

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Tuesday 17 October 2023 at 9:45am
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

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

Others: Catherine Burrows (CB), S. Quinn (SQ)

1. **Apologies for absence:** Emrhys Barrell (EB), Richard Blay (RB)
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** It was **AGREED** to accept the minutes with no redactions for the online version.
3. **Matters Arising:** as tabled on Agenda.

4. Reports

a) Financial

i. Profit & Loss report

The P&L report (Jan-Aug 2023) had been previously circulated as well as PB's monthly budget for the main items of income. This showed we had not been hitting ambitious budget figures, but income was in line with 2022. There were some mitigating factors such as S2C had been restricted to a 1-day event due to navigation closure at Boxted. Nonetheless, everyone was pleased that a version of S2C did go ahead.

[Temporary meeting pause - MG and GG got in touch for assistance with online access to join meeting. SQ was transferred to the 'waiting room' ahead of the next item of discussion after which they would be invited back. JR inadvertently exited the meeting. After a period of 6 minutes, the meeting continued with MG, GG and JR in attendance.]

ii. Project funding

PB referred to the Projects funding report and said it was recommended that we maintain 3-6 months in reserves to cover running costs for that period although we had previously been working on the basis of a whole year. Nonetheless, healthy bank balances have been retained with the Main account not dipping below £80k for some time. Current bank balances are Main £115k, Reserves 96k (includes BBL balance), Projects 48k (for current projects). PB suggested we could safely spend £50k on newer projects such as Granary fire escape and VEC flooring as well as funding towards Dedham Lock project. There are also some upcoming boat related expenses to factor in such as a potential new cover for EL if the deep clean and repairs as part of winter maintenance do achieve the desired result. All the boats will need new batteries over a period of 4-5 years. A discussion outside of Council regarding solar power had determined these are not currently feasible.

It was **AGREED** to proceed with obtaining estimates for Granary fire escape and VEC flooring works as prioritised projects. It was pointed out that here has been an attempt 18 months ago to get quotes from 5 companies for replacement fire escape, with only Philips Engineering responding at the time.

RB had submitted a quote for the deer fencing at Roger Brown Lock and it was **AGREED** to proceed with this preventative measure with a budget of £500; but subject to recommendations from an Environmental Consultant who had been in touch.

iii. Item 7, Remuneration and subsistence policy - Discussed earlier than tabled (discussion below).

[After 20 min period, SQ invited back into the meeting]

b) Management

i. Granary Fire Exit / VEC Flooring

CB had a site meeting with Barry Whymark (architect) to discuss the fire escape. It was understood that Babergh Heritage team would need to visit for pre-application guidance. Builders will be contacted for VEC flooring investigations and quotes.

ii. AGM arrangements

We are still unable to submit the accounts to Charity Commission due to new login process, but we been assured there will be no late submission penalty. The paperwork needs to be sent out to members within the next couple of days to align with the notification period for the AGM on 16th Nov. Fortunately, we can contact most of our membership by email. It was confirmed that JL, PB and SD are standing for re-election whilst GG stands for election. Each candidate to provide a 100-word election statement.

c) 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.

d) SBOC

i. John Constable

Sea Power Marine had carried out an inspection and reported that the controllers are fine, but the corroded contactors will need to be replaced. This is a cheaper repair than initially thought so the insurers should be happier i.e. claim totalling a few hundred pounds instead of £17k! It is hoped that this can be carried out within the next few weeks subject to our insurer's approval. Some other tasks that RST would like completed will be carried out at the same time at our own cost (work on connections between the batteries and motors to stop overheating as well as installing battery condition meters).

ii. 2024 Fares

SBOC recommended an increase to Henny Swan Lunch Cruise fares (off-peak adult £18 and child £9, Peak adult £20 and child £10). The return trip is almost 6 miles, with lock passage and a 2-hour stop at Henny. However short trip fares (1 mile, non-landing return trips) to remain aligned with DVB (adult £6, child £3). There had been no discussion about a subsequent increase to boat charter prices.

iii. Boat removal

Wed 8th Nov in the morning was suggested but CB advised that particular day of the week was problematic for trailer and boat manoeuvrability due to a numerous morning groups and car park usage demand. Alternative timings or dates to be discussed by those involved.

e) DVB

There had been an accident at Flatford where a recent boat trip passenger had tripped and fallen. This was not resulting from our operations or land but was caused by uneven surface by the bridge. NT took the lead on dealing with this although RST volunteers did assist.

f) Dedham Lock

It was reported that enabling works are going ahead with the tree works taking place in November. We have been notified that Essex Heritage Trust £7k grant for the penstocks has expired but we can reapply.

g) River Maintenance Group

RB had circulated a report of recent works undertaken. A lot of debris had been cleared at SSM whilst a riverbank had been uncovered at Judas Gap following clearing works achieved in collaboration with NT. It was **NOTED** that everyone was grateful for the enthusiasm and efforts of the RMG volunteers.

5. Health & Safety

a) Chainsaw and insurance – SD said that our insurer has quoted HSE requirements on chainsaw operation verbatim without any interpretation. This did not allow for differences between

chainsaws that are powered either by battery or petrol. There are significant implications i.e. training costs, etc so SD is following this up directly with IWA contact and our insurers.

6. Environmental

- a) **Bathing Water Application** – JK had reported at SBOC that the application has now been submitted. Defra will consider the application with those that meet the criteria and a final decision should be by 30 April at the latest although we are aware there is already a backlog of applications.
- b) **D7 Exemption application** – This will enable burning of waste wood at SSM Lock Island. Our insurance permits bonfires, with some restrictions.

7. Remuneration and subsistence policy (discussed earlier in meeting after item 4-a-iii)

Following the consultation, there was a query regarding the volunteer mileage rate. SD explained (as outlined in the policy document) that “HMRC set a maximum ‘approved’ amount at, on or below which, no tax is liable. Any mileage expenses above this amount, income tax and NI must be deducted... The [volunteer] mileage rate is to reimburse the cost of fuel, plus a small contribution to vehicle running costs. As the vehicle is used for purposes other than volunteering for RST, this does not wholly cover the costs of running and maintaining the vehicle... An example journey might be from the VEC to Fox Chandlery in Ipswich and return. The following is based on a family petrol car that achieves 40mpg and petrol at £1.53 per litre; (cost at Sept’ 2023). The journey is 48 miles and the cost of petrol is £8.10 (source RAC). Volunteers may claim £0.24 per mile which equates to £11.52.”

Rates can be reviewed once we have a better understanding of the uptake and financial implications. Specific forms will need to be created to process claims and maintain accurate records.

It was **AGREED** that the discussion regarding volunteers’ own equipment should be discussed when those that had raised the issue were also present to put forward their views.

PROPOSED JR/SECONDED PB ‘that the policy is accepted, subject to future discussion regarding the section about volunteers’ personal equipment’ **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**

8. AOB

a) CPD Assessments

There are only a few outstanding to be picked up early next season.

b) 1st Aid training

The certificates expire after 3 years but there is a grace period of 2 years, so it was **AGREED** to have training for the new skippers and then follow up with renewals for the current skippers.

9. Next meeting: Tuesday 28th November 2023, 9:45am – via Zoom

SQ was thanked for joining the meeting as an observer.