

THE MAGAZINE OF THE



President: Bill O'Brien J.P. M.P.

ISSUE 7-05 - DECEMBER 2005

Red Diesel / AGM / CCs reprieved

LATEST - UK Government 'minded' to ask EU for red diesel extension. See Page 10

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2006 CALENDAR

Council meeting	Copy date
Jan 28th	Feb 4th
Mar 11th	Mar 18th
Apr 22nd	Apr 29th
June 3rd	June 10th
July 15th	July 22nd
Sept 16th	Sept 23rd
Nov 18th	AGM
Nov 25th	Dec 7th

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



A very merry Christmas to you all, afloat or ashore, and a big thank you to all who braved the fog and frost to come to the AGM.

I think I said this last December but I'll say it again – please don't throw this issue out with the torn up wrapping paper, keep it till you can focus again, and give it the attention I hope it deserves.

In spite of failing on behalf of our members to prevent BW making one of the biggest blunders in the history of its customer relations, I have been re-elected as chairman of NABO.

Heaven knows how much I tried to stop it (BW's blunder that is!), but somehow BW has an uncanny knack of knowing just when to put another log on the fire of discontent. To keep the metaphors mixed - I put it down to viewing the world through Windows with a capital 'W' and a scroll bar down the side. The blunder I refer to, of course, is the Licence Structure Review which received 485 responses, mainly objections, and boaters writing to their MPs.

If the management style of BW followed what was portrayed in 'The Apprentice' on TV, someone would be *fired*.

Would it be Sally Ash, architect of the proposals? Probably not, her brief was to come up with some ideas to satisfy the Ombudsman ruling that the demarkation of shared ownership boats should be made clear and fair. However she did go beyond that and made the crucial error of using blatantly

misguided statistics in terms of the wear and tear caused by 'continuous cruisers'. Had she torn herself from the computer screen and talked to real people, she would have discovered it was not only going to cause over a thousand customers extreme financial worry, but it would also be seen as a false accusation against a very caring sector of the boating community, and a threat to the whole concept of the '24/7' cruising freedom embodied in the pleasure licence.

Would the axe fall on Eugene Baston, External Affairs Manager? Many saw him as the boaters' champion within the hierarchy of BW and I know as well as anyone how much he tried on that score. But in this case he too failed. Was it within his power to succeed? I don't know, but there were certainly times during this affair when he and I didn't see eye to eye. At present he is right in the centre of the target zone. Pig in the middle? He is no longer a happy bunny, that is for sure.

Would it be Eugene's boss, Simon Salem. From where I stand, he seems somehow to have weathered the storm in fairly slack water.

Would it be Robin Evans, Chief Executive. Fire himself? I can't see that happening, but he told me the Executive Directors had sanctioned the proposals so they are as much to blame as anybody, and he personally dismissed my plea to restart the consultation minus the fallacious arguments.

If I had to put my money on anyone going it would be Eugene, not through being sacked, but of his own volition if his position becomes untenable. He may have accused NABO of 'scaremongering' and a few other things he

might regret, but I wouldn't really want to see him go.

So, what now? BW has admitted the errors of its ways in writing, but will it learn? I would like to think so. In the draft report on the responses, BW did comment that the individual replies echoed the views of the user groups. Taking this the other way round, it showed that the user groups were in tune with the individuals – a point that I hope will be remembered for future consultations. That is why we are here, to save BW going directly to individuals. Not consulting us first is both expensive, wasteful of our assistance, and, in this case, it multiplied the anxiety and scope for misconception. Sally and I are communicating again and, at our AGM, Robin Evans did extol the virtues of (genuine) Continuous Cruisers and how much BW valued them.

That was good to hear. They have been a much maligned sector of the boating community, yet in the winter, they **are** the boating community, while everyone else, the grockles (Devonian for seasonal visitors) get into the warmth of houses, or further afield, and some even take pleasure in giving CCs stick through websites and newsgroups. But CCs are the natives. Should we banish them like American Indians? They keep the paddles turning, keep an eye on water levels, and give custom to boatyards and local services during the 'low season'.

Yet I have it in writing that it was APCO, the Association of Pleasure Craft Operators, many of whose members' boatyards benefit from CCs' custom throughout the winter, that supported BW in putting CCs in the high band - so CCs know who their friends are!

There have, of course been other issues in 2005, most of them reported in the pages of this magazine. Some handled by me, many by others, for which I am very grateful. Most of the stalwarts are still committed to the cause, on or off Council and we have three new members elected.

We must all remember that NABO is supposed to reflect the views of our members and that means two things, finding out what those views are, and putting one's own hobby horse in its stable. There is no harm in having one, but before riding it, we must change out of NABO colours.

Finally I must also remind myself that we are all volunteers and can only expect of each other what we are prepared or able to give. However we have made a commitment and it is only fair to own up if we find ourselves unable to keep it.

With those thoughts in mind, I would like to thank Council and everyone else for support during 2005 and hope we achieve plenty in the year to come.

May your road be good in 2006.

Stuart

Annual Increases: BW=4.6% EA=6.9%

BW's 'Oxera' Formula has resulted in 4.6% in April next year, partly due to the construction index component which has suffered from the steel price hike. Gold licences are to expected to rise by 5.2% and EA registration by 6.9% from January 1st.

REPRIEVE AT LAST FOR CCs

BAD NEWS FOR SHARERS

After a summer of worry and lost sleep, ‘Continuous Cruisers’ can breath a sigh of relief that the threat to increase their licences by 147% has been withdrawn. BW is no longer considering making possession of a home mooring a factor in licence price discrimination.

