

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Tuesday 11th August 2026 at 2:00pm
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

Present – Trustees: Paul Brewerton (PB – Chair & Treasurer), Richard Blay (RB), Alan Ryan (AR), Carol Shakespeare (CS), Kevin Taylor (KT)

Other attendees: Catherine Burrows (CB – Manager), Jane Rogers (JR - Company Secretary)

1. Declaration of Interest: None

Charity Commission guidance on conflicts of interest (as circulated 9 Jun 26, item 6-B-ii) – Conflicts are not limited to financial matters and that the guidance provides broader clarification. **Action: Trustees to review the Charity Commission guidance prior to consideration of a draft policy.**

2. Apologies for absence: Steve Durham (SD), Jim Lunn (JL)

3. Minutes of the last two meetings (approval of June minutes postponed due to upload circulation failure).

- **PROPOSED AR/ SECONDED CS** “to accept 09.06.26 Council minutes as a true record **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**
- **PROPOSED AR/ SECONDED KT** “to accept 14.07.26 Council minutes as a true record; with KT’s amendment to item 6-g-ii’
- 12.05.26 Council minutes (item 6-F-iii) - Chris Parsons (CP) had requested a retrospective revision to more accurately represent his commitment toward becoming a Trustee. It was **AGREED** to amend as follows:
“CP would like to serve a full season as SBOC Chair but there is no firm commitment to becoming a Trustee. In the meantime, he has arranged to meet with AR to share notes on the operation of the Upper and Lower river and to get a better understanding of their operation.”

4. Matters Arising – as tabled on agenda.

5. Notification of Any Other Business

- i. PB - Sudbury to the Sea event
- ii. KT – Environment Agency relationship

6. Reports

- i. **Governance**
- i. **Companies House Verification** – JR had been temporarily removed as Director due to ongoing issue with identification process and the filing deadline for confirmation statement. Our accountant, Lisa Burdett, had been able to assist so JR was reinstated.
- ii. **AGM** – Documents circulated with AR, KT, JR for re-election and CS for election. There had been no nominations for Council. Mike Finch had sent some queries, and this was being followed up. CS would be in attendance to present the accounts but, having not been involved as a Trustee during the relevant period, questions at the meeting might require additional follow up. CB queried provision of the bar and refreshments. **ACTION: CB to arrange.** Online attendance by Zoom would again be available for those not attending in person.
- iii. **Annual Accounts** – A finalised version will incorporate the required amendments, as discussed. **PROPOSED RB/ SECONDED JR** “to formally adopt the accounts upon the recommendation of the Auditor and Treasurer”. **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**

ii. **Financial** (document 'Carol Shakespeare - RST Treasurers Report August 2026')

It transpired there had been a misunderstanding regarding which RST bank accounts currently hold restricted and unrestricted funds – see below:

- 'Lloyds Unrestricted Fund' is corrected to restricted funds for specific projects.
- 'Restricted Reserves' is corrected to general funds. This had formerly been RST's Reserves, but Council agreed to make this unrestricted with a new reserves account to be set up (11.11.25, item 5-b). The balance had not been transferred into the main bank account to benefit from the small interest rate.
- 'Current Reserves' is correctly identified as the current RST Reserves for which the relevant policy was approved by Council (13.01.26, item 5-b-i).

CB explained only the Main Account can facilitate external payments whilst the other accounts can only move funds internally. CS will work with CB to update 2026 accounts regarding allocation of funds e.g. recording grant expenditure, moving funds internally, etc. It was reiterated that tidying up the 2025 accounts remained the focus at this time as this ultimately impacts 2026. Brantham Parish Council have transferred a £1,500 grant into the Main account, but it is restricted for allocation against the Cattawade jetty project.

