

NABO NEWS

The central graphic is a grey porthole with a white circular label inside. The label features the text 'NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS' around the top edge, 'NABO' in large black letters in the center, and 'www.nabo.org.uk' at the bottom. The porthole is decorated with green holly leaves and red berries on both sides.

- **Letter to Minister on Licensing**
- **BW Customer Service Standards Survey**
- **Sustainable Boating - Solar Power**



Issue 7 December 2007



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Editor's Note

A merry Christmas and a happy Hogmanay to you all!
Savour this greeting because there are precious few festive frivolities in the rest of this issue, mainly because I seem to be suffering an 'in year cut' across the board in snippets from you (not even any responses to the plea on p.18!).

However this shortage may suit those who have suffered a surfeit of seasonal sentimentality and be needing some meat to balance their mental diet. There is plenty of that. (Please don't mention Veg!).

Council has asked me to leave space so we can insert a membership leaflet in every issue. Please stockpile these if you can't use them straight away - remember they could be worth £5 each to you.

NABO APPEALS TO MINISTER - AGAIN

Dear Minister

I am sure it will come as no surprise to you to learn that BW craft licence payers are feeling victimised. Why should the other users of the network, who contribute only through their taxes, be able to reduce their contributions through a stroke of the government pen, when private boaters are powerless to prevent their contributions increasing at several times the Cost Inflation rate?

Whilst we commend BW's attempts to be seen to consult on this issue, which is of course its statutory duty, it would appear from the documentation that the amount BW wishes to recover from pleasure craft licence payers is **not** for discussion. Neither is the deal it has struck with hire boat operators to keep their increases to cost inflation rates. This is a blatant case of unfairness.

If we are expected to accept, albeit grudgingly, the inevitability of these injustices then we ask your Department to:-

1. Appoint a 'Leisure Navigation Champion' to BW's Board of Directors
2. Ensure BW does the following, without taking BW's word alone that they have been achieved:-
 - a. create a workable plan to spread the financial load across **all** the beneficiaries of its service, in the same way as Defra is doing to those it benefits.
 - b. cut money wastage, including the number of unlicensed boats on its waters, the latter preferably to zero but certainly to no more than 1.5%.
 - c. abide by its published standards to provide a network 'fit for purpose' and incorporate them into its legal obligations to licence holders.

To expand on the latter point – at present BW's Licence Terms and Conditions document (being the contract BW makes with its boating customers) includes only one paragraph quoting BW's own obligations, which says:-

'6. Our obligations

6.1 We will do our best to keep the Waterways open for cruising...'

...followed by disclaimers which absolve BW from any repayments as a result of stoppages (which boaters generally understand and accept).

Now that BW has finally drafted the minimum Customer Service Standards promised in its 1999 Framework document, these should form the basis of its own obligations in the Licence Terms and Conditions. BW should:-

- add the upholding of these standards to its obligations to licence holders
- commit itself to consultation and independent performance auditing concerning said standards
- accept penalties for failure in terms of rebates or discounts to customers or reductions in future rises.

It is only reasonable that, if BW is to act commercially, it should provide a quality controlled service at a fair price. It should be called to account.

NABO ONLINE

A GUIDE TO WHAT NABO OFFERS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Slowly but surely the digital revolution is taking over the world and it is becoming ever more of a challenge to ignore it. For some years it has been possible to squeeze millions of personal details onto a pocket sized piece of plastic and lose it in the post – as recently demonstrated by HM Government!

NABO is in the digital race too, trying hard not to lose touch with the pack, neither lagging behind or being too far ahead. We have to keep in mind those who choose to have nothing to do with electronic communication altogether, right through to the WiFi brigade who have almost instant access to music and live moving pictures off the internet while sitting in their cabins afloat. To the latter we may seem to be in the ‘dark ages’, keeping to plain text and simple web pages where possible to suit old mobile phone type connections, but to those who can’t get on with computers at all, NABO’s online services may still seem like rocket science. We hope we still have the right balance.

Email Bulletins

These are primarily a direct service to members, but some are made available to a wider audience too through the NABO website. At present they come straight from the chairman’s desk, as and when he feels there is an issue that can’t wait for NABO News coverage, or contains invitations to participate in online surveys, follow web links etc. They are not a discussion forum (see Waterway Reports) but the chairman would be open to requests to distribute any message that would be of benefit to members.

To be sure of receiving (or not) these announcements first-hand please opt in (or out) on [**www.nabo.org.uk/bulletin.html**](http://www.nabo.org.uk/bulletin.html)

To keep list sizes within the system limit for Spam reduction and to provide some flexibility, the list is subdivided by region:-

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| North | Generally north of Audlem (SU), Stone (T&M) and Nottingham (Trent) |
| Midlands | South of the above, including the Severn, but north of Banbury (S Oxford) and Weedon (GU) |
| South | South of Banbury (S. Oxford) and Weedon (GU) plus the Broads, EA, NT and PLA waters etc. |
| South [BW only] | As above but not including the Broads, EA, NT or PLA waters |
| Roving | Only if you cannot commit to a region through being a continuous or long term cruiser, trail boater or own a share in a boat which is moved around the system |

It is possible to join more than one list, if you are happy to accept duplication. Most bulletins are in plain text without attachments, are sent to all regions and include the words NABO and BULLETIN in the subject line.

Nabo Website - www.nabo.org.uk

Restyled and revamped last year, this has sections:-

ABOUT NABO - Mainly for visitors and potential members, giving information and contacts

CURRENT ISSUES - Latest matters ongoing, but also giving access to potted histories of the more important campaigns

WATERWAY REPORTS - Mainly for you to report problems on particular stretches of waterway, but now also incorporating space for cruising 'blogs' and general issue debates

BOATERS REFERENCE - Other useful information for boaters, some open to the public, some restricted to members.

