

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Tuesday 21st January 2025 at 2:00pm
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

Present - Trustees: Paul Brewerton (PB – Chairman of Council), Steve Durham (SD), H. Gallo (HG - Treasurer), Jim Lunn (JL), Jane Rogers (JR), Kevin Taylor (KT)

Others: Catherine Burrows (CB)

1. Apologies for absence: Emrhys Barrell (EB), Alan Ryan (AR)

2. Minutes of last meeting

It was **AGREED** to accept the 19.11.24 Council minutes as a true record of that meeting, without amendments and no redactions for the online version.

3. Matters Arising: as tabled on Agenda.

4. Reports

a) Financial (comparative 2023/2024 Profit & Loss Report circulated)

2 financial years (2023 and 2024 have been copied over from Sage to Xero with both software used concurrently over the December 2024 period. The circulated Xero P&L Report has been modified to show Sage comparison for the same period. The Xero report has not yet been customised to groups together similar logical categories e.g. Granary venue income has multiple split categories (wedding function, wedding ceremony function, non-wedding, hourly rental) that could instead be grouped together for a consolidated total.

HG referred to the 2024 expected deficit of almost £50,000 due to completion of Dedham Lock restoration (but including an unexpected £10,000 expense for new VEC flooring). However, we do have an operating profit and there has been significant investment, particularly in the river and those structures/sites we are responsible for, which are fundamental aims of the Trust. We have over £200,000 in the three bank accounts, but caution is advisable for this year as further large-scale works are already in the pipeline e.g. lock island stabilisation, Granary fire exit and lift installation.

The 2024 income for the venues and trip boats was good, especially for the latter given inclement weather and flooding issues. It was pointed out that outgoings such as utilities and wages have increased but venue hire charges have remained static [post meeting note: although reductions to inclusive hire period and bar hours had been made in lieu of hire charge increase]. Other local venues had been researched for prices but there was no ideal direct comparison. It was **AGREED** to apply a 7.5% increase to the hire charges.

It was known that National Living Wage is being increased by 6.7% as of 1st April 2025, and this would affect all wages to ensure a payment differential is maintained between specific staffing roles. **ACTION: PB to present wage proposal at the next meeting.**

We have three bank accounts with Lloyds Bank that exceed the FSCS protection limit of up to £85,000, and a prior application for a CAF Bank savings account had been withdrawn when it transpired that an additional account with monthly fee was also required. RST funds need to be protected in the unlikely event that Lloyds Bank went bust. We also needed to ensure our charity reserves policy maintains an adequate figure to manage any reasonably foreseeable contingency and comply with Charity Commission guidance. It was **AGREED** to

proceed with application for a Virgin Money Savings Account with higher rate of interest than the 1% interest applied to the existing Lloyds accounts holding Reserves and Special Projects funds.

It was **NOTED** that the 2024 figures comprised both 2023 and 2024 income from Kathleen Talbooth charters which skews the 2024 figures by about a £7,000 surplus (as opposed to £7,000 as a deficit last year in 2023). KT suggested it would be useful to have figures for individual boat income as we already have individual boat maintenance costs and then it would be possible to identify running costs against income. CB acknowledged that boat income is simply split as Lower River or Upper River but, wherever known at the time, is also recorded as income against individual boats so it would be possible to provide analysis on individual boat income activity. Although there are instances when full information cannot be known until boat trip paperwork is submitted e.g. pre-paid fares attributed to a specific trip but not a specific boat.

b) Management – No report.

c) Membership – (report circulated)

It was **AGREED** to set the Senior rate age at 65 years old. It was **AGREED** to accept all new members.

d) SBOC

- JL is running the usual pre-season refresher training course at VEC (date and invitations to follow). IWA Assessor, Andrew Phasey, will be invited to attend.
- Steve Giudici has agreed to continue in the role of SBOC Chair.
- John Constable's new motors and controllers are ordered, and it was hoped she will be back in operation for the start of the new season.

e) DVB

- All the boats are out of the water undergoing usual maintenance with canopy works for Trusty and Kathleen well in hand. Quotes of circa £1,000-£2,000 for new Trusty cushion covers.
- River levels from flooding are not as extreme as in previous years which has been a relief.
- Dedham lock gates are currently shut back. One gate had broken free of its fixings but had since been refixed into position.
- 7th March First Aid Course – SD is organising this and there might be a change of date depending on volunteer availability.
- DVB key register and secure key storage to be implemented.

It was **NOTED** that committee minutes should be sent to the RST office to be saved on file.

f) River Maintenance Group

Our two main priorities are Dedham lock island erosion protection (£5,000-£7,000) which is contractually obliged; and the replacement of Cattawade jetty which is not fit for purpose.

There was concern that the proposal for Cattawade exceeded what was required, with the unexpected installation of a revetment, particularly given that the site is SSSI and on the border of a Ramsar site. Planned works will require various permits (including bespoke) and environmental assessment clearance from RSPB and local Councils.

