

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Tuesday 28 November 2023 at 9:45am
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

Present - Trustees: Emrhys Barrell (EB), Paul Brewerton (PB), Richard Blay (RB), Steve Durham (SD), Maggie Gardner (MG), Graham Gardner (GG), Jim Lunn (JL), Jane Rogers (JR)

Others: Catherine Burrows (CB)

1. **Apologies for absence:** Alan Ryan (AR)

2. **Election of Chairman**

PB reminded everyone that RST MAA stipulated that Council “shall at its first meeting every year after the Annual General Meeting and from time to time appoint from the Council Members a Chairman of the Council.” There were no nominations for chair; **PROPOSED JR/SECONDED JL that ‘Paul Brewerton is re-elected as Chairman of the Council’ AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**

For completeness, PB referred to the roles of Company Secretary and Treasurer. In the absence of other nominations, MG and PB were happy to remain in the respective roles of Company Secretary and Treasurer. Council thanked PB and MG for fulfilling these roles.

It was **NOTED** that PB would prefer to continue as Treasurer rather than Chairman but was happy to support willing candidates for either role. It was **AGREED** that the imminent membership newsletter includes promotion of the voluntary roles for treasurer, fundraiser, publicity, etc.

3. **Co-option of new Trustees**

RB said AR was willing to join Council since meeting attendance did not necessitate attendance in person. AR has attended previous meetings and offers an additional link with RST Dedham Vale operation, is part of the Dedham Lock project team and River Maintenance Group as well providing various other valuable skills and knowledge.

PROPOSED RB/SECONDED JL that ‘Alan Ryan is co-opted onto Council’ AGREED UNANIMOUSLY

4. **Minutes of last meeting**

It was **AGREED** to accept the minutes with no redactions for the online version. It was **NOTED** that it would be beneficial for the draft minutes to be circulated sooner after the meeting.

5. **Matters Arising:** as tabled on Agenda.

- a) Remuneration Policy (17.10.23, Item 7) – RB sought clarity on the status of the policy, particularly mileage and privately owned equipment. The minutes showed Council had discussed feedback from the consultation process and ultimately agreed to accept the policy, subject to future discussion regarding the section about volunteers’ personal equipment.

6. **Reports**

a) **Dedham Lock**

It was **AGREED** to discuss this item earlier than tabled. It was **NOTED** that EB cannot physically help but offers an advisory function due to his prior hands-on involvement with the project.

EB updated those present on the grant situation and expressed concern that the Pilgrim Trust (PT) grant could be withdrawn due to expiry of the expected completion timescale as was the case for the Essex Heritage Trust (EHT) grant. We have received the Dedham Parish Council grant of £10k but need to demonstrate a tangible benefit to the community for this grant. The EHT grant would have covered the manufacture of the penstocks to comprise a visible historic appearance but with the required up-to-date mechanism below the water. The

former PT grant was less specific, but EB had given assurances that the signing of the lease would be the pivotal moment. A shortfall of £38k is now realistically closer to £70k as a worst-case scenario should grant funding be unavailable.

EB referred to the most recent project team update which showed that the lock island piling was taking precedence over the lock restoration. The suggested completion date of Autumn 2024 was argued to more likely be Summer 2025 given limitations on when certain works can be carried out. Sadly, neither are worthwhile dates for grant providers. When applying for grants, the very basic information that is requested is the overall cost of project, how much we are requesting and the completion date.

SD pointed out that the signing of the lease had taken longer than expected (signed in Nov 2022) and we then had the ongoing land boundary dispute (still being dealt with in Jun 2023). One of the major issues currently being tackled by the project team were large trees and their roots that are causing cracking in lock chamber wall and problems at the upstream end of the lock. Once these are removed then another river depth survey is required due to further erosion and to determine the method of piling to use. It was accepted that the lock and the island cannot be dealt with as separate phases and their progress must overlap.

The issue of funding is another consideration. PB advised that the RST could manage to cover the project costs but it would be difficult so the preference would be to retain existing grants or achieve new grants. EB said there was a possibility of a successful EHT grant re-application if someone needs to go to where the lock gates are currently stored to measure the rod for the penstocks which enables ordering. This would then provide an order/invoice that can be submitted with the application. The stop logs are another simple part of the project that can be easily achieved and presented for part of the PT grant.

SD commented there was confusion over three stop log slots as it was unknown which was useable. EB clarified that the EA had stopped using the slots and instead bolted a specially made angle iron onto the concrete section. Those stop logs had been offered to RST, but they were bare steel and not galvanised. They had been left outside for 12 years and were ultimately scrapped as they not in a condition acceptable to an engineer or our insurer. It was **NOTED** that the angle iron slots were to be used for the stop logs in the upper end of the lock (a diver might be required to desilt areas and to check that the bolts holding those were still effective) and, in the lower end of the lock, we might still use the slots meaning they are different lengths, but it was still an achievable task. Stour Engineering were ready to manufacture these once details were given for the order.

RB was irate at the lack of progress and queried how this had been allowed to happen. It was clear that a project leader had not been identified since EB withdrew due to personal health reasons. The project had faltered as the newly formed project team grappled with the breadth of information provided. SD has prepared a Gantt chart to monitor progress and focus activity against time; but this would need amendment as it currently favoured lock island stabilisation phase ahead of lock restoration phase when it was now accepted that the phases needed to overlap. It was pointed out that volunteers were doing their best with the resources available to them and RST needs to factor in whether too much is being asked from too few.

ACTION: Project team to prioritise measuring for penstocks and stop logs so that orders can be submitted with grant re-applications, where applicable. Expressions of interest need to be sent to potential contractors with access to full documentation including full client brief and pre-construction H&S file available upon request.

