

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Monday 16th September 2025 at 2:00pm
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

Present - Trustees: Emrhys Barrell (EB), Richard Blay (RB), Paul Brewerton (PB), Steve Durham (SD), Hilary Gallo (HG), Steve Giudici (SG), Jane Rogers (JR), Alan Ryan (AR), Jim Lunn (JL), Kevin Taylor (KT)

Others: Catherine Burrows (CB), James Parkinson (JP)

- 1) **Apologies for absence:** N/A
- 2) **Declarations of Interest:** EB - Thames Electric Launch Company.
- 3) **Appointment of Chairman of Council:** As per the RST Memorandum & Articles of Association “*at its first meeting every year after the Annual General Meeting, a Chairman of the Council is appointed from and by the Council.*” Attendees were invited to propose nominations. **SD proposed, KT seconded that ‘Steve Giudici be elected as new Chairman of Council’ AGREED** – SG to Chair effective immediately.

Council record its thanks to PB for his time served as Chairman of Council. He guided RST through some very difficult times, including Covid which could have wiped the Trust out, and the Dedham Lock restoration that could have cut the lower river in two.

- 4) **Minutes of last meeting:** It was **NOTED** SG had inadvertently been missed off the circulation list for the draft minutes. It was **AGREED** to accept 11.08.25 Council minutes as a true record, with no redactions for the online version.
- 5) **Matters Arising – as below and as tabled on agenda.**
 - a) Confidential - Item 7a: [REDACTED]

[RB arrived and notified that minutes had been accepted and new Chair elected]

There was brief discussion regarding the Chairman’s role and responsibilities beyond the definition in the [RST’s Memorandum and Articles of Association](#). The Chairman’s primary task is to chair the meetings with all Trustees sharing responsibility for strategy and delegation of duties. It was **NOTED** that concerns regarding a lack of strategy and clarity regarding employees reporting line could be tabled for future discussion following the appropriate notice, research and circulation of supporting paperwork.

- 6) **Notification of Any Other Business (AOB) – as tabled in advance of the meeting:**
 - a) **Granary External Doors (SG)** – item 10b
 - b) **Website (SG)** – item 10d
 - c) **Solar at VEC (SG)** – item 10c
 - d) **River Issue (RB)** – item 10a
 - e) **S2C (JR)** – item 10e

It was suggested that AOB items not notified in advance could be briefly mentioned for tabling at the next meeting.

- 7) **Reports**
 - a) **Governance – CONFIDENTIAL** (refer to item 5a).
 - b) **Financial** - no financial report was available for this meeting.
 - i. **Granary Fire Exit & Lift Project** - Major consideration regarding unknown cost of this project. Further discussion under item

- ii. **Anglian Security & Fire (ASF)** – Following their recent audit, it transpired RST not been charged for security monitoring since 2021 at least. A retrospective invoice (£1500) for two years (2024 and 2025) has been received. However, this is being followed up, particularly since it has been confirmed there is no copy of a signed contract/agreement. **ACTION: CB & HG**
 - iii. **RSPB, Flatford Wildlife Garden – [REDACTED]**
 - iv. **Annual Accounts ending 31.12.24** - RB referred to the AGM paperwork to query allocation of funds in regard to ringfenced funds. It was clarified that a historical analysis of restricted and designated funds is being undertaken over the winter months (as per previous Council discussion on 11.08.25, item 6avi). It was recognised that a strategy and spending plan is important for informed decision making.
 - v. **2026 Pricing** - There was brief discussion about increasing charges for activities/services to consider inflation, running costs and our association with Talbooth which has a 2-year pricing strategy. Our current financial reports can be misleading depending where certain income/expenditure is located within the Chart of Accounts. This has not changed since the migration from Sage to Xero and will form the basis of updates, alongside annual budgets and a 5-year program, over the winter months.
- c) Management**
- i. **Great Cornard portage** - EA closed this a couple of days before S2C despite agreement to the contrary. However, the lock was operational for participants and alternative jetties and route were possible with longer term arrangements for general river users to be discussed/arranged with EA.
 - ii. **RST maintenance craft licence exemption** – SG is liaising with Lee Cobbold regarding the formalising of licence exemptions for RST workboats, Wendy and Annabelle Rose.
 - iii. **Bank signatory/access** - SG to be authorised as additional signatory with bank account access.
ACTION: CB
 - iv. **Granary Project** - Onsite meeting took place with RST (SG, SD, CB, PB), Barry Whymark (Architect, Whymark Moulton Ltd) and Mark Shutt (Structural Engineer, HJ Structural Engineers Ltd - HJS). The latter had provided the 2023 structural survey that was submitted as part of the planning application. It gave a limited usage period, following remedial works, until condemning its use. However, a limited time extension has been granted for existing bookings with attendance not exceeding the 60-person capacity. We cannot confirm future bookings and users will be restricted to using the internal fire escape route only. It is recommended HJS are engaged to provide structural design drawings that can be used to obtain quotations for the works.