HOT NEWS - Headlines linked to current issues.



Online Surveys

NABO is committed to collecting and representing boater owners' views and the quickest and least volunteer-intensive way to do this is using online survey forms.

If the importance of the issue dictates, and there is sufficient time and volunteer effort to process postal entries, then an online survey will be supplemented with a form in NABO News. However the postal responses to the recent survey on Navigation Charges were analysed separately and found not to change the outcome significantly, which casts doubt on the extra effort required to process written submissions.

We would urge those without access to the Internet to call upon the services of family or the local library if they want to take part, particularly for the new survey on BW Customer Service Standards which would probably take up a sizeable chunk of this magazine if committed to paper.

Joining Forms

Council is looking into the possibility of letting people join NABO online and making the initial payment through an agency like PayPal.

Council Email addresses

All 'role' addresses for people who hold specific posts in the Association (e.g. for the Treasurer, Chairman etc.) in 2008 will all now include '.08' – as shown on the back cover. Addresses with '.07' will still reach whoever held those posts in 2007 for the time being. Addresses with no year number will bounce.

BW CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

As mentioned in NABO's letter to the Waterways Minister on Page 3, BW has published seventy-nine Customer Service Standards which are introduced by the statement: *'Annual review & consultation to increase scope and raise standards'*

There is no specific consultation process for the 'annual review - year zero' (i.e. now), but informally NABO has been invited to comment. **That means you!**

We have prepared an online survey which is in two parts. The main form lists the standards as published and for each one we are giving you buttons to click to tell us if you think the standard is of low, medium or high priority and how you rate BW's present performance on a scale from bad to good in your area.

The results from this form will be amalgamated into a 'scatter graph' to give a visual display, and we may repeat the process in, say, six month intervals, to see how performance progresses.

There will be a separate form you can bring up on top of the main one for verbal comments and suggestions for any extra standards you think have been left out.

BW Customer Service Standards Questionnaire

YORKSHIRE AREA

This survey is for us to get general feedback on how you rate the priority of the standards as published and how well you think BW is achieving them at present in your area.

To make verbal comments about individual items please use the comments form

Please give your NAME to identify this submission

| STANDARD | Priority | Performance |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| BW Purple | Low-High | Bad - Good |
| 1. Are friendly, helpful and conscientious | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 2. Make every effort to understand the needs of customers and to exceed their expectations wherever possible | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 3. Take ownership of customer enquiries and endeavour to resolve them immediately | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 4. Politely acknowledge customers at every opportunity | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 5. Are smartly dressed for work (business / work wear) and wear a name badge | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 6. Have an overall understanding of the waterway network and destinations around it | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 7. Promote the organisation positively in all circumstances | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 8. Try to build and maintain strong relationships with all waterway businesses and partners | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 9. Answer all telephones with a welcome message - Good Morning (or equivalent) / Name / British Waterways / How can I help you? | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 10. All telephones have a voice mail greeting which is kept up to date. This includes Name / British Waterways / Thank you for calling / Sorry I can't take your call! Please leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| Bridges | Low-High | Bad - Good |
| 11. Bridges are clearly signed on both sides with an identifying number | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 12. Hand operated lift bridges can be secured at prevent accidental lowering | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |
| 13. If a boat is the wrong size to pass a lift bridge, the boat is warned of this in advance | (+) (●) (●) (●) (●) | (-) (●) (●) (●) (●) |

Preview of part of the questionnaire at the time of writing this article

Please visit www.nabo.org.uk/css-survey.html and fill in the survey. This is an excellent chance for you to have your say and help BW to use its ever-shrinking resources to best effect **for you**.

If you have no internet access yourself, please see if you can scrounge access off family over the 'festive season'.

You can see the document in glorious colour by downloading it from:-
www.britishwaterways.co.uk/images/Customer_Service_Standards_2008_2009.pdf
...but in glorious greys:-

Standards at a glance

- 1 Annual review & consultation to increase scope and raise standards
- 2 BW people preparing to work to these standards from April 2008
- 3 Measurement against standards in place from April 2008

Colour Key

-  People Standard - target achievement 100% by March 2009
-  Safety Standard - target achievement 100% by April 2008 (see note)
-  Performance Standard - target achievement 100% by March 2009

STANDARD

BW People

-  1 Are friendly, helpful and conscientious
-  2 Make every effort to understand the needs of customers and to exceed their expectations wherever possible
-  3 Take ownership of customer enquiries and endeavour to resolve them immediately
-  4 Politely acknowledge customers at every opportunity
-  5 Are smartly dressed for work (business / work wear) and wear a name badge
-  6 Have an overall understanding of the waterway network and destinations around it
-  7 Promote the organisation positively to all customers
-  8 Try to build and maintain strong relationships with all waterside businesses and partners
-  9 Answer all telephones with a welcome message - Good Morning (or equivalent) / Name / British Waterways / How can I help you?
-  10 All telephones have a voice mail greeting which is kept up to date. This includes Name / British Waterways / Thank you for calling / Sorry I can't take your call / Please leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can

Bridges

-  11 Bridges are clearly signed on both sides with an identifying number
-  12 Hand operated lift bridges can be secured to prevent accidental lowering
-  13 Mechanically operated lift bridges have fail safe devices to control their descent

14 Clear and simple instructions for use are displayed at customer operated bridges

Channel & winding holes

15 Approaches to structures, landings/moorings, winding holes & sharp bends are kept clear of vegetation for at least 65m. Advance warning signs advise boaters if fixed structures obscure the 65m clear sight line

