

**River Stour Trust Council Meeting**  
**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 at 2:00pm**  
**[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]**

**Present - Trustees:** Emrhys Barrell (EB), Paul Brewerton (PB – Chairman of Council), Steve Durham (SD), Maggie Gardner (MG – Company Secretary), Jane Rogers (JR), Kevin Taylor (KT)

**Others:** Catherine Burrows (CB), Sharon Quinn and N. Williamson, Lisa King (LK - Accountant – item 4)

**1. Apologies for absence:** H. Gallo (HG - Treasurer), Jim Lunn (JL), Alan Ryan (AR)

**2. Minutes of last meeting**

Correction of grant figure - from '£12,000' to '£15,000' (item 5a)

It was **AGREED** to accept the 02.07.24 Council minutes as a true record of that meeting, subject to the correction, without redactions for the online version.

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

**4. AGM Preparation**

- LK presented the 2023 Annual Accounts and invited questions/queries before they were to be finalised.
- The BBL balance had recently been settled so would be disclosed on the accounts.
- There had been an issue regarding VAT reconciliation, but this had been finally resolved by contacting HMRC. A sizeable credit was being held on our account without our knowledge and HMRC have been deducting payments against it. We requested repayment and a sum of £17,376 was received in July.
- A note regarding purchases made from the Thames Electric Launch Company, in which EB has an interest, clarifies all purchases were charged at a strictly nett rate, with no profit accruing to the company. Suppliers' invoices for every purchase are provided to the Trust to confirm this.
- CB enquired about provision of refreshments, and it was **AGREED** to offer complimentary hot drinks with pay bar. **ACTION:** CB.

**ACTION:** Queries regarding 2023 Annual Accounts to be forwarded ahead of their finalisation on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, at which point they need to be made available to members, along with the final agenda and 2023 draft AGM minutes. [Post meeting note: CB followed this up although it was during annual leave].

**5. Reports**

**a) Financial/management**

- Accounts packages – we are looking at alternatives to Sage due to cost and useability. Comparative year on year profit & loss reports are no longer easy to obtain.
- Granary Fire Exit – still progressing with the planning permission now available for public consultation.
- S2C and Boxted navigation – RST's installation of a temporary portage for the event has been agreed verbally by the EA with PB to consult the landowners. CB will check in on bookings and queries for the event in a voluntary capacity during annual leave.
- Banking – Payments from the bank account are now authorised by 2 people (between CB, PB and HG).

**b) Membership** – no report

**c) SBOC**

- The silt build-up in Gasworks Cut is worsening with our accessible boat, Francis J, is running aground and only recently getting stuck when accessing the slipway jetty to load wheelchair users. There have been discussions with Aquatic Solutions (EA's weedcutting contractor for the past few years) and suggested method is a floating pontoon to collect silt into special bags that allow the water to drain out, but the solids remain ready for composting. Council **AGREED** to proceed based on a worst-case scenario costing £8,000. Works to be scheduled over the period when the boats are no longer operational. **ACTION:** EA permit application to be followed up but need to check whether this will be undertaken by the contractor or RST.

#### d) DVB

- DVB news update (appended to these minutes) - SD had circulated to DVB members only as many had not realised the start of the Dedham Lock Project was imminent. Volunteers are working hard to raise funds so important to keep them informed. This update could be incorporated into a wider membership newsletter.
- The Flatford bank breach should cost RST circa £300 to resolve and EA permits are being obtained to proceed with the works classified as emergency. The affected area is on land owned by the farmer, Guy Lennox, who is permitting access but offering no financial contribution at this time.
- It is anticipated that once Dedham Lock is back in use, boat trips to Stratford St Mary will be desirable but a recent charter struggled with silt build up, particularly near Roger Brown Lock as well as Dedham Mill Pond being identified as a problematic area. **ACTION:** Reprofiling for these locations could be a future issue that might again involve the services of a contractor, such as Aquatic Solutions.
- CB asked whether it would be possible to arrange a trip with passage through Roger Brown Lock for longstanding member #8, Ivan Cane. This request has been outstanding for the past few years as it's been postponed for one reason or another from either party. It was suggested that springtime would be a better possibility due to better river depth and less weed growth.

