

River Stour Trust Council Meeting
Monday 20th May 2024 at 2:00pm
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

Present - Trustees: Emrhys Barrell (EB), Paul Brewerton (PB), Steve Durham (SD), Maggie Gardner (MG), Hilary Gallo (HG), Jane Rogers (JR), Kevin Taylor (KT)

Others: Catherine Burrows (CB), Sharon Quinn (SQ)

1. **Apologies for absence:** Jim Lunn (JL), Alan Ryan (AR)

2. **Minutes of last meeting**

It was **AGREED** to accept the 05.04.24 Special Meeting minutes (to discuss and finalise Dedham Lock contractor) as a true record of that meeting. It was **AGREED** to not publish these on the website due to commercial sensitivity.

It was **AGREED** to accept the 16.04.24 Council minutes as a true record of that meeting without redactions for the online version.

3. **Matters Arising:** as tabled on Agenda.

4. **Reports**

a) **Financial/management**

- No specific report for this meeting as HG awaiting some further information, but up-to-date bank balances given as follows: Main Account £68,528, Reserves £105,148, Special Projects £35,612.
- BBL loan balance is currently at £12,500.
- Dedham Lock project initial deposit payment of £12,356.82 has been paid to Green Oak Carpentry.
- Granary fire exit replacement application is still in progress. Plans will include future provision for a lift.

b) **SBOC**

- JC electrical repairs have been completed and now needs cleaning before coming back into operation.
- 8 of JC's batteries were borrowed for use in EL as she was experiencing problems. It was **AGREED** that EB order 8 new batteries for EL at a cost of £1700.
- Very busy with charters, Suffolk Walking Festival, Henny Lunch Cruises and busy in the tea room.
- Late notice charter for EA representative (travelling from North Lincolnshire) to view potential locations between Sudbury and Henny for 'weed deposit locations'.

c) **DVB**

- Unfortunately, not a good start to the season due to the weather.
- Aspirations to offer Flatford boat trips everyday but difficulties in getting sufficient crew. JR offered to help bankside, if required.
- Still restricted to using Trusty only until MC propellor shaft is fixed or replaced; and she would benefit from a couple of new batteries. Stour Valley Engineering might be able to help with the shaft; or contact or T. Norris Marine as they produce this item (circa £250). It was **AGREED** to add an additional two batteries at the same time as ordering for EL.
- CPD sessions postponed whilst only able to operate Trusty on the Flatford stretch.
- Kevin Ward has been appointed as a DVB trainer to work alongside Kevin Taylor.

d) **Dedham Lock**

- Council congratulated EB who reported that his Garfield Weston application has been successful, and the £15,000 grant will be paid within a week of bank details being provided. An end of project report will be provided by May 2025.
- Pilgrim Trust also offered £15,000 but visit to the lock to be arranged.

- Essex Heritage Trust would like to see works commence on site in July before issuing the £10,000 grant.
- KT thanked HG for joining the project team to lend his knowledge and experience with paperwork. IN particular, he has already prepared a draft contract for Green Oak Carpentry (GOC).
- GOC have revisited the site and are getting underway with preparing RAMS and construction phase plans. Plans to start late July and finish by end of August 2024 (with September as a 'cushion' should works need additional time).
- It was noticed that the bands at the top of the lock gates are not useable so GOC blacksmith will replace these.
- EA permit applications are in progress with one already accepted at a cost of £1190 (25% discount applied, costs split as £968 main part of lock works, £111 dewatering the lock, £111 use of floating structure i.e. Versadock to float the lock gates along the river).
- A further application is being submitted for works pertaining to the erosion of the lock island. The permit is expected to cost in the region of £968.
- DMMCL have been advised that the lock restoration is taking precedence over the lock island works due to the specific dates when the works are permitted to be undertaken.
- EB emailed EA Waterways Manager, Katherine Briscoe, to provide an update on the project and to enquire whether there is any funding available. She had forwarded this to Alastair Windler, the new Anglian Waterways Asset Manager, who had said they were hoping to locate some funding. EB had pointed out that the office rental fee for the river inspectors allocated space at the VEC had never been followed up.
- Did we ever follow up with EA regarding contributions towards tree removal? We are saving them considerable sums of money each time we undertake this.

e) River Maintenance Group

Richard Blay has submitted a RMG budget request and Cattawade improvements costings proposal (circa £5,000). He has since applied to Brantham Parish Council for funding towards the latter (extending the car park) which will involve members of the IWA Waterways Recovery Group.