16 Vegetation at winding hole pivot points is kept trimmed

17 Water depth is adequate for boats to pivot *

Landings & moorings

18 Operating structures, including a lock or flight of locks, have customer landings both upstream and downstream *

19 Landings at operating structures, have a minimum of three bollards (or other mooring device) over a 21.5m length

20 Leisure and commercial craft have separate landings on multi-use waterways. Commercial landings are suitable for maximum length craft *

21 Waiting points are provided in the approaches to locks and opening bridges on rivers. They are suitable for at least one craft *

22 Waiting points on multi-use waterways segregate leisure and commercial craft. Refuge piles are acceptable waiting points *

23 Landings and moorings have even surfaces and defined edges

24 Vegetation is kept trimmed at landings and moorings

25 Water depth at landings and moorings is maintained within published dimensions over a minimum length of 21.5m (for leisure craft) and the maximum craft length (for commercial craft) *

Locks

26 Locks are fitted with ladders. Two in wide locks - ideally at opposite third points. One in narrow locks - ideally at the centre point. The ladders have top hoops and are kept clean **

27 Narrow locks have three mooring points on the same side as the ladder. Wide locks have three mooring points on either side ***

28 Lock chambers and gates are free of protrusions / indentations that could snag boats. Gates are fendered

29 Cill positions are clearly marked on lock top and sides

30 Staircase, guillotine and customer operated power locks display clear, simple instructions for use

31 Locks are clearly signed with an identifying number. Also with a traditional name where appropriate

32 Balance beams have handles and these are securely fitted

33 Lock walkways, and balance beams used as walkways, have non slip surfaces

34 Lock walkways, and balance beams used as walkways, have securely fitted handrails

35 Lock paddle spindles are one of two BW standard sizes. Spindles are not

worn or rounded

36 Lock paddle gear includes a device to prevent reverse rotation of a windlass when raising a paddle

37 Lock paddles & sluices are risk assessed regarding potential flooding of boats. Fitted deflectors are the default requirement

Lighting

38 Lighting, provided by BW on safety grounds, is maintained in full working order

Signage & navigation aids

39 Safety signs and safety aids are visible, clear and legible

40 Safety signs are replaced within one day of a problem being logged

41 Customers are warned about overhead power lines with clear, visible warning signage

42 Navigational aids, signs, lights and buoys are installed in appropriate circumstances and maintained in full working order

43 Customers are warned about navigational hazards, such as weirs, in advance of the hazard. The correct navigation channel is signed

44 Where they are required, river level indicators are clearly visible and legible

45 Where strong streams or water levels can be hazardous, water level indicators and warning signs are in place. Both are clearly visible and legible

Towpath / fishing / access points

46 All vegetation is cut 'hedge to water's edge' at least once a year. Customer safety risks are eliminated within one month

47 Fishing pegs are not permitted within 30m of overhead power lines

48 Steps and sloping pathways have no loose treads or risers. Treads and risers have clearly defined leading edges *

49 Where steps and sloping pathways have handrails, these are securely fixed *

50 Where the distance between step risers is less than 1000mm, the tread / going is horizontal *

Tunnels

51 Tunnels have fixed safety and gauge reduction signage that is visible, clean and legible

52 Tunnels are clearly signed to indicate one or two way working

53 The direction of the nearest tunnel exit is clearly signed with arrows

54 Lengthy tunnels have distance markers every 100m

55 Tunnels with towpaths have secure handrails. Tunnels without towpaths have fendering and grab chains installed

56 Tunnel air vents are covered with a fixed grill or mesh

Performance

57 Customers receive their boat licences within fifteen days of BW receiving the application

58 Signage is clear accurate and up to date. Redundant signage is removed when new signage is installed

- 59 Notice boards are kept up to date and are easy to understand
- 60 Destinations have welcome signage relevant to their location
- 61 Waterscape.com and BW's web site are accessible 24 / 7
- 62 Water points, sanitary stations and other facilities are clearly identified
- 63 Correspondence is personalised with the customer's name, whenever available. A named BW contact (first / last name) will be provided
- 64 Standard information is dispatched within a day of a customer's request
- 65 BW can communicate with customers in Wales, in the Welsh language
- 66 Postal enquiries are replied to within five working days
- 67 E-mails are replied to within five working days
- 68 First level complaints are acknowledged within five working days and responded to within fifteen days of acknowledgment
- 69 Second level complaints are acknowledged within five working days and responded to within fifteen days of referral to a director
- 70 BW offices provide a 24 / 7 voice mail messages service
- 71 Telephone enquiries that cannot be answered immediately will responded to within five working days
- 72 Work patterns reflect the volume and type of customer demand
- 73 Pre-booked assisted lock / bridge passages are attended to punctually
- 74 Emergency calls to 0800 4799947 are responded to within 45 minutes and bone fide emergencies attended on site within a further 60 minutes
- 75 Electricity supply bollards and water points at visitor moorings function correctly
- 76 Toilet & pump outs, chemical toilet & refuse disposal, showers & washing facilities are kept clean & serviceable. Any unsafe situations are responded to within 24 hours of notification
- 77 BW tries to maintain waterway vegetation at fit for purpose levels that reflect customer usage
- 78 Every effort is made to keep canals & towpaths free of litter
- 79 Busy dog walking towpaths have dog bins that are regularly emptied

Notes

- * March 2009
- ** March 2009 for Leeds/Liverpool & Rochdale canals
- *** March 2009 for narrow canals

YOU SAY

"We arrived at one lock on the Thames as the lock keeper was just finishing his maintenance. We had to wait while he went to change his shirt before he could pen us through. He is not allowed to operate the lock unless he is wearing his white shirt: blue shirt for maintenance, white shirt for lock operation."