- i. **Leasehold Property** – CS is continuing to research Mike Finch's query regarding an entry in the Balance Sheet for the value of RST's leasehold properties – specifically the Granary and Dedham Lock - as tangible assets. The concern is that there has been a mistaken interpretation of the financial rules from the previous accountants. The leases are not transferable or saleable, so their values have overstated our assets
- ii. **RMG sub-committee** – The initial meeting had taken place, and it was agreed that the major breach at Flatford would be priority (ref. 4a4b), for which RST had received grant money from Babergh District Council. RB will provide revised costings for the above to ensure we are covered by this grant. There will be no future work undertaken on the breaches until discussed and further grants are obtained.
- iii. **Project costings** – CS is following up full cost implications for the 'Barn Project' and the 'Granary Project' necessary to ensure adequate funds to carry out all the proposed project work.
- iv. **Mileage Policy** (documents x 2: 'Proposed Mileage Claim Doc 07.26' and 'Mileage without names') - The policy revision had been circulated for both the previous and current meeting, with discussion at last meeting (14.07.26, item 9-i). It was **AGREED** to accept the policy revision to apply from 1st July 2026. There was some discussion regarding opposition to "claim deadline of the 5th working day of the following month in which they were incurred" but this timeline aligns with standard accounting practices and will likely be applicable to general claims in the future.

iii. **Membership** (Document: "Membership Report - Aug26")

It was **NOTED** that the automated system now facilitates payment of joining subscription at the time of application instead of postponing this until application is manually approval.

It was **AGREED** to accept all new members.

RB queried the membership approval process and said the report should focus more on overall number of members gained and lost. The report does include this basic data on membership totals (and more details where known) but it was reiterated the approval process is a requirement stipulated in our governing document i.e. Memorandum and Articles of Association (MAA).

It was suggested that, in the early stages of the charity formation, it was probably felt necessary to prevent membership where it was known that motives did not align with the charity's aims and objectives. The RST MAA would likely benefit from another review for which the process is outlined by Companies House and Charity Commission.

iv. **Management 2026**

i. **Stratford St Mary River Garden** (Document 'SSM PC - River Garden')

In June 2026, SSM Parish Council (SSMPC) emailed about the River Garden. This followed contact with the landowners, Northumbrian Water, who rejected SSMPC request to extend from annual to a 5-year term. There had

also been an increase to the lease fee from £1 a year to £250 alongside other obligations. SSMPC were actively canvassing opinion from residents and other interested parties and this included asking whether RST would take responsibility for the River Garden since we have a lease for the river access platform there. Our response had been to confirm “RST would want to look into retaining this as a river access point”. To date, there has been no further contact from SSM PC and nothing from Northumbrian Water.

There are various portage points at Stratford St Mary, but these are not as easily accessible as the River Garden.

- ii. **Coracle event at Bures** – This was mentioned to highlight efforts to retain this as part of the annual RST events calendar. It’s a free event but promotes RST and the Bures section of the river. It was recommended that Events should be a Council agenda item to address insufficient discussion, planning and/or support for RST events. **ACTION: PB to add new agenda item ‘Events’**

v. **SBOC** (*Document x 1: ‘sboc and granary reports aug 2026’*)

The report was accepted requiring no additional debate, changes, or written follow-up.

vi. **DVB** (*Documents x 2: ‘Lower river report Aug26 – AR’*)

The report was accepted with further discussion on the following items:

- i. **Flatford-Dedham water levels** – Discussions with National Trust and Field Studies Centre at Flatford about the issue and the operation of the sluice have been unproductive. RST is concerned that the river levels are a problem not only from a navigational standpoint but also environmentally.
- ii. **Flatford Lock repairs** – Stour Valley Engineering have quoted £195+VAT for stainless steel fixed brackets for each post (x8 = £1560+VAT). It was **AGREED** to proceed with this solution, as discussed and recommended by DVB, which does not involve draining the lock but instead securing the brackets onto the firm wood posts.
- iii. **Dedham Lock jump proof fencing** – RST is legally compliant with regard to signage, but Stour Valley Engineering had been approached to quote for a suitable solution. A bespoke design and fitting have been quoted at £3,760+VAT. It was **AGREED** to proceed to alleviate this issue. It was deemed RST’s responsibility so not appropriate to request a contribution from Dedham Mill residents. However, it could be worthwhile approaching Dedham Parish Council for financial assistance.
- iv. **Dedham Lock Penstocks** – Aquico had quoted just under £4,675+VAT to carry out the repairs which had been deemed too expensive. KT had enquired after their recommendations for necessary parts enabling RST to make alternative arrangements for the repair. A diagram is awaited but the cost for parts is circa £680 (it is not currently known whether sale or return is offered).

vii. **RMG** (*Document: ‘RMG Report August - by email’*)

The report was accepted with further discussion on the following items:

- i. **Cattawade jetty project** – This has been well received by paddlers.

