were healthy at present, though it was recognised that this was a quiet period in terms of income. Insurances were due to be paid in January 2016. Current balances total approximately £66,000, but this does not show outstanding creditors and debtors.

The position of Treasurer has not yet been filled, and an urgent appeal is to be sent out as soon as possible. **Action: MF, with CB**

#### **Granary Refurbishment**

It was agreed that AR should meet with CB early in the New Year, to look at the existing plans and to make suggestions for amendments, such as the need for a separate, private, area for the purpose of weddings, where an objection is raised to the ceremony taking place.

SB asked about the possibility of the cellar being utilised for storage space and JL agreed to inspect the cellar's current state. MF said the cellar was damp. **Action: JL**

MHS suggested that a list of modifications to the plan be created and circulated to all members of Council for consideration; it was agreed that this should be done after the meeting of the tea room team in January.

## **Flatford Lock**

A meeting had been called by AONB to discuss the current situation, attended by MF, but no clear actions resulted. The National Trust and the Field Study Council had not removed the flashers on the top of the sluices at Flatford Mill; the EA had not enforced their request for this to be done; the FSC said the sluices were inoperable and no-one has taken responsibility for their repair, and the landowner of the field below the bridge appears unwilling to repair his bank to help prevent the field from flooding. The EA noted that very little water had been pumped from the Ouse to the Stour over the summer of 2015 because of the high levels of water in the Stour this year.

The AONB were very concerned about the current position because of the importance of the Valley, the number of tourist visitors, and the effect that anticipated major changes would have on the local economy.

JM reported that the responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the weir and sluices was owned by the FSC in the terms of their lease with the National Trust.

The EA have stated that it is their intention to stop operating the tilting gate during Autumn 2016, and want the lock gates to remain open over winter 2015-16. After the cessation of the tilting gates, the lock gates will be closed during the winter, to prevent the river from draining down. It was pointed out to the landowner and the FSC that it was not an option to leave the gates open during the winter for this reason, and to prevent worse flooding. JL pointed out that this, and the tilting gate at Dedham lock were the last two such gates in place in the country, and the controls for these had now been isolated. JM stated that in a flood situation, Willy Lott's cottage would be the first area in that locality to be flooded.

It was further noted that leaving the gates open would destroy the fishing in the river, and that the Archimedes screw at the FSC would not be operable, because there would be insufficient water in the river.

RB reported that the EA were passing responsibility for the pumps in this area to Essex and Suffolk Water

The question of the effect of flooding on the ability to navigate the river was raised. It was thought that eventually the river would change its course, and become un-navigable because of low water levels.

GD reported on an investigation by the Ramblers' Association on the condition of the footpath between Dedham and Flatford, and the responsibility of its maintenance, which was the responsibility of Suffolk County Council. Any flood damage would probably affect the footpath's condition.

**Dedham Lock** – no progress

## **Stratford St Mary Lock**

GD reported correspondence with the EA on the subject of a rotting tree stump alongside the lock site, which was causing damage to the bank. The EA had stated that there was no objection to the removal of the stump, but the restoration of the bank would have to be done to their specification. It was noted that the tree was not on RST property. It was agreed that GD would draft a letter for

MF to sign on behalf of the Trust, to remind the EA and Essex & Suffolk Water of the issue, and to ask them to resolve it.

### **SBOC Report**

MHS reported that a level of confusion still existed within SBOC about who has responsibility for what and when, and he said that the minutes of 16 Nov were not completely accurate. Discussion ensued.

It was noted that of some sixty items on the proposed maintenance schedule for the boats at Sudbury, only two had been questioned by Council.

It was formally proposed by EB, seconded by SB, that the maintenance schedule go ahead with the exception of the refurbishment of Francis J's topsides, and the painting of her hull.

This was accepted unanimously.

MF had produced a paper, circulated before the meeting, about the issue of FJ's refurbishment and the testing of her for stability, number of passengers. He was thanked for his work and for the recommendations contained in his report.

It was agreed that the refurbishment of FJ should be considered in the light of the results of stability tests, and the need to reduce the weight of the superstructure and the seating which would improve the stability of the craft. MF offered to go to the next SBOC meeting in January to present his paper. AR also agreed to attend that meeting.

It was noted that, as the Granary refurbishment had been delayed for twelve months, the financial position of the Trust had changed, and that this would have an impact on spending in the early part of 2016.

It was reported that the larger petrol storage container had been ordered for the Granary compound, the old batteries had been sold and that the shed had been tidied.

It was further reported that several crew lifejackets appeared to be missing and that SBOC crew members should be asked to check to see if they had inadvertently taken these home. JL requested that the Trust purchase some new crew lifejackets as some had reached the point of needing replacement, and that some recharging devices also be obtained. Agreed that JL and EB would liaise on this matter. **Action: JL and EB**

MHS wondered if asking crew for a deposit on their lifejackets would be a good idea. It was noted that the Trust had a responsibility for the provision of safety equipment and that a deposit should not be requested.