EB said that grant applications request the charity confirms it can cover the cost of the project should the grant be unsuccessful, so a resolution was required. There was some concern voiced on the strategy thus far, but everyone recognised the importance of the project and wanted it to succeed.

PROPOSED PB/SECONDED JL that 'in the absence of sufficient grants being attained, that RST covers a potential £70,000 shortfall to achieve completion of Dedham Lock Project.' CARRIED (FOR 7, AGAINST 1)

b) Financial

The P&L report (Oct and Year to Date 2023) and Budget reports had been previously circulated and there were no comments. The bank account balances were as follows: Main £120,000, Reserves* £98,000, Special Projects £48,000 [post meeting note: * includes current BBL balance £15,500]. In April 2024, the national living wage increases by 9.8% and it was **AGREED** this increase will apply to all staff wages.

c) Management

i. VEC Flooring

Builders have investigated and found the plywood layer sitting on top of the waterproof membrane layer is saturated, but it is completely dry underneath. The builder will quote for removal of the tiles and sodden plywood to be replaced with a wooden flooring.

ii. Shillingfords at The Granary

The venue is hosting the pop-up restaurant, and our bar is open for a few hours on Friday and Saturday evenings for a 5-week period. The Shillingfords team consists of only the chef and two front of house, so they have a maximum of 10 tables which were quickly booked up from their own mailing list. There is a possibility that this could be a repeat booking.

d) Membership

MG said still need to update the database with the names of all new skippers and the process needs to be streamlined ahead of the 2024 season.

e) SBOC

The boat lift out has been postponed due to weather conditions and the trailers being stuck on waterlogged land. The Santa Boat Rides event has had another date added due to demand and bookings are at maximum capacity.

f) DVB

Boats still not taken out due to flooding, etc but intending to remove Trusty and MC on 13 Dec. A date for Kathleen is not yet known as she requires lifting out by tractor and this necessitates suitable ground conditions. SD commented that an earlier end to the season might be worth considering next year. The flood poles for the jetty have gone missing and these need to be replaced. AR has been having discussions with the Boat Yard owners regarding ownership rights as they are the landowners, but we own the jetty. We currently only pay towards electricity usage for charging the boats.

g) River Maintenance Group: RB had three funding requests as follows:

- i. Warehouse with ground floor storage box (approx. 7ft5in x 4ft7in) with our own combination padlock with secure access via reception on weekdays and Saturday mornings costing £17.50+ VAT p/w. **AGREED. ACTION:** SD to donate shelving. An inventory and storage details to be passed onto RST office for our own records and to update our insurance.
- ii. Privately owned equipment – Some useful tools have been purchased to facilitate RMG activities, but volunteers' own equipment is still being used. RB said this is problematic when the remuneration policy states that RST will not cover the cost of tool maintenance or reimburse in the event of loss or damage. It was pointed out that RST is grateful for the efforts and contributions of all volunteers and the policy does state situations are judged on a case-by-case basis with the possibility of reimbursement or a contribution towards costs. Whenever privately owned equipment is used, the owner must ensure it is correctly maintained and fit for the purpose. RMG activities were a newer addition to RST activities and equipment has been purchased when regularly used tools are identified whilst lesser used items can be hired instead. It was vital that the scheduling of tasks considered what is required well ahead of time to allow management of its budget. There was an appreciation that RST volunteers were completing tasks that assisted both RST boat operations and other river users. It was pointed out that RST is taking on tasks that the EA as navigation authority should really undertake and we should advise them of our activities and how we

are saving them considerable sums of money to maintain the navigation e.g. tree clearance. It was **AGREED** that the purchase of 4 items reciprocating saw, additional blades, pole saw and rope costing in the region of £378.

Until the budget had been set up, it was suggested that PB is approached in the first instance for items exceeding £100. It was **NOTED** that there needs to be consideration on the frequency of purchases under £100.

- iii. Deer fence and animal rescue ramp in locks. It was **AGREED** to proceed with cost of £200 for the construction and installation of the ramp.

7. Health & Safety

The chainsaw manual needs to be revised following the outcome of discussion with our insurers. The chainsaw training course has been booked and RST will purchase the required PPE.

8. Environmental

Flooding has caused issues. EB requested recent photos of the flooding around Dedham Lock and area leading up to Lock Cottage because we shall potentially be pursuing that plot of land in the future. Kevin Taylor has met the new owners of Lock Cottage on behalf of RST.

9. AOB

a) Member Benefits

Following queries at the AGM, PB suggested extending the pre-approval granted to SBOC and DVB groups for refreshments and gifts to tearoom and RMG. However, there was generally crossover of volunteer's roles and, where this wasn't the case, an invitation was extended by SBOC and DVB.

b) Replacement of privately owned equipment

RB had used his own outboard motor for RMG activities, and when it was damaged beyond repair, a second-hand replacement was purchased for £350 with a claim subsequently submitted. The issue arose because it was not covered by RST insurance and there had been an RST owned motor available. It had been reluctantly accepted that the replacement motor would be RST property following monetary reimbursement to RB. The remuneration policy clearly states, "RST is not in a position to cover the cost of maintaining private equipment, or the cost of its replacement... In the event of loss or accidental damage, a volunteer should seek recompense through their own home insurance under their 'contents away from home' cover... However, each situation will be judged on its merits and Trustees might be sympathetic to reimburse, or make a contribution, to such losses in certain circumstances, but this is not a guarantee." The aim is to ensure that RST owns and provides the necessary equipment for all the activities it carries out.

c) Seasonal office closure dates

Closing on Friday 22nd Dec and reopening on Thursday 4th Jan 2024.

10. Next meeting: Tuesday 9th January 2024, 9:45am – via Zoom