It was **NOTED** that the final total project cost of £17,228 had exceeded the agreed budget by £5,000 and there had been no formal Trustee discussion or approval to allocate all or part of the £10,000 River Stour Boating grant towards the project. RST had restored the grant in full as there was no way to confirm previous expenditure due to change of accounting software.

PROPOSED JR/SECONDED CS that ‘the River Stour Boating CIC grant of £10,000 be allocated in its entirety against the Cattawade Jetty project’. AGREED UNANIMOUSLY

[post meeting note: RSBCIC grant conditions: “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.”]

viii. **Granary Fire Escape & Balcony** (*Document ‘sboc and granary reports aug 2026’*)

The report was accepted with further discussion as follows:

- Internal Lift – we have planning permission for this, and suppliers are being researched to obtain pricing (circa £20,000) to apply for grant/s. PB has been made aware that [Bramford to Twinstead Community Fund](#)

offers grants up to £20,000 for capital works on community-owned buildings or land, as part of National Grid's £4.2 million community funding program. The application submission deadline is 18 Sep 2026 for a decision in Oct 2026. **ACTION: PB**

- Structure replacement – Phillips Engineering would like to commence from 1st Sep and the impact on venue hirers and tea room needs clarification.
- The Granary hire rates can be increased and the venue more proactively promoted once the required works are finally completed and full capacity is reinstated.

7. Health & Safety

- Manual update** - KT advised that SD has completed the revision of the DVB Operational Safety Procedures and Local Information Manual to comply with Gateway 3 of the IWA COBM Training Scheme. This will differ to SBOC manual follows disagreement on what should be covered within the scope of the training and operations manuals.
- Lifejacket/buoyancy aids policy** – There was some discussion about how volunteers approach the 'offer not recommend' revision to the policy.
- Insurance Update: Lock operation** – It was mentioned that SBOC are still questioning the necessity for Skippers only to manage the boat during lock operation.

8. Environmental – No report

9. Any Other Business (AOB) – discussed under other items.

- S2C (PB)** - A recent river survey undertaken by experienced paddlers of the River Health Group had established that low water levels and rapid reed and weed growth makes the section between the campsite and Boxted Mill almost impassable.
The recommendation is to cancel the 2-day event and switch to a 1-day event ending at the campsite. This would be a more enjoyable and safer paddle for the participants who differ in experience as well as family groups and increasing number of paddleboarders who would all struggle with the conditions. All those booked in were to be advised and invited to transfer to a 1-day event with a reduction in the entry fee.
ACTION: PB to draft statement for CB to send to all participants and publish on social media. CB to follow up with relevant suppliers and businesses as well as participants regarding event changes, transfers and refunds.
- EA relationship** – KT was concerned about lack of response to issues that have been raised with EA. There was frustration, particularly given works undertaken by RST volunteers to proactively improve the river [post meeting note: as well as processing sales of unpowered craft registrations in the region of £18,000]. It was suggested that there was a more systemic issue with various departments not even aware of one another's activities. There is slow response time to emails, particularly shared mailboxes, such as boat registration (email enquiry sent 10 July received auto reply stated '10 working days customer charter' but no reply to date).
The low water levels and prolific weed was causing problems and progress to address issues was vague and slow. There was a need for better cooperation which was felt to be lacking. **ACTION: PB to email Katherine Briscoe. Further follow up could be contacting local MPs James Cartledge and Bernard Jenkins.**

10. Date and time of next meeting: Tuesday 8th September 2026, 2pm – online via Zoom.