

**River Stour Trust Council Meeting**  
**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at 2:00pm**  
[virtual via Zoom - meeting was recorded]

**Present - Trustees:** Emrhys Barrell (EB), Paul Brewerton (PB – Chairman of Council), Steve Durham (SD), H. Gallo (HG - Treasurer), Jim Lunn (JL), Alan Ryan (AR), Kevin Taylor (KT)

**Others:** Catherine Burrows (CB), Richard Blay (RB)

**1. Apologies for absence:** Jane Rogers (JR)

**2. Minutes of last meeting**

The minutes were a true record, although it was subsequently clarified that Ian Connelly had been on holiday, so SD and EB had overseen Trusty's charger replacement (item 5e, paragraph 2).

It was **AGREED** to accept the 02.09.24 Council minutes as a true record of that meeting, subject to the amendment, without redactions for the online version.

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

**4. Reports**

**a) Financial** (comparative Period and Year Profit & Loss Report had been circulated)

Boat operation income is down on the previous year, but not surprising as it's been a tough season. Kathleen's Talbooth income was also yet to be included. [post meeting note: unsettled weather, river flooding, MC and JC out of use due to mechanical issues].

In contrast, Granary bookings and bar income had increased. EB enquired whether there had been more weddings than the previous year. Unfortunately, a new inadequacy with the Sage accounting software meant it was not possible to easily compare 2023 and 2024 figures. Sage had been contacted and their unsatisfactory solution was that a historic accounts file be uploaded to extract a previous year's profit & loss report before overwriting the software with an up-to-date file to generate the same report then manually produce a comparison report. Anecdotally, it was thought there have been more midweek weekly bookings [post meeting note: there had been a similar number of wedding functions, but two cancellations in 2023].

**b) Management**

- i. Tree works at Cornard – Quotes being sourced for removal of willow tree in millstream (not blocking main navigation) and section that overhangs footpath and a residence.
- ii. Granary Fire Escape Project – It was examined 2 years ago following an incident, and venue capacity was temporarily reduced to allow repairs but with an overall conclusion that a total replacement was required. The planning application submitted is for a metal fire escape, with wooden features and space allocated for a freestanding external platform lift.

A Babergh Heritage Officer (differing from the officer who attended pre-application meeting) has responded to query the location and finish of the lift. A flood risk assessment has been completed and there is a request for a survey of the piling supports, which has been quoted at a cost of £2,075 +VAT. There could be funding for the lift available from a landfill grant as well as Babergh District Council. It was felt prudent to carry out a formal inspection of the piling regardless of the project.

It was **AGREED** that a working party was desirable to oversee this project, and this was to comprise PB (chair), EB (funding, grants), SD (constructions, H&S), RB and CB. EB has already spoken to a local contractor familiar with listed building works.

**c) Membership** – There were no objections to formally accepting the 4 new members.

- i. **Andrew Sheldon** – RST stalwart for 25+ years who has been involved in a number of RST activities, roles and projects but soon moving up North to be closer to family. It was **AGREED** to offer life membership.

ii. **Subscription reminders** – RB queried whether renewal reminders are issued, particularly as it was understood membership was required by active volunteers to be covered under RST insurance. CB said renewal reminders were usually overseen by the Membership Secretary. This was to be followed up since Maggie Gardner had stepped down alongside setting up the new membership system. The ‘MemberMojo’ system will automate a lot of the processes and reduce the administrative burden as it enables members to verify and update their own membership details.

d) **S2C** – PB thanked everyone that was involved to oversee approximately 130 craft over the course of the weekend. Event booking had been delayed until mid-August due to the ongoing closure of the navigation at Boxted. Our thanks to the landowners for permitting installation of a temporary alternative portage by RMG team, which subsequently enabled the EA to approve the event. The navigation at Boxted remains closed and discussions between Essex Highways and the landowners continue. RST is liaising with EA and the relevant parties to get this section of the river re-opened for all river users soonest.

e) **SBOC**

- SBOC Chair – David Kirkman is back home recuperating following his successful operation. Steve Guidici is undertaking the role of Chair.
- Santa Boat Rides dates have been confirmed with EL to be used during this event, whilst Rosette and FJ to come out of the water ahead of scheduled winter maintenance.
- John Constable – as previously reported, she is still out of action as the repairs were not successful. Our insurers have been contacted so full replacement of the controllers, and possibly the motors, is required. TELCO will be asked for a quotation. EB advised Council that 2 new motors would cost in the region of £7,000 each which is what we should ask insurers for. However, we should be prepared that that insurers might only offer to contribute a proportion of this as the existing motors are 12 years old. There could be a possibility of obtaining a grant for a historic vessel.
- As an update we have submitted an estimate to insurers of £15,050 plus installation cost.
- FJ’s motor and canopy– professional advice required as part of its winter maintenance (a lot of habitation propellor damage and steering arm too short). Sail & Cover have been booked to attend and it was suggested that alternative quotes are also sought.