#### e) Dedham Lock

- The start date remains as 27<sup>th</sup> August although the contract needs to be countersigned by GOC.
- The gates will need to be removed from Schofield's Storage on 27<sup>th</sup> August. **ACTION:** EB to review storage terms and advise Schofield's of the gate removal.
- Lock Island erosion planning permission has been submitted at a cost of £293. One of the statutory consultees are National Landscapes and they have no objections. There is also no objection from the water vole survey, although it is recommended that work is carried out this season before they 'move in' and area to be kept trimmed. When the lock is drained, a fisheries expert will relocate fish, and an escape route i.e. a plank for mammals to be able to escape from the lock chamber.
- The Essex Heritage Trust grant will be awarded upon proof of purchase of the penstocks.
- The Pilgrim Trust is pledging £15,000 and would like to arrange a site visit. A view from the footpath will suffice. **ACTION:** EB to liaise with Pilgrim Trust and KT to arrange a date.
- SD is in touch with Jenny Bingle (Northumbrian Water Supply Manager) and meeting arranged for 13<sup>th</sup> August.

#### f) River Maintenance Group

- RMG team and other DVB volunteers did sterling work loading all 28 steel stop locks (each stop log weighs 40kg and are used to dam the locks), from Stratford Lock onto floating pontoons prepared at Stratford Pumping Station and then towed by Kathleen from to Dedham Lock Island.
- Other than the emergency bank repairs at Flatford, the team are getting ready for works at Cattawade Picnic Site. Members of the Waterways Recovery Group will assist, and the site will be closed to all visitors (advance signage on display and Google listing updated). River users who are not aware can still exit the river at the slipway past the site.

### 6. Health & Safety

- Due to river conditions, DVB are double manning the boat rather than single manning until footpath access is re-established.

### 7. Environmental

- FRA application submitted for emergency bank repair works at Flatford (see item 5d).

### 8. AOB

- It was **NOTED** that JR wanted to record thanks to everyone working so hard to help for RST.

### 9. Next meeting: Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024, 2pm – via Zoom

## Appendix A

### ITEM 5d – DVB Update (31.07.24 email sent to DVB volunteers & RST Trustees)

Dear all, (You may need a make cuppa to read this!)

We seem to be going through a period where all-in-sundry are throwing curve balls at us from multiple directions to thwart our boat operations. We are doing our best to limit the disruptions, but as you know the breach in the bank is the major issue. Without footpath access for back-up and to ensure safe operations, the decision was made to have two skippers on all trips until the situation is resolved. To ease the pressure three people were allocated to duty days where possible, only to be told by The Boatyard with their new ANPR system, only two cars are permitted to be parked at Dedham Boatyard.

When three skippers have been allocated to Trusty's Flatford trip duties, one will have to travel directly to Flatford in the morning and set up camp ready for the arrival of the boat. Likewise at the end of the day, the boat can leave and head back to Dedham directly, leaving the Flatford person to decamp and pack everything away. It was anticipated that the skippers concerned would work it between them, or the OOD would designate (other than themselves), who would start at Flatford.

If going to Flatford is logistically difficult for some, then the third person can park in the Dedham Public Car Park. It's £5 for a days parking and claim it back. You can complete expenses claims online, or download the forms if preferred at ...

<https://www.riverstourtrust.org/about/rst-policies/remuneration-and-subsistence-policy/general-expenses-claim/>

#### Role of the OOD

It has been reported that on occasions, some OODs have chosen to start the day at Flatford, but I'm afraid this does not align with the responsibilities of the role. The OOD is responsible to oversee administration and that the boat is prepared, safe and fit for the days operations and likewise at days end, bedded down, moored correctly and on charge. This can only be achieved at Dedham. The duties of the OOD can be found in the RST Training Manual under Module 16, Page 19, but who can still find their manual? Took me ages to dig mine out, so just as a reminder, I have attached the relevant section and I've included some guidance to the role.