MF requested that two items be added to the Maintenance Schedule at Sudbury: the replacement of the outboard mounting board on FJ, which had deteriorated badly over the last season, and the replacement of the cutlass bearing on Rosette (to be done while she was out of the water over the winter). These were both agreed.

GD stated that the Trust should have a full record of all boat testing, including among other things, calculation sheets and photographs, and conclusions concerning the number of passengers and crew each vessel can carry, so that the Trust could be shown to be exercising a duty of care and due

diligence in the case of any incidents. It was agreed that this should be created and that all boats should be tested at the start of the 2016 season. **Action: JL**

### **Lower River Group**

In his capacity as the new Chairman of the Lower River Group, John Morris presented a paper, drawn up by IW, on the future operations of Kathleen on the lower river. Copies were circulated to Council showing options which were discussed.

At a cost of £2500.00 LRG could implement proposals for a floating dock at Stratford St Mary, which would facilitate the wedding service offered to Le Talbooth, plus non-landing trips between Stratford St Mary and Dedham, linked to the pubs in Stratford St Mary. Support for these proposals had been received from both Stratford St Mary and Dedham Parish Councils, and the local businesses in Stratford St Mary. Initial calculations had shown that the money could be recovered in possibly as few as 19 trips during summer 2016. It had been proposed that the round trips would be charged at £15.00 per head for an eighty minute trip. It was proposed by MR, seconded by SB, that £2500.00 be allocated to LRG to carry out their proposal, and accepted unanimously.

Queried by GD, JM pointed out that a longer term aim was to improve access to the canoe portage point at Dedham, with the ultimate aim to be able to pick up and land passengers at Dedham, but this would need very careful planning and consideration.

MF reminded Council that the permission to run a second boat on the lower river was dependent on approval by the EA, renewed annually. So far no objections had been raised.

EB commented that the service proposed between Stratford St Mary and Dedham was important in terms of our public profile and Council should consider the money as an investment towards this.

It was also suggested that LRG look at purchasing Versadock pontoons, as opposed to EasyDock, as the Trust already owned some Versadock material, and would prefer to continue with this for the sake of compatibility.

Thanks were expressed to LRG for the work that had been done to produce an excellent report.

MR proposed a Vote of Thanks to Ian Whale, on his retirement as Chairman of the Lower River Group, for all the hard work he had contributed to the Trust. This was accepted unanimously, and MF was asked to put this into writing. **Action: MF**

MR reported on the Working Party activities, in carrying out maintenance on both Kathleen and Trusty II, which was going well. Both boats were now stored in a barn at Langham, belonging to Jax Horswill, a member of LRG, and secretary to their committee.

The controllers from Kathleen, and those from Rosette had been collected by MF, and it was agreed that they be sent to Ian Rutter for amendment. The battery charger from Trusty, which was not working, would also be sent, together with that from Edwardian Lady, which needs reprogramming to work with the gel batteries to be supplied next spring.

### **Administration Report**

This had been circulated prior to the meeting, and was accepted. It was agreed that the Administrator could carry forward five days of holiday into 2016.

## **Membership Report**

This had also been circulated before the meeting. An amendment was made to reflect a payment received against an administration cancellation, and the report was proposed for acceptance by MF, seconded by JL. It was unanimously accepted.

### **Life Memberships**

The following Honorary Life Memberships were proposed

Ian Rutter, for his work on the electronics of the Trust fleet, which has been invaluable

Proposed MF, seconded EB – approved unanimously

John Morton, for his enormous contribution to the Trust, not only as a crew member, but as a member of numerous work parties, and a volunteer at many of the fund and profile raising events over a prolonged period

Proposed JL, seconded SB – approved unanimously

John Mills, for his enormous contribution to the Trust, not only as a crew member, but as a member of numerous work parties, and a volunteer at many of the fund and profile raising events over a prolonged period

Proposed JL, seconded SB – approved unanimously

Alan Davison, for his work for the Trust as both Company Secretary and Treasurer in the past, often in difficult circumstances, and for his ongoing support of the work of the Trust

Proposed MF, seconded JL – approved unanimously

MHS queried the difference between an Honorary Life Member and a Vice-President, and it was defined as an expression of thanks for a major contribution from a member for a Life Membership, and recognition of the contribution a Vice-President could make to the Trust both on appointment and in the future.

It was suggested that Honorary Life Members would receive a framed certificate, stating the reason for the award. It was suggested that JL produce the initial wording, which the Administrator (or JR) would then generate into the appropriate format. Presentations would be made at appropriate moments, and an announcement posted on line and in Lock Lintel. **Action: JL, CB and JR**

EB suggested an Honours Board would be appropriate but no decision was reached.

**Any Other Business – None**

### **Date and Time of next meeting**

Thursday 14 January 2016, at The VEC, at 7.00 pm.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.35 pm