BEST AGM YET!

A member reports

Super venue, although the car parking was limited, excellent buffet, marvellous and amusing speaker, not much business, and plenty of time to talk to each other. The beer wasn't bad either.

Our chairman kept the necessary business to 3/4 of an hour, then we were able to discuss current issues. Our help was requested, and many members came up with ideas for promoting NABO (see the membership application form which will be included into every issue of NABO news from now on) as well as offering to attend user group meetings to save hard-pressed regional secretaries from having to travel long distances, saving travelling expenses too. I'm sure more help is needed, especially as Council is only seven-strong now. Can you spare some time?

John Edmonds, chairman of IWAC, formally IWAAC but now IWAC without the amenities (!) kept us all amused, and gave us good advice as to how to proceed with the BW funding campaign. I hadn't known anything about him before the meeting, but it seems that IWAC reports directly to DEFRA. He stated that regular communication between itself and NABO is what IWAC is there for.

The downside? Not the best attendance. I don't know why folks are put off by the thought of a meeting: you missed an excellent day out, and my thanks to Council for organising it.

...AND YET ANOTHER MEETING

Snippets from Council Meeting 24/11/07

Shame our Fly has buzzed off, but just to keep you in touch with issues not mentioned elsewhere:-

• **Merchandising**

Council is seriously looking at abandoning NABO's trade activities. The work involved does not justify the profit made and 'loyalty wear' is so 'last century'. Windlasses are the only viable corner of the market but even they are borderline on effort for profit, unless we get a keen volunteer marketeer.

• **Overstay letters**

NABO is questioning the legality of some letters being sent to 'continuous moorers'. BW seems to be stepping beyond its powers again and may even be weakening its own case.

• **Moorings Issues**

Our pro-active approach to visitor time limits is being shunned. That and the complaint about lack of consultation on tendering are still being pursued.

• **Events**

Offer to pay boat entry to rallies is still open to those willing to promote NABO. Crick and the National still being considered although recruitment barely worth it.

SOME SUSTAINABLE THOUGHTS

Hello! This is Andrew, South Sec on the NABO council. I am going to write a series of articles on some of the sustainable aspects of boat life. I will be looking at recycling on the canal, solar and wind power and other sustainable areas that fit into boat life styles. Firstly I will look at solar power...

Solar Power

Solar Power is increasingly popular. The solar panel is becoming an important part of the boat owner's kit! This is partly because they are getting cheaper and more efficient. It is also perfectly suited to boats because our power is stored in batteries. The potential is massive. It can range from topping up our batteries to producing enough power to move a boat, and replace or supplement our diesel engines.

I often have conversations with towpath users, and boat owners about the panels I have on my roof. I am impressed with the increased awareness and knowledge people have. I am most likely to be asked how much they cost, and if they are cost affective. I have 2 panels and a regulator. The panels are different. One is a 90-watt mono-crystalline (£300) and the other is an 80-watt poly-crystalline panel (£350) and the regulator is able to cope with 30 amps (£70).

In financial terms, that is a lot of diesel! However, the equation is not that simple.

I realise I am a convert to the power of the sun; as for me there are many benefits. These include "free" power! I am a continuous cruiser, and I don't run my engine while stationary, for the 5 months from May through until the end of September. Personally, the peace and quiet is a massive plus, and I am sure it is for my neighbours too! For the rest of the year I know the minimum my batteries are getting is a conditioning charge. Even in winter I can leave the boat and return to fuller batteries than I left. I think it could easily give an extra year's use out of your batteries too.

They also save wear and tear on my engine. It has probably reduced my running time by 5 or 6 hours a week. That is 300 hours a year! Environmentally there are positive benefits too, from the reduction in diesel to the lack of engine noise.

How do solar panels work, and what is the difference between the types of panels?

A solar electric panel, often called a PV panel is basically a set of treated silicon cells arranged in a series string that produces electric power when exposed to light. There are three common types of solar panels manufactured. Briefly, they are:

Monocrystalline - made from a single large crystal, cut from ingots. Most efficient, but also the most expensive. Somewhat better in low light conditions (but not as good as some advertising hype would have you believe).

Polycrystalline - basically, cast blocks of silicon which may contain many small crystals. This is probably the most common type right now. Slightly less efficient than single crystal, but once set into a frame with 35 or so other cells, the actual difference in watts per square foot is not much.

Amorphous - "thin film", here the silicon is spread directly on large plates, usually of something like stainless steel. Cheaper to produce, but often much less efficient, which means larger panels for the same power.



Polycrystalline

Monocrystalline

Vaporware - this is the 4th type - the one that pops up in the news about every 3 months, proclaiming the next major breakthrough that will make plastic spray-on solar cells that will cost around 5 pence per watt, or some similar claim. Well, after almost 30 years, we are still waiting for one of these to actually reach production, and I suspect we will be waiting for another 30!

How many panels do I need?

The answer will depend on how much power you use, how often you are at your boat, how often you cruise, and what other ways of charging you have. All year round sole reliance from the sun is difficult to achieve. I think an 80 – 90 watt panel would make a considerable difference to all boaters. It would give up to 70-ampere hours a day in the summer, and roughly 10-ampere hours in the winter. (Positioning the panels to face the midday sun really helps).

For some, this may be too expensive or take up too much space. Well, every little helps. Start small and build when you can. Another benefit is that solar systems are easily expandable.

And the future...well the price of diesel is set to rise....and the sun is still expected to shine!!

YOU SAY

NOTICES

""Wet Paint signs, have you noticed how they curl up at the edges so that you can't read them? Then you open the gate, feel yourself stuck, and discover the paint's wet."