Even if you do not as yet volunteer for the OOD role, please still read the attached. From my experience, everybody mucks in to get the jobs and paperwork work done, but the OOD's role means they have to be there from start to finish.

#### Flatford River Bank Breach

After many hours of consultations with the farmer, Suffolk Highways, Environment Agency and 'Uncle Tom Cobbly and All', the farmer has finally agreed to give us access to repair the breach that he is responsible for and doesn't want to pay for and the authorities are too scared to legally enforce. Richard and his RMG team will start to repair the bank this Monday 5th August. If anybody can spare a few hours filling sand bags etc, please contact Richard.

#### Flatford Bridge Lanes

There are moves by National Trust to change traffic flows at the head of the car park, introduce a golf buggy and classify the access lanes as a 'Restricted Parking Zone - No Parking at Any Time'. This includes the area in front of Bridge Cottage on the approach to the bridge. Although we fully support NT in trying to improve pedestrian safety and stop kayaka's and boarder's parking in the lanes and the disabled car park, we object to the Bridge Cottage section. We need to be able to park vehicles and trailers to carry out maintenance of our land and the lock and have asked for a 'permit holders only' status. We are in consultation with NT and Suffolk Highways and a full response has been submitted in writing, so watch this space.

## **Maria Constable**

Poor old girl! As you know this boat suffered a bent propeller shaft and obtaining a replacement has not been easy, particularly as it has to be made to order and to very precise specifications. Anyway, the shaft has finally arrived and Ian Connelly and his team have fitted it, but there are still some fitting issues that need to be resolved. It is now very unlikely MC will be put back into the water this year.

## **Trusty**

Trusty is holding out despite some juddering from the propeller or shaft. As many of you know, despite the EA putting a weed cutter in the river earlier, there is a lot of weed being picked up on the propeller. The poled hooked knife has been sharpened and a straight slightly serrated knife on a pole has also been provided. A previous safety message was sent out regarding clearing the prop, but to emphasise, a strict regime of not having the cutting pole in the water whilst the ignition key is active is required. You must establish a good command communication system to ensure the prop cannot be turned with cutting pole in the water. If somebody enters water in waders to clear the prop, then it is prohibited to have the ignition key on the boat. Ideally the key should be in their pocket before wading in.

Also again, please take great care when stowing the charging cable. A wooden cover was made to protect the fuse box and wiring, but on several occasions this cover is found upturned and the fuse box cover is knocked off. You could find yourself stuck without power if a wire is dislodged during sailing. A small switch cover has also now been made to prevent the cable hitting the STOP switch on the battery charger.

## **Dedham Lock Gates**

On Monday, the RMG team and other DVB volunteers loaded all 28 steel stop locks (used to dam the locks), from Stratford Lock onto floating pontoons prepared at Stratford Pumping Station and then towed by Kathleen from to Dedham Lock Island. Each stop log weighs 40Kg so not light work and other than a minor slip on a bank and a very wet leg for somebody, all without incident. It was commented that it was reminiscent of the pictures of the old lighters under tow going down the river.

Dedham Lock restoration is all set to go ahead on the 27th August and it will take three weeks. Green Oak Carpentry is the contractor and once set up, the site becomes a construction site and there will be no access for RST or the public. Only those RST personnel that need to carry out compliance audits or inspections, as required by the CDM Regulations are permitted on site. Those personnel will need a safety helmet, high viz and safety footwear. However, it is intended to arrange some visiting days at the weekends so those of you who want to see the progress can do so. The public footpath will not be closed, so you can observe from the footbridge anyway, but do not go on site.

In closing and I know I speak for the whole DVB Committee, we are truly grateful for the efforts and support everybody has put in this season just to keep things going and in very difficult circumstances. Its a credit to you all that as a team we have such a positive outlook with excellent morale and yes, we can still have laugh, even if it is often at ourselves.

Remember we are all volunteers, have fun.

Kind regards

Steve Durham