

River Stour Trust

Minutes of the Council held on Thursday 10 November 2016, at the VEC

Those present: Jim Lunn (JL, in the chair), Emrhys Barrell (EB, via Skype), Paul Brewerton (PB), Roger Brown (RB), Sue Brown (SB), Gordon Denney (GD), Bob Foster (RF), Pam Johnson (PJ), James Parkinson (JP), Mick Rogers (MR). Catherine Burrows (CB, Trust Administrator) and Jane Rogers (JR, Company Secretary, taking notes) were also present.

Apologies: John Morris, David Kirkman

Observers: Mike Finch (MF), Graham Simmons (GS)

JL opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Confidential items were considered.

3. Matters arising from those Minutes:

Stratford St Mary Lock: The Essex and Suffolk Water (ESW) objection to planning permission being granted for new locks was still being considered.

Storage for SBOC boats: the barn doors of the building in question had now been repaired and the building made secure.

3a. Wormingford/Wiston River alterations: GD circulated some correspondence he had been involved with. The Environment Agency (EA) response, with regard to the legal position, was expected on 25 November. MF had information on the Water Framework Directive (WFD) which implied that the EA might have problems regarding heavily modified water bodies.

Peter Evans (PE) was going ahead with his own protest on the works carried out.

It was noted that the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (DVAONB) had received permission from the EA to carry out the work. It was the belief of the meeting that the EA's decision was wrong. GD's opinion was that the Trust and other river users should have been consulted earlier in the process, before work was undertaken. It was also his opinion that the EA permit should not have been granted.

There was concern from local landowners about flooding being caused by the alterations to the watercourse.

JP suggested that the impact of the water flow could gain support from ESW.

It was noted that overall river levels were low, and water was being pumped from Abberton Reservoir to Langham to service Mid-Essex.

EB asked if there were any objections to his attending meetings with PE, with the EA and DVAONB.

After discussion, EB stated that he would attend as a member of the public, and not as a representative of the Trust.

4. Financial Report:

BF presented his analysis of the figures for the year to date, which showed a profit to date of £49,182.00, which was better than in 2015. Because of ongoing overheads, the profit is predicted to drop to £37,000 by the end of the year, before depreciation. The final figure could be in the region of £23,000.

These figures showed the erratic nature of the Trust's income, where grants monies had come in and gone out again.

In terms of cash, the Trust currently had approximately £100,000 in its bank accounts, but more expenditure is anticipated before the end of 2016.

Between January and March 2017, expenditure was anticipated to be approximately £15,000 for overheads. Therefore the Trust could not finance the Granary refurbishment from its current funding. It would not be good financial practice to totally deplete the current funds.

The question also arose as to whether Sage was the right accounting package for the Trust to use. It was designed for much bigger organisations than the Trust.

PB questioned whether the Trust should look at other accounting packages. As the Trust was looking to set up a Trading Company, it might be a good time to trial another package. Research was needed.

The Profit and Loss accounts showed that the Trust did not spend a sufficient percentage of its income on its stated Aim of restoring the navigation. This had led to problems when applying for grants.

5. Stratford St Mary Lock

GD reported that he now had the EA permit to fit new gates. He had made a further grant application for this work from the IWA's Tony Harrison Fund. MF's assistance in completing the forms was acknowledged.

Applications were also pending with Veolia and Cory. It was noted that Veolia would require the Trust to supply 20% of the cost, while Cory needed 10%. There was a possibility that the two funders would join together to fund the project. Both applications had been accepted, and were progressing to Stage 2. Veolia were waiting to see if planning permission was granted before Stage 2 could be submitted, and the EA were to write a letter stating their intent to supply a licence for the work to be carried out. Cory's Stage 2 submission would be made in mid-December, followed by a meeting with the Trust on 17 January, with a decision approximately 6 days later. Veolia's decision would not be made until early March. The IWA decision would be made by the end of April.

MF raised the question of river flow rates and the long-term aspects (20-40 years down the line). He also asked who would be responsible for the lock gates in the long term future, if the Trust were not be in existence then. The EA and ESW would consult their legal departments on such issues.

Concern had been expressed by a hydrologist, but RB pointed out that the lock now had steel stop logs, which could be installed in future if needed.