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



WHAT FOOL AM I - to believe that, by donning a suit and tie, I might penetrate the commercial dominance of the British Waterways Advisory Forum?

Ever since the forum was inaugurated, it seems that customer 'consumer' groups have fared poorly in any of the elections, including those for the related Ombudsman Committee. In this case the fact that I lost the election didn't matter as I was only standing for BWAFC chairman to ensure there was one. I didn't really need another job and, as far as NABO is concerned, I am probably better placed by keeping my partisan portfolio and ditching the businessman's uniform in favour of a more 'marine' associated blazer.

However I do feel this episode is another symptom of a worrying trend. The likes of the IWA, NABO, RBOA, HNBOC, TBA and SOW are all minor irritations to those whose real motivation is the acquisition or preservation of money. They don't seem to get bonuses for listening to customers or providing wonderful waterways, it's more according to their business performance. Those who don't abide by that creed, including also some very motivated people who have left positions of influence within BW, are seen as just amateurs – I say 'just' to ensure the word 'amateur' is seen in its derogatory sense, as we can all be proud of being amateurs in the true meaning of the word, which has the same root as 'amorous' – and implies true **passion**.

Yes, we do have passion, especially in NABO where every full member has parted with a lot of savings in pursuit of waterway passion. What irks me is the way this has been exploited by the business 'suits'. When BW suffered an in-year grant cut it was to the 'passionate user groups' that Robin Evans turned in the hope they would apply pressure on Government that BW couldn't. Yet, when NABO brings BW the Waterway Reports Forum or other constructive suggestions on a silver platter, they mumble a few perfunctory gratuities, but, seeing such initiatives are aimed at improving the waterways rather than saving money in the short term, they put them on a back burner that is not even lit.

Looking 'gift horses in the mouth' extends to the whole issue of volunteers. The word immediately conjures up folks in muddy WRG T-shirts wrestling with recalcitrant tree stumps, but actually it applies to a much bigger reservoir of active people committed to preserving and improving the waterways and the lifestyle they love. However such people are an embarrassment to those who think they know best and want to keep the credit for themselves, with their 'Business Units', 'functional teams' and false economies (such as employing contractors who care even less).

"I'm not paid to run a £200 million turnover business by consultation" was the sentiment expressed by BW's Chief Executive at this autumn's BWAf meeting when one of his decisions was questioned. A similar vein to the way he answered Simon Robbins' question at BW's Annual Meeting about the withdrawing of support for the BSS. I think it is an appalling admission.

As I said in my Chairman's report at the AGM, my '*holy grail*' has been improving consultation, by which I mean: ***not only being listened to, but also being given a satisfactory explanation as to why any advice offered is not accepted and acted upon.*** I won't be giving up - not for this year anyway.

AGM and Thanks

On the subject of the AGM, I thought it was a cracking meeting and so did everyone else who went and offered an opinion. Nothing to do with it being my bottom in the chairman's seat, it was the quality of the contributors. It is a shame so many people are put off by the stuffy title, and an agenda that looked as though it would fill most of the time with boring procedures. If they had come I am sure they would have left with quite a different perception. The boring bit took less than an hour. Floor discussions then ranged freely up until an excellent buffet lunch, after which we learnt a great deal from John Edmonds including some words of caution regarding Government funding which gave us a good 'steer' for the future.

One thing that perhaps I didn't take enough time for at the meeting was thanking people, particularly those who have left Council. If I could just say here, to a much wider audience, that we owe a lot to them.

Aileen Butler will be missed at Council meetings. She has a lot of irons in different fires but, in spite of being afloat in all sorts of places on the system, she made a great effort to be there, and, more often than not, resplendent in a frock. (Easier to hide the other four legs – you guessed, she was Fly!). Her work on organising events was much appreciated.

Peter Foster, when his health or circumstances would let him, also added a lot to meetings, constantly reminding us that there are boats other than narrow ones and there are rivers up north and navigable drains!

Tony Haynes I mentioned in my last column as he had already stood down. What I didn't mention is that he has been cruising the waterways with a boat wearing a NABO and SOW banner and seems to have a new lease of life on the campaign front. All power to him.

We will go on owing a lot to those who are still on Council and everybody else who is, has been or will be working on NABO's behalf. Personally, I am also very appreciative of the moral support members take the trouble to give me. I doubt if I could manage without it.

Happy Christmas and all the best for the New Year

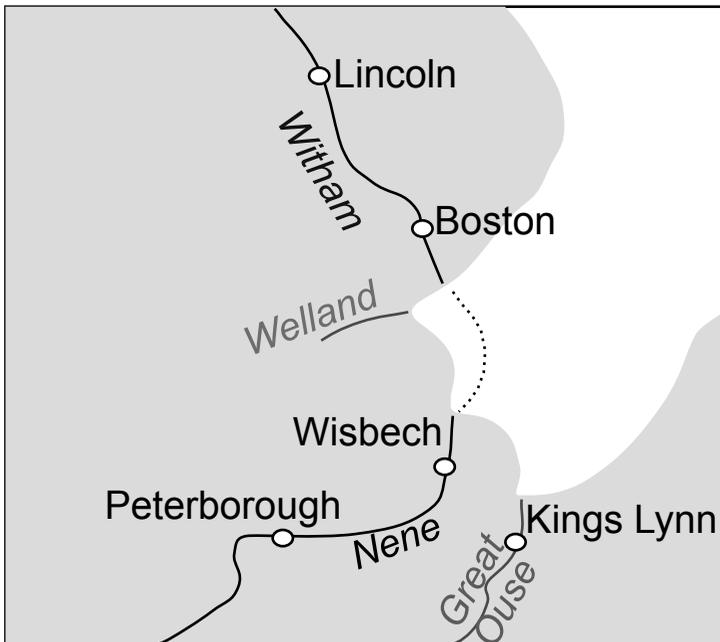
NABO 'CHALLENGING' CRUISE - 2008

Due to popular request, next year's cruise will be across The Wash, from Wisbech to Boston. To do the trip in this direction is what 'them that know' have advised. Tide tables are not yet available, so I cannot give the precise dates, but I expect the timing to be for June or July, when the daylight hours are the longest. I plan to engage a pilot or two, the cost to be shared between the participants.