RST was given a grant of £10,000 from RSBCIC's winding up funds to be used for public access jetties but it was known that some of the fund has already been spent (conditions of grant added post meeting: "...on the

condition that the money is to be used solely for the building and maintenance of jetties and similar structures to allow safe public access by paddlers on the navigable Essex & Suffolk River Stour. If the Trust is unable to use the money for whatever reason, it should be donated to the Inland Waterways Association.").

ACTION: Cattawade portage plan and project proposals to be forwarded to DVB for consideration and prioritisation.

It has been beneficial to have an RST team that deals with lower river issues. However, the associated costs and allocation of resources need to be controlled by the Council. A lot of background work is undertaken before establishing whether projects are supported or feasible. There needs to be consultation with DVB, as the nominated subcommittee of the Council, before river maintenance issues and priorities are circulated and any costs incurred as well as reducing availability of volunteers for DVB boating operation.

There are some valid issues to be dealt with but need to reinforce a process whereby RB approaches DVB with project ideas. The works also need to be assessed for viability, and we need to gauge appropriate use of RST items/equipment e.g. SSM stop logs are for emergency lock use so should not be removed for other purposes. An inventory of tools acquired for RMG activities is also required for insurance as well as knowledge of what is available should it be required. Access to these items cannot continue to be restricted to a single person.

The problem of overgrown trees blocking the navigation should be referred to the EA and it needs to be made clear that cutting back for smaller paddle craft is not sufficient for the size of our boats which should also be able to navigate. In the past, volunteers have carried out weedcutting activity in Sudbury for which the EA contributed to via the River Stour Navigation Company. This model could be suggested for tree works as it is more cost-effective for the EA. River Stour User Group (RSUG) meetings had not taken place for some time, but it was hoped to resurrect these and this will be discussed at a forthcoming RST/EA meeting on 30 Jan with EA Stour representatives: Lee Cobbold (Waterways Operations Team Leader) and Paul Lunan (River Inspector).

ACTION: PB to circulate Trustees a draft email to RB that responds to Cattawade jetty proposal and provides clarification on RMG's scope and that the group falls under the supervision of DVB; also, a requirement to produce a full equipment inventory.

5. Health & Safety (policy revisions circulated)

It was **AGREED** to accept the revisions as recommended by SD.

6. Environmental – (policy revisions circulated)

It was **AGREED** to accept all policy revisions as recommended by SD.

7. Remuneration Policy

A couple of 2024 related mileage claims were outstanding as they were contrary to RST policy. These were discussed and it was **AGREED** both claims will be paid (but excluding the 2023 journey). Policy terms will be reiterated as these must apply to everyone. The expiry date for submissions cannot exceed 2 weeks past the end of the claim month e.g. January expenses must be submitted before the end of the second week in February.

It was **AGREED** to add a hybrid meeting option to the Remuneration Policy which negates travel and those attending could therefore not claim for mileage unless specifically requested to attend in person. **ACTION: SD**

8. AOB

- a) **Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity policy** – SD had reviewed the policy and no updates were required.
- b) **Letter from Jax Horswill** – The letter follows a brief discussion at a previous meeting, to confirm a sale offer. Unfortunately, this was not viable for the Trust. Last year's annual lease fee was £600, which is significantly cheaper than commercial storage. Our 'Licence to Occupy' document provides no recourse regarding the condition of the barn. We are unlikely to be able to secure a mortgage offer so need to be conscious of the 3-month eviction notice period. **ACTION: PB to draft a response acknowledging the kind offer but confirming we are unable to go ahead.**
- c) **RSPB Flatford** – HG explained that the long-term future of the Wildlife Garden Reserve is under review, including potential change of management. RST has been in touch to indicate an interest.
- d) **Email from Chris Griffin (CG)** – It was known that powered craft are restricted to operating on the stretch between Ballingdon Bridge and Henny Street as outlined in the byelaws (No. 27) "...[this] shall not apply to such use or navigation by the River Stour Trust or by a person who is a riparian owner of a part of the River Stour and provided that such exemption shall apply only to that number and type of vessels in such use on 25 October 1982." CG is a riparian owner but did not have a vessel in use on the date required in the byelaws. However, he has since registered/licensed a couple of powered boats with the EA, although it does not mean any change to the byelaws and is only a presumed right to navigate the prohibited stretch. The EA would challenge the misuse of these licenses. **ACTION: Brief reply to thank GC for getting in touch but the craft is unfortunately not suitable for our use.**
- e) **Mobiboat** –NT Flatford has been told that the project is not feasible unless suitable operational/mooring jetty and on-site storage is provided. SD's comprehensive report had been issued. A meeting between RST and NT was due to take place tomorrow.
- f) **Dedham Lock Opening Ceremony** – This needed to take place before lock island stabilisation works and KT would continue to liaise with the DMMCL residents and EB agreed to take the lead on organising another lock opening ceremony; but more locally based volunteers to oversee tasks 'on the ground'. Permission for access onto DMMCL land is required before planning commences. **ACTION: KT and EB**

9. Next meeting: Tuesday 25th February 2025, 2pm – via Zoom