f) **DVB**

- Trusty and Kathleen canopies - 3 quotations to be obtained on a like-for-like basis. The expectation is that Kathleen canopy will require a replacement, but Trusty will benefit from repairs (new zips and turn buckles with reproofing that last 3 years).
- CPD – only 4 DVB skippers have incomplete assessments, but SD not sure whether volunteers are completing sections on upper river. The shared online folder system has not been utilised.
- DVB Barn – Jax Horswill (JH) is looking to sell the barn. JH was advised the roof is leaking and some side panelling needs attention, and she is quite happy to pay for this. The next-door neighbour is also planning to sell so a prospective buyer might like to take both properties. There is also an office and cart lodge, but significant repairs to the barn are required. The plot alone in the area was an attractive proposition to a potential buyer.

g) **Dedham Lock**

Council was reminded that, at the RST AGM, Stephen Bunting had raised concerns regarding the upper lock gates and the existing stoplogs which he suggested ought to be removed. This area was checked whilst the lock chamber was drained. It was decided that the stoplogs do not cause a navigational problem and are actually beneficial to hold back silt and other detritus.

Contract – it was clarified that the simple format of the contract chosen for the Dedham Lock project was in preference to a ‘bill of quantities’ contract (lists individual costings for the work, materials and labour), ‘schedule of rates’ contract (used when the nature of work required is known but it cannot be quantified) or a hybrid of the two. These were considered heavy handed and impractical, so the simple format kept costings down for all parties. It is not possible to retrospectively break down costings and change the contract format. Only 3 of the 6 contractors approached submitted a tender. KT reported that Green Oak Carpentry were a pleasure to deal with,

resolved issues quickly and had worked well alongside Stour Valley Engineering (who assisted with some steelworks on site). It was determined the brief had been met with no H&S issues.

The original quotation had been £53,250 and there was a couple of reductions relating to the stop logs bringing the final figure to £50,150. The stop logs had been a fixed price, so it was a goodwill gesture to offer a reduction. The provision of penstocks is another issue that requires explanation, because Aquiko had been put forward by RST as the supplier given the type of penstock that RST required. GOC had various issues with the provision of the penstocks, including delivery, missing parts, inoperable parts, incorrect fittings, etc. GOC will follow up directly with Aquiko. For this reason, there was certainly a degree of relief that GOC were responsible for this task instead of RST as it would have undoubtedly caused an unwelcome delay to the project. The penstocks cost has reduced from £16,800 to £13,800 as detailed in KT's final account which lists the variations such as fixing oversized lock gates, walkway boards and manual removal and repair of the straps (repairs undertaken by SVE).

The final figure is a little over £68,000 which is less than originally agreed. It was **AGREED** to ensure GOC's final balance is paid upon receipt of the final invoice.

Thanks to KT, SD, AR, EB, Mike Finch and Colin Daines (as well as RMG team) for their input to the success of this project. KT reminded everyone that the piling of the lock island was still outstanding for which the planning permission has been received although there is a slight hitch. A restriction was placed on heavy machinery with a view on hand-held tools to be used (noise and environmental concerns). However, the permission is granted with a reference to 'hand tools only' which needs clarity/correction. KT is trying to follow this up but the officer who dealt with the application is currently on leave for 3 weeks. KT is also consulting with the residents, particularly Lock Cottage, to alleviate concerns (noise, duration, vibrations, etc) regarding the tools and method adopted.

#### **h) River Maintenance Group**

RB was pleased to report works at Cattawade were almost finished with only the fifth picnic table and walkway ramps to be finished. The replacement portage jetty works, and budget is being formulated. CB queried whether there had been discussions with Trustees regarding budget increase as RB's submitted costings spreadsheet showed Brantham Parish Council had increased its grant award (£5731 exc. VAT) with further expense (£1325 exc. VAT) listed as 'RST retained costs'. RB confirmed he had not contacted anyone regarding additional expense, and his initial estimate had excluded some items.

RB's budget proposal of £4,987 was presented to Council in May (RST Council 20.05.24, item 4e) and Trustees agreed a budget of £5,000 with an additional 10% contingency of £500, but in hopeful anticipation of the project being fully funded by RB's grant application to Brantham Parish Council (BPC). RB claimed the BPC grant covered the cost of the car park improvements with RST covering other works, but this was inconsistent to what was previously outlined. It was **AGREED** that expenses should be approved by the Trustees and liaising with the Treasurer is a minimum requirement. Nonetheless, RB and RMG were thanked for their efforts to improve the site.

#### **5. Health & Safety**

- First Aid kits and fire extinguishers for the boats are required for the new season.
- H&S policies need to be reviewed and updated. **ACTION: SD**

#### **6. Environmental – no report**

- Policy needs to be reviewed and updated. **ACTION: SD**

#### **7. AOB**

- a) Lengthsmen Scheme – A revival of the scheme whereby walkers and paddlers to monitor particular stretches (lengths) of the river and report back any issues.

#### **8. Next meeting: Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024, 2pm – via Zoom**

It was **AGREED** to skip a December meeting.