

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Tuesday 8th July 2025 at 2:00pm
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

Present - Trustees: Emrhys Barrell (EB), Paul Brewerton (PB – Chair of Council), Hilary Gallo (HG – Treasurer) – *arrived after item 7e*, Steve Giudici (SG), Jim Lunn (JL), Jane Rogers (JR) – *arrived at item 4*, Alan Ryan (AR), Kevin Taylor (KT)

Others: Catherine Burrows (CB)

1. Declarations of Interest: It was decided to focus on financial conflicts of interest. EB declared his link to Thames Electric Launch Company.

2. Apologies for absence: Graham Simmons (GS), Steve Durham (SD)

3. Minutes of last meeting

It was **AGREED** to accept the 03.06.25 Council minutes as a true record of that meeting, with redaction of names in item 7.1, 7.2 and 6.b.ii for the online version.

4. Matters Arising – as below and as tabled on agenda:

i. **Invitation honorary role of RST President (03.06.25, item 5)** – EB had not yet heard back.

5. Notification of Any Other Business (AOB) – as tabled in advance of the meeting:

i. **Jumping into the river at Dedham (KT)** – discussed after item 4

ii. **Solar Panels on VEC (SG)** – discussed after item 7e

iii. **Grants (EB)** – discussed after item 7e

6. AGM Arrangements

The timings flowchart had been circulated (refer to appendix for item 7c). PB to oversee AGM organisation with office assistance. PB has been Trustee and Chair for 6 years and will be standing down as Chair at the AGM. PB will circulate details of who needs to retire, etc. HG to liaise with accountant for the Annual Accounts.

7. Reports

a) **Governance** – refer to items 6 and 7 of Management Report.

b) **Financial** – *discussed after AOB* (P&L Jan-May 2024 & 2025 comparison circulated) – It was clarified that the income includes pre-payments for boat trips and venue hire. A new report layout is being devised to amalgamate figures.

c) **Management** – the report (appended to these minutes) was noted and approved with further discussion during the relevant agenda items.

i. **S2C 2025** - SG offered to assist with S2C organisation. The Boxted Bridge load testing (to determine whether it could re-open for pedestrians and cyclists) has been postponed until October 2025. This means a temporary portage at Boxted is again required for S2C so PB will liaise with the landowners.

ii. **Membership Newsletters** – CB reminded Council that the last newsletter was 6 months ago and it had previously been clarified that the office will primarily assist with design and distribution rather than compiling its content. **ACTION: JR to liaise with office for preparation of an update for membership.**

d) **Membership** (report circulated) – Council approved all new membership applications. The final stages for the full transfer of membership data to MemberMojo is taking place.

