

Minutes of the River Stour Council
Held on Wednesday 23 October 2019 at The Granary, Sudbury

Those present: Paul Brewerton (PB) in the chair, Emrhys Burrell (EB), Bob Foster (BF), Jim Lunn (JL), Graham Simmons (GS), Alan Thomas (AT), Catherine Burrows (CB, Manager), Jane Rogers (Minutes Clerk)

Observing: David Kirkman

1. Apologies for Absence: John Morris

CB introduced Michelle Mandry (MM), who has taken up the post of Administration Assistant. Ms Mandry then left the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest: GS, Management Report, appointment of Accountant

3. Minutes:

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2019, not previously approved. PB asked for approval of these Minutes as it was agreed that most items in those Minutes would be covered by the later Minutes, and by this meeting.

EB requested an amendment to the wording of item 8a Dedham Lock, as follows:

... the actual transportation. The £55,000 grant, which was the maximum we could claim from Enover, covered manufacture of the four gates, plus their steel handrails and walkway supports. These have all been completed. The sluices and paddle gear were not covered by this amount. Hargreaves did not make sluices, but bought them in from a specialist supplier, the same one who made the sluices for SSM. They have said they will supply a set for Dedham when we ask them.

These Minutes were approved subject to this amendment.

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2019:

Paragraph 8a VEC rebuild – members of Council wished to amend the word ‘makes’ to read ‘could make’ to the last line of the first paragraph, and to add the following sentence: The Trust has had the premises revalued professionally on a regular basis.

PB asked for approval of these Minutes, subject to the amendments outlined above. GS seconded the proposal, and approval was given.

4. Matters arising from Minutes, not already covered in the agenda: None

5. Notification of AOB: None

6. Financial Report:

GS spoke to the papers which had been circulated before the meeting, and noted the following points:

There was a re-alignment of the accounts as presented to come into line with the Charity Commissioners’ policies.

The overall surplus/deficit report will be submitted monthly in future.

The Projected Bank Balance at 31 December 2019 was a provisional figure.

The Income/Expenditure report would be updated bi-monthly in future.

AT requested clarification of some items in the Financial Report; GS responded that he and CB were working on this, and hoped to resolve this soon.

Future use of Sage will be enhanced and further training given to CB and MM.

GS reported that the overall picture of the Trust's finances looked solid. It was anticipated that Sage would be able to produce reports to show the annual figures both as January to December, and for the financial year (April to March). Surplus income was put into such projects as Dedham Lock, repairs to jetties and other routine maintenance. GS asked that any inaccuracies in the figures presented should be notified to CB.

CB then took over to talk to the Management Report. She confirmed that VAT experts Saffrey Champness had reported on the matter of VAT on boat tickets, and stated that, with the exception of FJ, all other tickets should be exempt from VAT. FJ's status required further examination. It would be possible to claim back VAT paid on ticket sales as far back as 2015, with a substantial sum involved. This matter was in hand. Gift Aid – it had appeared that the Trust was not registered to claim Gift Aid online, but CB had now rectified this position and a claim was in progress.

Appointment of New Accountants. GS, having declared a DoI, took no part in the discussion on the appointment. Following discussion, it was agreed to appoint Burdett King Accounting Ltd to be the Trust's Accountants. Proposed by PB, seconded by AT and approved.

PB thanked JR for agreeing to act as Minutes Clerk to Council and for her offer of support to JL in his role as Company Secretary.

EB raised the question of running more events like S2C, following its financial success this year. CB reminded Council that the agreement it had with the EA limited us to one full length-of-the-river event each year. Other options were discussed, without any definite proposals coming forward.

7. Update Reports

(a) VEC Rebuild – a paper had been circulated updating the situation following meetings between PB, AT, GS, and Alan Ryan (AR). They had concluded that the specification drawn up by the Loss Adjusters was too vague and included many items which they deemed to be superfluous. HMRC had been consulted about the recovery of VAT from the project and had asked for information in writing, which had been done. GS and CB had looked at the financial situation and had concluded that, if certain monies came into the cash flow, the RST could cover payment of the VAT and then reclaim it from HMRC.

PB had looked at the possibility of using demountable buildings but had not made any progress on this.

It was noted that M D Mills, a local building contractor, known to the Trust from previous works, had expressed an interest in the rebuild project, but the insurers had not picked on them to tender. PB had sent them a copy of the specification but had had no reaction yet. AT stated that he and AR wanted to see the specification as they felt it was not clear. AR had offered to rewrite the specification in full detail, as it was felt that a clear price could not be determined from the information currently outlined.