The Cattawade project was largely supported although JR pointed out that the CIL application incorrectly states that RST has two part-time employees, and EB suggested supplementing the submitted application with images showing the site being used and enjoyed by people. HG suggested that a 10% contingency should also be included within the projected costs.

It was **AGREED** to accept the Cattawade project proposal with the addition of a 10% contingency. **ACTION:** Images of the site in use to be forwarded on to improve the chances of the grant's success.

Further discussion was required on the 3-year budget and equipment plan as more details required. There are some instances when hiring equipment as required might be preferable to purchasing outright. MG said most of the items were not available to hire and would ensure that the RST could operate the boat trips which bring us income. It was **NOTED** that the increased RMG activity on the lower stretch was to assist RST and other river users but sometimes covering the responsibilities of others, such as the EA and landowners. SD pointed out that there are safety considerations to make sure we have the right tools for the job. **ACTION:** HG to discuss with Richard Blay. EB will continue discussions with the EA to keep them aware that we are saving them money.

f) Membership

MG sends subscription reminder emails but don't always hear back and membership numbers are decreasing but how do we get more? CB said that engaging with the current members and sending a membership newsletter would help. JR suggested that S2C registration comprises compulsory membership. There are no incentives to joining but tax implications seem to have been the issue. **ACTION:** EB to contact Princess Risborough Railway Association to enquire how they manage to offer benefits for members.

There is a list of members to be formally approved by Council. **ACTION:** CB to circulate names by email.

5. Health & Safety

An accident at Flatford where RST volunteers assisted, although without association to RST operations or land.

Temporary repairs to bring Cattawade portage back into use have been completed with signage indicating to river users which side is safe to use. This will remain in place until a complete overhaul of the portage can be carried out.

SD asked that RST consider granting permission for BBQs on the site by organised groups. It was **AGREED** that we have an allowance for organised groups to manage BBQs (gas powered only, not charcoal/wood), subject to RST being contacted in advance and the requesting organisation to provide suitable insurance and risk assessment documents.

It was suggested that regular users of the Cattawade might be willing to contribute towards its upkeep.

6. Environmental

A lot of illness has been reported by river users on the lower stretch of the river. Weill's Disease, e-coli and other toxins in the river seem to be worsened by the flooding. SD reminded DVB volunteers via WhatsApp about Weill's Disease and preventative measures (also forwarded to SBOC volunteers on WhatsApp).

Defra has awarded Designated Bathing Water Status to the stretch of the river alongside Friars Meadow. It doesn't mean the water is safe but requires the EA to test the water during the bathing season with the results to be published on signage by the river by Sudbury Town Council. It was **NOTED** that Trustees thanked RST volunteer, John Kemp, who had been the driving force behind this scheme.

7. AOB

- a) **Mobiboat** – To bring her up to a useable standard was estimated to be in the region of £7,000. National Trust (NT) are keen for accessible boat trips to be a shared initiative. NT have offered a berth, landing stage for operating from, outboard motor and battery can potentially be securely stored with battery charging facility within the proposed new rowboat work shed but no land-based, covered storage at the site. However, there are other NT owned buildings that might be suitable for storing the boat over winter. NT wants to liaise closely with RST and the mobiboat to clearly promote both organisations. A joint project to access funding avenues was a viable option to pursue. EB is able to loan a battery that can be tiller steered for trial run. The mobiboat is designed to allow a wheelchair user to actually steer the boat which opens up volunteering opportunities to more people.
- b) **Boxted Bridge** – the navigation remains closed at this location although assurances were made in July 2023 that an alternative portage would be installed. The EA have said that Essex Highways are leading on this but S2C cannot go ahead if this is not resolved. **ACTION:** PB to contact Essex Highways and EA.
- c) **Versadock at SSM** – the Versadock has been moved into the pumping station following repeated trespassing onto the site. We currently do not have the correct key to access the external area of the site, but this is being discussed. RST has permitted half the structure to be used by Northumbrian Water for river access during a canoeing activity for disabled and autistic children.

8. Next meeting: Tuesday 2nd July 2024, 2pm – via Zoom