- e) **SBOC (Sudbury Boat Operations Committee)** – Wendy is to be relaunched soon. FJ engine issue has been resolved without cost. JC should be up and running soon with training sessions for volunteers. Sudbury Rowing Club have enquired about potential for RST to undertake weedcutting ahead of its annual Regatta.
 - f) **DVB (Dedham Vale Boat Operations Committee)** – Volunteers willing to cover weekend boat trip operations was proving difficult. There were also ongoing issues with poor internet connection for the card reader. The use of volunteers personal devices was not the preferred option and it was **AGREED** to purchase a 12-month sim for the WiFi dongle. **ACTION: HG**
Unfortunately, MC is still out of action despite repeated efforts from RST volunteers.
AR was liaising with Jax Horswill who had asked RST to contribute towards the barn roof repairs. This was outside of our charitable remit so it was suggested to propose a rental increase. A trailer for RMG equipment transportation was also being considered and this would need storage. However, the barn would not be suitable for equipment due to security and the extent of the owner's insurance was unknown.
It was **NOTED** that the wording 'Volunteer' would be a useful addition for our corporate clothing as a visible affirmation that RST volunteers are not staff and are not paid a wage. CB reiterated the need for all expense claims to adhere to RST's Remuneration Policy in fairness to all volunteers.
 - g) **Dedham Lock** – The piling has been successfully installed by RMG team. It was **NOTED** that KT had still not had a reply on how to pay the 'peppercorn rent' for Dedham Lock.
 - h) **River Maintenance Group (RMG)** – see previous item g.
8. **Health & Safety** – SD has prepared new accident report forms. There have been a couple of minor accidents at Sudbury which SBOC is dealing with.
9. **Environmental** – no report.
10. **AOB (as declared in item 5)**
- i. **Jumping into the river at Dedham (KT) discussed after item 4** – This was initially raised as a Dedham Lock Island issue although trespass, vandalism and general misuse of areas and structures is causing concern at several sites along the river. Unfortunately, signage and verbal guidance is misunderstood and/or ignored but RST needs to ensure that every effort is made to cover its public liability duties for the land and structures for which it has responsibility. SD had recommended appropriate signage. EB suggested that we engage our insurers and solicitors for advice, particularly in regard to the scope of the lease for Dedham Lock. **PB proposed, KT seconded that 'we adopt SD's proposal for signage and reporting. In addition, we report to solicitors regarding lease and responsibility of the lock wingwall; and our insurers via our IWA liaison, Neil Edwards, regarding general advice.'** **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**
 - ii. **Solar Panels on VEC (SG) discussed after item 7e** – The Granary is withdrawn from further consideration due to limitations linked to its lease and Grade II listing status. However, the VEC is wholly owned by RST so remains a viable option subject to the terms of the 25-year lease being agreeable. [HG arrived after item 7e] **ACTION: HG to check lease and recommend whether further advice from solicitor should be sought.**
 - iii. **Grants (EB) discussed after item 7e** – Colchester City Council councillors had suggested the Rural Prosperity Fund (RPF) as a potential source of funding. There was a possibility of funding available for The Granary and other Councils would also have access to RPF funding. **ACTION: PB to arrange Granary Project working group meeting at The Granary with Barry Whymark.**
There was discussion about forward planning for possible loss of mooring locations on the lower river and also improving river access for general river users. It was known that planning permission might be difficult in the Dedham Vale area due to AONB status. There were also concern about lack of security and potential for negative feedback from those not welcoming increased visitors given the issues as previously mentioned (item 10i). [KT left after the AOB discussion]

APPENDIX

Management Report – July 2025

Purpose of this report

This is to update Council on key projects and works being undertaken by the management team.

1) IT / Software Upgrade

The RST's computer systems were last updated in 2019 following the fire at the VEC. We have been advised that Windows 10 and Office based software systems are to be discontinued and longer supported by early November 2025. The computers have limited storage and memory, and the older external drives are used for back up and storage. Functionality and security is now seriously impeded.

Integration of the recently purchased online based accounting system is problematic. Although we are on full fibre broadband, the download and upload speeds are much to be desired. Our phonelines are also reliant on this connection.

There is a need to make any new system/hardware far more flexible — using laptops, sim-based tablets and upgrading onsite handheld card payment machines and mobile phones. This will ensure commonality across the whole of RST.

We are currently investigating the various options available to the RST

- 1) Outright purchase
- 2) Evaluate a service type contract
- 3) Evaluate some form of leasing hardware and software contract
- 4) Ensuring security of data and recovery systems

We will be evaluating the systems available during August with a view to upgrading and implementing from September.