Before asking for more details, first check with your insurance company that you will have cover for coastal use. This is essential. Then you need to be sure that you have enough time available. Each available tidal window lasts for a week, and also, the weather conditions have to be right. i.e. good visibility (there wouldn't be much point in making the trip if we couldn't see anything) and a wind force of less than force 3. If no such conditions occur within the window, you'd have to kill time for a week before the next window.

The cruise will involve beaching on a sandbank for about an hour and a half waiting for the tide to turn. During this time, it will be possible to get off your boat and have a picnic, or we could have our social buffet.

If you are interested in joining the flotilla, please contact Carole for more details.



RCR Advert



Deliberations of a meeting held on December 1st

1) BW should be moved away from DEFRA. A dialogue should take place between user groups with advice from local MPs about where the most suitable place for BW should be.

SOW believes that there is much common ground between the objectives and responsibilities of BW and DCLG. The main beneficiaries of a vibrant, busy waterway are the residents of the community through which it passes. who enjoy increased passing trade, jobs in shops, marinas and boat yards and, of course, the benefits of a local recreational resource. The local council also benefits from the increased rates that higher property values bring as do the local home-owners whose property values increase.

Local Government is responsible for improving the living environment of their communities and given that the local community benefits from so many aspects, it seems obvious to SOW that DCLG is the most natural home for BW.

2) The EA should reimburse BW for expenses incurred in flood control. There should be a campaign through local MPs and local media.

3) Local Authorities should have statutory responsibility for their local waterways related environment and should contribute to the costs of :

- towing path maintenance
- fly tipping and vandalism
- rubbish removal
- Possibly the provision of waterside amenities (water points, sanitary stations, toilets, rubbish bins etc)

Each year BW spends at least £7.5 million on the upkeep of the non-navigational aspects of these local recreational facilities. For example, clearing up after fly-tippers and vandals, removing towpath rubbish. SOW takes the view, that regardless of which government department BW is funded by, Local Authorities should bear the cost of cleaning up BW waters and towpaths that have been treated with disdain by local residents.

Action could be a postal campaign to MP's and local Councillors backed by a media campaign.

4) BW must appoint a Board Member with specific responsibilities for representing leisure users interests.

Action through lobbying MPs and direct representations to BW

5) The meeting was unanimous in its support for the proposition that BW should ensure that the two companies (KPMG and Merrill Lynch) should consult with stakeholders before completing their review to consider and investigate whether BW's current institutional form and financial structure are optimal for the long-term security and success of BW's inland waterways.

SOW is alarmed that the procedure announced by BW is that its Board will review the report and decide whether it should be referred to Government. If Government decides to implement any of the report recommendations, only then, will there be a consultation process.

EA announces THAMES WATERWAY RESTRUCTURING

Our waterways service has had regular budget reviews over the last few years. Increasing pressure on public funds has led to the development of a Navigation Funding Strategy for all Environment Agency waterways, including the River Thames. As part of this strategy, we have looked at how we can operate, maintain and promote the River Thames as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In 2005, we worked with our staff on an efficiency review known as 'Better Ways of Working'. With the prospect of a tighter budget position, we are using the recommendations of this review to organise ourselves to be more efficient in future.

Over the next two years, we will be restructuring the Waterways Department to make sure we have the right people, in the right place, at the right time. On the river this will mean more staff during the busy summer months so we can provide a more consistent lock keeping service. This will mean fewer permanent staff overall in the winter. We will also be able to put more time into enforcement work, policing the river effectively, and securing all the income we are due. Our investment in the waterway assets will be maintained. Getting information to our customers is important so we are looking at how we talk to our customers. We need to continue our work to attract new people to the Thames and to make sure we are doing this efficiently and effectively.

Our customers are likely to see gradual changes and in most cases, an improvement in the services we provide. We do not intend to make staff redundant but will be using the opportunities presented by retirement and staff turnover to move to the new structure.

We have talked to all our staff about these proposals and we hope to firm up our new structure soon. We will continue to discuss all our work with customer representatives via our advisory groups.

Lock Houses

Like every other public sector organisation, we continually review what assets are essential to deliver our work. We have recently sold a site in Sunbury, are planning the redevelopment of Caversham Lock Island and have already sold or rented several relief lock houses away from the river. The Navigation Funding Strategy recommends a further review of assets to ensure we save costs and, where possible, raise income. In the light of this, we will be looking again at all our assets, including lock houses, and presenting a robust business case for those we need to keep as they are essential for operational reasons. As we have told our staff, no decision has been made yet about lock houses as there is a lot of work to be done before we decide on the way forward.

Eileen McKeever

GRUMPY OLD MAN OF THE RIVER HAS HIS SAY

I am getting just a little bit fed up with the attitude of officialdom towards river boaters. They seem to think we have bottomless pockets.

Those of us who do our boating on rivers such as the Severn or Weaver never get the opportunity to use the other BW rivers that we pay for in our River Registration fees. I am talking about Pleasure Boat Certificates NOT canal licences – BW please note the distinction!