It was also noted that, in 1946, the IWA identified three projects which it deemed to be necessary: The Warwick Canal, the Kennet & Avon Canal, and the Suffolk and Essex Stour Navigation. Of these three, the Stour project was the only one not achieved to date.

GD suggested that when the lock was completed, a lock-keeper would be needed, to help meet the requests of the funders re public access to the lock. The lock should be available 365 days per year, dependent on river levels. RST would restrict usage if river levels were too low. It was thought that keys could be issued to regular users of the lock, along with appropriate Health & Safety Training, and lock operation training. RB had a contact who might be possible; it was agreed that he would make contact. **ACTION: RB**

It was noted that because tax payers' funds were involved in the grants, public access had to be guaranteed.

5. Dedham Lock

It was noted that no further progress had been made. RF reported that the EA were suggesting a joint approach between themselves and the Trust, who had expressed an interest in being involved with discussions on this project. It was agreed that he would follow up on this. **ACTION: RF**
It was also noted that the tilting gate would be taken out of operation in 2017.

5. Flatford Lock

A notification had been received from Gary Cockett of the EA, that the tilting gate at Flatford would be put into winter mode (ie up). It was noted that 2016 winter would be the last time this was done, as the tilting gate would be lowered to the lock chamber floor in the spring and left there permanently. It was suggested that the Trust ensure that the EA clear the chamber floor before this is done, so that the tilting gate would sit flat. RF was asked to respond to Mr Cockett on behalf of the Trust. **ACTION: RF**

6. Boat Operations

SBOC – minutes of their last meeting were circulated before the meeting. Boats were scheduled to be taken out of the water in mid-November. PB commented that any help available would be appreciated. The trailers were ready to be used, and the storage barn was ready to use. MF raised the question of Francis J, and its need for testing. PB replied that SBOC wanted to be sure that the aluminium parts of the boat were still fit for purpose before any monies were spent on refurbishing the superstructure. The concern was for the integrity of the welds. SB asked for the cost of such testing.

John Constable – MF was concerned about the work that had been carried out on JC, and offered to consult with DK on the maintenance schedule proposed by the original boat builder.

LRG – no minutes were available yet from their last meeting. Both Kathleen and Trusty II had been lifted out and were now in storage in the barn belonging to Jax Horswill. EB had been consulted about fitting stop buttons to the engines on both boats, and had responded. (These would be emergency stop buttons, in case a skipper was taken ill whilst on passage, and met with an IWA recommendation re single manning of craft).

RST policy was that craft were manned with a skipper and crew, or skipper and skipper-in-training. It was noted that LRG ran their short trip boats single manned, although the water bus was double manned, as were charter trips. RF pointed out that Frolics used elsewhere were operated by a single man; JL pointed out that Cotswold Canals Trust had ceased single manning because of this problem.

Tim Smith (Training Officer) had offered to host a meeting to discuss the current operating manuals, and issues such as that raised above. **ACTION: JL to set up meeting**

7. Granary Refurbishment

After discussion, it was decided that there was not enough time in 2016 to ensure that all the funding and permissions would be in place, work on the refurbishment would be deferred temporarily. Discussions also ensued about alternative plans, costing less, which could be implemented as an interim solution.

RF stated that the Trust could not fund £70,000 at this time, and offered alternatives:

- (a) Reduce the scope of the refurbishment, and carry out as much as possible with the funds available
- (b) Carry out the work as planned, using volunteers wherever possible to reduce costs
- (c) Borrow money to finance the project; however this option was probably not viable because of the costs of paying back. It was also noted that although there are bodies which fund interest free loans to charities, they would expect the Trust to be spending much more of its income on its main Aim.

RB asked what funds were currently available for the project; it was agreed to work on a sum of £25,000 to see what could be achieved.

GD would make enquiries about any deadlines relating to the funding secured for electrical equipment. **ACTION: GD**

It was agreed that a working party, consisting of Andrew Sheldon, Catherine Burrows, Jane Rogers, and possibly a financial adviser would meet to discuss the options. **ACTION: JR to set up meeting**

8. Company Secretary's Report

This report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

It was agreed that the Trust were prepared to take on the fishing jetties at the Cattawade Picnic Site from the EA, subject to the receipt of a maintenance grant of £1000, which had been offered.