PB had sent a list of revisions to the insurers and surveyors, and the surveyors had requested a site meeting. PB would arrange this and hoped that AR and other interested parties would be able to attend. A fixed term contract had been mentioned. AT stated in his opinion this would be satisfactory if sufficient detail was in the contract. PB stated that this option would be fully discussed with JW Hughes (the suggested contractor) and Ellipta (the appointed surveyors). PB further stated that he was not in favour of RST project managing the rebuild.

ACTION: After considerable discussion, it was agreed that PB would arrange an appropriate site meeting, and would circulate any outcome via email to Council.

(B) Dedham Lock –

AT reported that no IWA grant towards the cost of this project would be forthcoming as the proposal did not meet the IWA's criteria.

DMMC had met with their solicitors on 22 October, but no feedback had yet been received. The RST solicitor was aware of the situation and was chasing information.

A letter had been sent to the owner of land adjoining the lock, confirming that the fence in situ could remain, if kept in good condition and the lock was accessible. To date no reply had been received.

EB queried the definition of third party access to the lock side, but again no reply had been received. It was noted that RST needed a definition of existing third party rights.

Storage of the new gates: BF had spoken to Schofields of Langham, who were prepared to store these on their site at no cost to the Trust. EB proposed that moving of the gates from Hargreaves' site to Langham should take place as soon as possible. **ACTION:** It was agreed that BF and EB should liaise on this matter, and should go ahead.

(c) BOM -

No written report. AT reported on an incident on the Lower River, when Trusty had struck the oar of a hired rowing boat. He noted that RST had some responsibility in the matter and had communicated with the National Trust (owners of the hire craft) and the hirer to which no reply had been received from the latter. CB had informed NT and IWA that the investigation had concluded with corrective actions put in place to improve our processes and help to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

It had been suggested that dash cams be fitted on boats on the lower river, as a trial. It was noted that the appropriate warning notices would need to be posted. It was further suggested that the cameras might be angled to film inboard, as well as ahead of the craft.

ACTION: It was agreed to research possible dash cams to be fitted for this purpose.

(d) SBOC

JL commented on the previously circulated report, and named two new members of the SBOC committee, Steve Butler (with previous experience in Risk Assessment and Management) and Richard Kearton (previous experience in public liaison and marketing). Both men would be of great help to the Committee, and the Trust in general.

JL also recorded thanks to David Kirkman for the immense amount of work he had put in, almost singlehandedly, on JC, and preparations for winterisation of the vessel.

JL reported that the outboard engine on FJ, being 18 years old, was reaching the end of its lifespan. Research had shown that the cost of an electric outboard replacement was three or four times the cost of a petrol driven engine. EB recommended the replacement should continue to be petrol driven.

Battery problems had been reported on EL, which had now been resolved.

JC is to be fitted with a new battery meter.

JL reported that the SBOC fleet would come out of the water on 7 November although JC would remain in service. Three days of Santa cruises had been set up for early December.

Inspections of the walkways and jetties would be carried out over the winter by new volunteers.

PB reported on a very successful trip, organised by SBOC, for the tearoom ladies, including the provision on tea and cake. This had been much appreciated by the ladies.

(e) DVBOC

BF spoke on the circulated report. Income had increased in 2019, in part due to the presence of Maria Constable. The record daily take for one day had been £850.

Mike Finch, the committee's chairman, was still out of action, with a damaged hand. Good wishes were expressed for his recovery.

EB asked that an official letter of thanks be sent to Councillor Christopher Hudson, Chairman of Suffolk Council, for facilitating a grant of £6000, enabling the purchase of Maria Constable.

ACTION: It was agreed that EB and BF would create missive for CB to produce official letter for PB to sign.

(f) Membership Report – tabled

PB proposed acceptance of those new members, which was approved.

Sheila Morris was moving away from the area, but had agreed to continue in the role of Membership Secretary as her tasks were largely digital. Council recorded its thanks to Sheila.

8. AOB – None

The meeting was then opened for questions.

DK reported that the paint for work on JC had been donated by BeDec of Dunmow. He had acknowledged their gift. **ACTION:** Copy of letter to be provided for office records.

DK also noted that RSBCIC were offering grants for new jetties. They had continued to work on portage points, although no longer offering canoe trips on the river.

DK requested a printed copy of the formal report on the incident on the lower river, when it was available. AT replied that the report already existed, and members could view it if they wished.

DK also asked what action the BOM and IWA had implemented to improve safety for the Trust's activities on the river. AT replied that corrective action had been included in the report.

DK then asked if Trust boats would continue to operate with only one crew member on board, and was told that this was the case. It was noted that, for the incident on the lower river, two crew members had been on board. The provision of dash cams on board would help to monitor any future incidents.

Date of next meeting: TBA