Now BW is proposing to make every boat owner pay way beyond the rate of inflation to use the waterways and at the same time reducing the service they offer. Locks on the River Severn, previously manned during winter months are now only available for short periods on certain days of the week. Likewise with bridges on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. To add insult to injury, there is now to be an increased charge for the use of the sea lock at Sharpness, with everyone potentially liable to pay extra.

All this is happening at a time when the latest annual report from BW shows that Board members and the Directors received 18 per cent extra in remuneration; and bonus payments to the directors went up by 39 per cent.

I do not want to pay more for my licence or certificate just to subsidise the BW gravy train!

2007 was not a good year for river users – floods in July effectively curtailed the boating season. Riverside properties in many towns were inundated to record levels, so wasn't it a stroke of genius for BW to acquire a riverside pub in Upton-upon-Severn? Since the floods, all the pubs on the waterside have been closed down and experts have even stated that it may be impossible to protect them from devastating floods in the future and all such properties may have to be abandoned. Maybe not such a good investment?

River boaters still have bitter memories of the farce that surrounded the introduction of the infamous Boat Safety Scheme. The architects of the scheme failed to heed the protests of river users and many were faced with huge costs to comply, in some cases having to carry out modifications that actually made their boats unsafe on the river and at sea. Now we learn that BW is withdrawing its financial support from the BSS – so who do you think is going to foot the bill? No prizes for those who have said US!

The final straw may be the impending rise in the cost of red diesel fuel for pleasure craft. River craft tend to use more than canal boats because they have larger engines and currents to contend with. A large sea-going cruiser with twin turbo-charged engines can consume up to 20 gallons every hour on open water, but irrespective of the size of our engines we are all faced with a duty increase of over 600 per cent and an overall doubling of fuel costs – all because of EU rules.

Where will it all end? Come on river users. Join the Grumpy Brigade and tell them that we have had enough!!

CHRISTMAS FRUIT CAKE

Ingredients:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>1 cup of water</i> | <i>2 cups dried fruit</i> |
| <i>1 cup sugar</i> | <i>1 tsp salt</i> |
| <i>4 large eggs</i> | <i>1 tsp baking soda</i> |
| <i>8 oz plain flour</i> | <i>1 cup brown sugar</i> |
| <i>8 oz nuts</i> | <i>juice of 1 lemon</i> |
| <i>1 bottle brandy</i> | |

Method:

Sample the brandy to check for quality.

Take a large bowl. Check the brandy again. To be sure it is of the highest quality, pour one level cup and drink. Repeat.

Turn on the electric mixer, beat one cup of butter into a large fluffy bowl. Add 1 tsp sugar and beat again. Make sure the brandy is still OK. Cry another tsp. Turn off the mixer. Break two eggs and add the bowl and chuck in the dried fruit. Mix on the turner. If the dried fruit gets stuck in the beaterers, pry it loose with a drowscriber.

Sample the brandy to check its tonsistticity.

Sift in two cups of salt. Or something. Who cares?

Check the brandy.

Next sift the lemon juice and strain your nuts. Add one table. Spoon. Of sugar or something. Whatever you can find. Grease the oven. Turn the cake tin to 350 degrees.

Don't forget to beat off the turner. Throw the bowl out of the window. Check the brandy again and go to bed.

LOCAL USER GROUP MEETINGS

At the NABO AGM there was a call for volunteers, and one of the suggestions was for members to go to local User Group Meetings. This would mean giving up an evening or two during the year and just an hour or so composing a quick report. If you think you can do this, please offer your services to the Regional Secretary for your area (see inside back cover for contact details)

The dates we know about so far are:-

| | Date | Meeting | Venue |
|---|----------|------------------|---|
| Northwest | 12/3/08 | Sth Pennine Ring | TBC |
| | 13/3/08 | L&L + Lanc. | TBC |
| Yorkshire | 18/3/08 | Angling UGM | Fearns Wharf, Leeds, LS9 8PB |
| | 19/3/08 | UGM | Fearns Wharf, Leeds, LS9 8PB |
| Wales & BC | | ? | |
| East Mids | | ? | |
| West Mids | | ? | |
| South East | 25/3/08 | Strategic UGM | Holiday Inn, Milton Keynes |
| | 10/6/08 | Braunston UGM | Barby Village Hall, Rugby |
| | 12/6/08 | Tring Area UGM | Red Cross Hall, Tring, HP23 5BA |
| | 7/10/08 | Banbury UGM | Mill Arts Centre, Banbury |
| | 9/10/08 | Foxton UGM | Foxton Village Hall, Foxton |
| <i>Contact: Dee Inglis, 01908 302500, dee.inglis@britishwaterways.co.uk</i> | | | |
| South West | 12/12/07 | WWUF | TBC |
| | 13/2/08 | K&A UGM | Wessex Room, Corn Exchange, Market Place, Devizes |
| | 12/3/08 | WWUF - AGM | TBC |
| | ??/3/08 | B&TC. Forum | Venue and date TBC |
| | 11/6/08 | K&A UGM | Bath - venue to be confirmed. |
| | 8/10/08 | K&A UGM | Reading - venue to be confirmed. |

DID YOU KNOW?

British Waterways is to move its Head Office from Willow Grange, to 64 Clarendon Road, Watford, WD17 1DA. (just to the south of Watford Junction rail station) over the weekend 15th & 16th December. Telephone, fax and e-mail addresses are unchanged.

Craft Licensing is now at Fearns Wharf, Leeds LS9 8PB so if your boat says 'Registered at Watford' – sorry!