It was also agreed that the Trust should look at putting signs on all the works which they had carried out along the river, such as repairs to jetties and portages.

It was further agreed that there was a need for a Health and Safety Officer; steps should be taken to canvass for such a person. It was decided that there was no need at this point for a Child Protection Officer, as any school parties provided sufficient, qualified adults, and that there should be no occasion when a Trust member would be in a one-on-one situation with a child. In the coming season, crew members would be reminded to ask parents to fit children's life jackets, under their supervision, to ensure correct fitting. **ACTION: JR to canvass members for a H&S Officer**

Memorandum and Articles of Association: in the light of the need to revise the Aims of the Trust, PB and MF offered to read through the documents and make suggestions about amendments needed.

ACTION: PB and MF

Holiday and lieu time owed to the Administrator: CB had, due to volume of work over the summer, accumulated 15 days of lieu time and was owed 10 days' holiday before the end of 2016. It was proposed that this time be used in shortening hours, and holiday closures over Christmas. This was approved.

9. Administrator's Report

CB reported that Paypal had required us to become PCI compliant (PCI = Payment Card Industry); she was investigating what this entailed. **ACTION: CB to complete this**

River Stour Users' Group – in view of the problems which had arisen over Wormingford/Wiston, CB felt it was time to have a Trustee on the RSUG group, to represent the Trust formally. GD offered to undertake this role. **ACTION: CB to ensure GD has last set of minutes and date of next meeting**

Utility Contract Renewals – several contracts were due to be renewed in the immediate future. It was agreed that CB would do research to see if U-Switch or other similar sites could help with finding better rates for these services. **ACTION: CB**

Christmas Closure: It was proposed that the office should be closed from 5.00 pm on Tuesday 20 December and would re-open on Tuesday 10 January at 9.30 am.

10. Membership Report

No report was offered; there were no new members in the preceding month.

11. Trading Company

JR had met with Carol Green of Peyton Tyler Mears to discuss what was involved, and had circulated her report. She reported the need for further consultations to find out more about the practicalities and legalities of such an operation. SB mentioned that one of the Trust's members had experience of such set ups. JM had suggested that the proposed part-time administrative assistant be tasked with the administration of the company. **ACTION: JR to contact Trust member**

12. Recent and Forthcoming Events

The proposed BBQ at Hallowe'en had been cancelled, through lack of support. Invitations were being sent out to SBOC's Laying Up Lunch on 28 January at The Swan, Henny Street.

13. Any Other Business

Stability Testing on Trusty II – JP raised the question about why the report had not been circulated to Trustees. Discussion followed on the need for transparency to Trustees in all matters relating to their responsibilities. JL commented that as Boat Operations Manager, he had seen the report and made recommendations. MF asked which tests had been applied. Recommendations were being carried out, and a re-test would be carried out in the spring when the boat is relaunched. It was agreed that the first report be filed with the second report, with an outline of what had been done to Trusty II to ensure her stability.

Eden Rose Land Transfer – JL reported on conversations he had had with Rob Brooks, owner of Eden Rose Coppice. Eden Rose would like to take on the land at the head of the cut, and the Trust would like to take over a strip of land alongside the bank opposite the Granary. MF stated that if the Trust were to exchange the land, it would need a formal valuation to conform to the Charity Commission's ruling. It should also be determined how disposal of Trust assets should be carried out to the best advantage of the Trust. **ACTION: JL to arrange for valuation of the land involved.**

Stratford St Mary Bridge – GD reported that he now had the necessary paperwork to apply for planning permission; this would cost £385.00. It was agreed that this should go ahead. **ACTION: GD to apply for planning permission.**

Meeting closed at approximately 10.30 pm

Date and time of next meeting: Thursday 8 December, 2016, at 7.00pm, at The VEC.



CHRISTMAS CLOSING

Tuesday, 20 December 2016, at 5.00 pm

To

Monday 9 January 2017, at 5.00pm

Cat will be back at her desk on Tuesday, 10 January 2017, at 9.30 am