The 2024 Richard Jackson (RJ) report included inspection of the steel piling (omitted from HJS 2023 report due to weather conditions and river levels). Delamination was noted for the visible 6-8 inches but no further investigation of lower section. RJ had suggested lowering the water levels to properly examine the piling but HJS suggested it was more logical and cost effective to simply install new piling to ensure confidence of structural integrity for both the upper veranda and lower balcony. There are other adjustments such as replacing the lower balcony's chain style balustrades as no longer complying with current regulations; and upper depth extension by 1 metre is not necessary.

The next stage is to submit a planning permission amendment relating to the piling works. It was considered imperative to take immediate action to retain the venue's usability and revenue ahead of the next season. It is estimated the project could cost in the region of £50-65k. There had been a suggestion of reverting to a fire escape only but it was pointed out that this limits potential revenue expansion. Tenders sought from three contractors (Philips Engineering, Stour Engineering and third as put forward by HJS). It was **NOTED** permission was also granted for installation of a DDA lift so costings will be obtained to factor in whether this is undertaken at the same time or as a second phase (planning

permission requires works to start before March 2028). It was **AGREED** to proceed with obtaining structural drawings to obtain costings for informed discussion. **ACTION: SG & SD**

- d) **Membership** – it was recognised that membership numbers had decreased, which seems to be linked to Covid overhang, ageing membership and lack of interaction with younger paddling community. Declining membership and donors is challenge being faced by many charities and organisations.

e) **SBOC (Sudbury Boat Operations Committee)**

- i. **Rosette's batteries** – reports that might be starting to fail but could be cable issue.
- ii. **Boat Storage** - Sudbury boats will have access to the same storage as this year.
- iii. **Wendy weedcutter** – EA are interested in RST taking on weedcutting along the Sudbury-Henny stretch.

f) **DVB (Dedham Vale Boat Operations Committee)**

- i. **Dedham Boat Storage Barn** – Valuation is being arranged.
- ii. **Cattawade Car Park** – The introduction of a parking donation/fee was being considered to assist with maintenance of the site. This could possibly be managed by a third-party cost-neutral parking solution such as [ParkingEye](#). This does not detract from the site being used by locals and visitors but site covenants to be checked nonetheless.
- iii. **Boat maintenance** – Unexpected issues (Trusty's bent canopy, broken zip and electric charging issue and recent replacement of MC's batteries). It was not known whether there will be a bill for 2025 electricity usage at Boatyard from our separate meter.

g) **Dedham Lock**

- i. **Jumping from Dedham Lock** – Signage has been erected and there will be further discussion with Stour Engineering (SE) regarding their solutions to help counteract this activity.
- ii. **'Dedham Issues'** – KT will attend follow up online meeting on 1st October.
- iii. **Fallen trees at Dedham** – fallen trees are stopping access to Dedham Lock and this has been reported via EA Incident Line and directly to Waterways Navigation Team.
- iv. **Winter** – the tilting gates will come back into use and SVE have installed devices that will ensure the gates remain securely in place this year.

h) **River Maintenance Group (RMG)** – Some new recruits have joined the team. RMG is less active during July and August (holidays and peak skippering requirement period).