Registered at ~~Watford~~ Leeds

Congestion

We don't have a computer but wish we were telepathic. It was quite by chance we learned there was to be a lock closure at Tamworth which meant we would be delayed by at least a day. We'd already had a long day but we decided to join the queue as number 16 at 1710 hours, on the 21st of August.

It was 21.10 when we moored up in the dark below the locks. Only two small boats in tandem followed so I guess the fifteen or so behind us were waiting for daylight. Not ideal in the peak season!

Mrs Susan Miller

PS look forward to each NABO News – much needed answers and info.

Holding back on subs

In reply to a subscription reminder, one member said he was 'holding fire' on subscriptions to all canal related associations as he was bothered by:-

“Increasing disregard to boating courtesy, speeding being one but more dangerous practices like mooring on sharp bends on the wrong side - not hire boats - private boats

- This sounds awful, but too many £100k+ boats owned by people who think boats are the main thing whereas I think boats are merely a tool to enjoy the beauty and peace of the waterways. If I read in a magazine about another granite surfaced, chrome clad 70ft Gin Palace - I'll go bonkers!

- In the ten years I have been boating the attitude of boaters is changing. Selfishness abounds and too many 'look at my boat' types.

- Vandalism and antisocial behaviour by 'youths' is still on the increase which means a single-hander like myself has no chance of seeing parts of the system in peace. It's so sad.“

He goes on say his views are in a minority and would get very little sympathy. Would they?

Another looking forward to NN

Just to let you know how much we look forward to reading your great magazine. please keep it up

Pat & Barry

Insanity, insanity!

"They are planning to dig out a basin for houseboats", goes the rumour.

What utter and complete lunacy!

What is the point of moving all that earth, making watertight bases for some mobile homes, and plonking them in a basin? You might as well save the watertight bases and just plonk them on the original dry land.

Is there something in our seafaring nature that I have missed that makes it so desirable to have your abode floating around in an aqueous suspension of dead human skin cells, calcium stearate and non-ionic surfacants laced with cetearyl alcohol and sodium laureth sulphates, not mention cabbage water? Maybe it is the parfum?

I can see the point of houseboats on rivers - that's a different kettle of fish, if you can catch them. There you can enjoy views of nature and experience peace and quiet, providing you are conscious in those precious moments after the forge hammers of the last disco boat fades into the distance but before the time you are jerked awake again by "Squeeze – squeeze - put your backs into it", echoing across the water from the rowing coach's bullhorn, just when it is

light enough for the oarsmen to see where they have been.

But in a basin? I've seen some floating chalets too wide to get out of the marina they're in!

Let's hope they don't mean houseboats but residential boats – proper ones with engines that can go places. Much better, provided the basin has a wide enough exit. People using their boats all the year round saves on shore housing and actually saves building space.

I also hope they haven't the fashionable 'mixed development' in mind though, that could mean business barges which are an even worse waste of space.

Oh! Insanity! insanity!

Perplexed

Re: meeting - BW

Just to say I found your arguments impressive as it occurs to me that although BW was once the 'good landlord' this no longer applies.

However much we wish to see BW as a waterways authority, I maintain this is also no longer applicable.

The criteria for today's BW is purely cash, and if boaters are to survive, today much stronger dialogue, and action, is required.

In my inbox today alone three missives from boaters, two beginning to struggle with cost and miserable, one wishing he'd never seen a very expensive build, even before it's completed.

I don't know what this tells you, I know it tells me it's all going wrong and we're going to end up all too soon with worthless boats, left with nowhere to go with them.

Pam Pickett

MINISTER IN SAFE HANDS?



You may remember this picture in the last issue. What alarmed one reader was not the influential nature of the cargo, but the precarious position of both of the crew, particularly the steerer.

Should the rudder meet an underwater obstruction, or be wrenched over by something fouling the blades - not unknown in Birmingham's waters - the steerer might well have need of his life jacket and the ministerial party left on an unscheduled diversion up the Oozels Street Loop!

YOU SAY

NOTICES

I think it was on the Caldon, there is a handwritten sign saying 'Moored boats, slow down'. Beyond the next tree, another sign says 'No, slower than that!'

A POINT TO PONDER

A column for controversy

[Caution - opinions expressed here will remain anonymous, are independent of NABO official policy, and statements herein have not been verified as true fact.

Feel free to challenge anything said.

Don't let the persons of unrelated parentage pulverize you in a descending direction.

But they do.

At BW's AGM, Robin Evans was heard to say, having been taken to task for removing BW's contribution to the BSS scheme, which means much higher costs for boaters, that: "It was only £30,000 so it wasn't worth consulting about". Then, at the recent BWAf meeting, he said: "I'm paid £***, *** to make decisions and I can't do that if I have to consult". Next, your Council hears that its efforts to be pro-active and constructive regarding a national

policy for setting visitor mooring durations has been totally ignored by BW: so much for its efforts to move away from the criticism of being BW bashing.

Never, in all the years that I have been boating, has there been a greater need for NABO. Known for its tenaciousness and refusal to accept any spurious proposals from the navigation authorities, it is the only organisation with the financial standing to challenge BW and the like whenever necessary. NABO's representatives may feel pulverized, but they have a remarkably good bounce.

CHUMSTON AND SLAWIT?

Another plea for the real sound of place names

How do the locals say 'Cholmondeston' and 'Slaithwaite'? Where is Barlick? Why is the 'Y' in Eynsham nor sounded? All these things are sent to baffle the boater who would like to blend in, or at least understand locals giving directions.

NABO News could compile a list of places that are not said as they are spelt, so if you live somewhere or know somewhere that doesn't sound as it says on the map, please add to our collection by emailing: news.08@nabo.org.uk or drop the editor a line, giving the official spelling and the best spelling that really sounds as it is said locally.

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