2) Accounting system

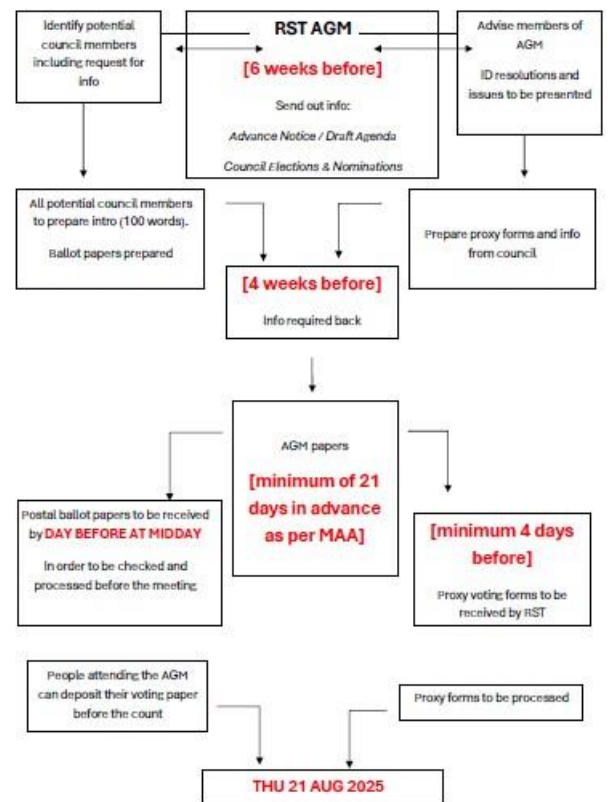
Good progress made on switching from the SAGE A/c's system to Xero, although any changes/upgrades such as increasing number of users increases subscription charges. Next stage is to sort out the key cost centres with the Treasurer during the Autumn/Winter months. The effects of introducing this system have meant other key operational projects have slipped e.g. the development of the website.

3) 2025 AGM procedure update (see agenda item 6)

The decision to hold the annual meeting in August adds further pressure on the team to coordinate and draft in support to pull together the necessary requirements for the AGM as set out by the Charity Commission. Clearly, there is a need to ensure that 2024/25 financial year data is available and has been approved by Council.

A draft agenda needs to be agreed and circulated to the membership giving sufficient notice for nominations to Council and/or to identify any resolutions/issues for the AGM. Additional documents to follow comprise ballot and proxy forms, previous AGM minutes and the 2024 Accounts.

Traditionally, coordination of the AGM is undertaken by nominated Trustees and with support from the office. It would be beneficial to make plans in advance for refreshments, hybrid meeting, the Trustees report to the membership, etc. The office team recommends that Council delegates named persons to pull together of the AGM to ensure we meet deadlines for a 21st August AGM. Please see flow chart below.



4) S2C event

This is a premier event for many of our members and the paddling community. It generates a healthy income and is an opportunity to promote the RST to a wider audience.

This event, rebranded as S2C in 2005, has been the focal point for the majority of river users to enjoy the full stretch of the Stour and promotes our aims and objectives beyond our existing membership.

The office team recommends that Council agrees a team to work together with the office team to ensure the event planning is in hand with clear communication between everyone.

5) Boat Storage

From RST point of view, is there an update on the issues surrounding boat storage for the lower end of the river? It is imperative that the Treasurer has potential costs and implications and undoubtedly start to make financial preparations.

6) Governance (agenda item 3)

There have been significant changes in the way the Charities Commission require us to function with particular reference to Declaration of Interests and Governance – particularly financial matters.

The responsibilities and financial knowledge that all Trustees should be aware of has been significantly emphasised, particularly its financial position and performance. This has been discussed with Trustee, Graham Simmons, who will review guidance to advise current responsibilities of the Trustees, both under Charity Commission and Companies Act. It is proposed to set up an "update" session for Council members in the Autumn.

7) River Stour Navigation Company

The dormant accounts have been filed with confirmation statement due by 9th October 2025. Current officers are Robert Baker (appointed Feb 2019), James Parkinson and Catherine Burrows (both appointed Feb 2018). There had been plans to utilise RSNC to offset RST's trading income and there is a Lloyds bank account with zero balance. This could be discussed as part of the proposed governance review update session.

8) Approved Venue Wedding Licence Renewal

The Granary's approval as a venue for civil marriages and civil partnership registrations is due to expire on 18 December 2025. It is proposed to process the renewal at a cost of £2000 (valid for 3 years and fee covered by one of next year's booked wedding).

There is an additional cost linked to this as the renewal has previously required a check of the venue by a Fire Service Safety Officer. The fire exit doors are difficult to open/close, the mechanisms are failing, there are noticeable gaps around the doors and door glass is coming loose. It is proposed to obtain quotes for their replacement.