- i. **Cattawade jetty replacement** – Numerous EA permits are required and applications are being prepared alongside the final project design, method and risk assessment documents for discussion at DVB.
- ii. **Tree clearing** – a number of trees have been identified. It was clarified that there are limits on the extent of tree clearance that can be undertaken by RST as license are for branches and trees up to a certain size whereas additional training would be required for felling larger trees.
- iii. **Equipment storage & transportation** – RMG equipment is currently securely stored with Schofield Removals (50sqft container at £1500 per year). RB continues to only utilise his vehicle for transportation of equipment to/from the site despite incurring some damage. RB reaffirmed his claim that RST needed a dedicated vehicle. The involvement of other volunteers and their vehicles was refuted due to questionable vehicle suitability. The alternative solution of a trailer was once again put forward although accessibility to some locations and security were pitfalls. In any case, there would be implications to consider. AR suggested the possibility of a National Landscapes grant towards a vehicle effectively being used to help main the National Landscapes area. **ACTION: RB to put together proposal.**

- i) **River Ecology & Navigability Group** – This is being developed as a proactive approach to stretches of the navigation not being sufficiently maintained with issues such as encroaching reeds, overhanging branches, shallow sections and underwater obstructions. The project will also encompass monitoring and improving river health/ecology (invasive species, water quality). SG is working alongside RST members, John Kemp and Keith Seaman with the support and involvement from other organisations including Sudbury Canoe Club, Sudbury Rowing Club, Cornard Nature Reserve and Riverfly. Relationships with riparian landowners will be important as well as collaborating with RMG. As previously reported, the EA Waterways Team is aware and supportive of this project being without sufficient funding to undertake work themselves. For example, its internal processes make relatively straightforward tasks costly e.g. replacing the small portage jetties at Cornard would need to undergo CDM process and could cost in the region of £25k.
- 8) **Health & Safety**
- a) **Passenger boarding/disembarking** – BDC Safety Officer had visited and was happy with our processes and our response to the incidents i.e. two crew members must assist passengers on and off the boats whilst those with mobility problems should be first to board first and last to disembark.
- 9) **Environmental**
- a) **Himalayan Balsam** – SD had been informed at Cattawade by paddlers who had encountered this plant. Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust are aware and will undertake ‘Balsam Bashing’ session/, if not RST.
- 10) **AOB (as declared in item 6)**
- a) **Dedham gravel bar** – This prevents RST trip boats from reaching the locks at Dedham and Stratford St Mary. EA had previously committed to resolving this issue in regard to the futility of reopening Dedham Lock but being unable to navigate to it. However, a timeline has yet to be confirmed. SG has requested documents from recent Anglian Waterways Group which set out their planned works program. **ACTION: SG to send follow up email following further information from RB (email trail) and PB (initial letter/email sent to EA).**
- b) **Granary External Doors** (quotations circulated) – the external doors have deteriorated to an extent that their replacement is crucial for both security as well as aesthetics. It was **AGREED** to proceed with the expenditure of £2,550.
- c) **Solar at VEC** – It was **AGREED** to issue confirmation letter giving consent for West Suffolk Council and solar contractor to make a DNO application on our behalf for a Solar PV application. Our insurers also need to be advised. **ACTION: SG and CB**
- d) **Website** – Beta version of RST website does exist but need to push forward completion of this project with Community Action Suffolk. **ACTION: CB and SG to meet with CAS**
- e) **S2C** – 142 craft registered but quite a few dropouts during the event due to challenging weather and river conditions. There was one issue when a teenage participant (without mobile phone) was separated from his father but RST marshals were made aware and the duo were reunited at Boxted portage. Numerous issues with fallen branches, submerged trees in river, reed overgrowth. Those that reached Cattawade were positive and looked forward to taking part again. Thanks to everyone who was involved. EB reminded Council that it has been previously suggested that we offer S2C entrants a type of RST membership that differs to the paid membership but helps to increase our membership and representation of under 75-year-olds!
- f) **Ian Whale Life Membership** – KT had verbally advised and CB had amended membership status. **ACTION: PB to write formal letter (as having been Chairman of Council when this was agreed)**

11) **Date and time of next meeting:** Tuesday 14 October 2025, 2pm – via Zoom