In the latest ‘white paper’ proposals, however, it plans to group all multi-user vessels in what it wants to term the ‘High Rate’ category, including all shared ownerships. Many in NABO and the IWA still feel that the abandonment of the terms ‘Pleasure’ and ‘Business’ leaves BW with too much freedom to re-categorise boaters in an arbitrary manner. While a two band system with such a high differential is in force there are bound to be ‘border disputes’.

However, the document’s appraisal of the feedback to its predecessor was frank and admitted many of the shortcomings of the original consultation. We hope BW won’t forget about the 485 responses that Sally had to lay out on her spare wallpaper - and that User Groups were representative of the views of individuals.

We all have till January 16th to respond, but BW requests that only new evidence is presented – no going over old ground. We trust BW will accept deliberations from Council’s next meeting on Jan 28th as most members only saw the paper at the last meeting and felt there were too many changes to give a snap reaction.

This isn't the end however, BW says it will continue to review how it charges boaters and is aware of the call for 'harmonisation' with other navigation authorities. The current proposals are to be treated as ‘interim’.

APPENDIX 1 REVISED PROPOSALS: JUSTIFICATION FOR LOWER AND HIGHER RATE FEES FOR DIFFERENT USAGE CATEGORIES

Usage category	Price sensitivity	Intensity of use	Resultant category allocation
Sole or family user self-drive pleasure boat	The licence fee is borne by a single household. Price sensitivity is therefore likely to be higher	Most people's use is limited to a few weeks per year	Low
Multi user self-drive pleasure boat	Several households share the licence fee, or, in the case of businesses, the cost can be passed on to customers without significant effect on demand. Price sensitivity is therefore lower.	Usage is typically high at several months per year.	High
Passenger-carrying boat	These are run as businesses where the licence cost is a small percentage of total operating costs and can be passed on to customers without significant effect on demand. Price sensitivity is therefore lower	Usage is typically high	High
Trading craft (low turnover)	Low turnover businesses have limited scope for passing on the licence cost so price sensitivity is high	A large proportion of these boats remain static.	Low
Trading craft (high turnover)	Where turnover from the boat is above the VAT compulsory registration threshold, it is reasonable to assume scope for covering the higher licence fee from sales revenues	As above	High

BW's Table summarising the thinking behind the new proposals

NABO's 14th Annual General Meeting

The annual gathering of the NABO faithful took place on the 19th of November in the plush surroundings built by the fair hand of members of Stafford Boat Club. Fog, frost and perhaps even an iced up canal may have deterred some, but those who came broadly welcomed what was on offer:-

- A **short** but positive address by the Chairman.
- News that 2004/5 income exceeded expenditure by more than enough to recoup the losses two years ago.
- New **Life Membership** categories at ten times the annual subscription rates for full and family members.
- Subscriptions unaltered.
- Three new members to Council, with the stalwarts still carrying on.
- A new Vice-chairman - Tony Haynes, and Treasurer - Stephen Peters.
- Half an hour of constructive dialogue with the new Council.
- A splendid buffet and bar.



Stephen Carole Stuart Tony
Treasurer Gen. Secretary Chairman Vice-chair
(Photos by Tom of Narrowboatworld.com)



Robin Evans
speaks at the NABO AGM

- An afternoon quizzing BW's Chief Executive, Robin Evans, on a wide range of issues. See below
- Free window slogans, stickers and other offerings to take home. (see page 26)

Agendas for AGMs are rarely good billboards – those who came actually enjoyed it and those who didn't missed a good day. Next year's meeting is planned for the 18th of November, subject to confirmation, at the Bonded Warehouse in Stourbridge.

For more details visit www.nabo.org.uk (Members this way!) and/or www.narrowboatworld.com ('BW does listen')

Resumé of the afternoon session from the minutes (credit Carole) with certain verbatim quotes courtesy of Tom and Jan of Narrowboatworld (in *bold italics*)

Robin spoke for 10-15 minutes about his vision for the future of the waterways, which is to be achieved by 2012. It costs £110 - 120 million to run the network. There are maintenance arrears costing £130 million, which BW is planning to

eliminate by 2012. Indications show that a the government will be adopting a tight-belt situation.

Upon conclusion, he received applause. There followed questions from the floor.

Q -What about rivers? Robin had spoken eloquently about canals and not mentioned rivers. Is he is concerned about the closure of the boatyard and drydock in Newark, as the alternatives will be going all the way to the Humber or expensive craning out?

A - Robin replied that of course river users are valued customers. The retention of the Newark dry dock is being looked at, and, if its closure would be detrimental to Trent users, then it is important to keep it.

Q - Why is the contract for new workboats being put out to private tender when there is so much expertise within BW staff? And have there been problems with amphibious craft?

A - Robin agreed as to the expertise of staff, but stated that it was not economic to keep workshops in all areas of the country. There have been problems with amphibious craft: they are good in the water and out of the water, but going between the two was not satisfactory.

BW is looking at a 'pod' system, which can be lifted on/off workflats.

Q - Could we have an update on the restoration of the upper reaches of the Lancaster Canal?

A - Robin said that the feasibility study, into the ease of building and economic benefits, is currently underway.

The member was disappointed that in spite of this study being agreed some years ago, it is still not completed.

Q - The promise had been made of 'Waterways for All'. BW's continuing pressure on Continuous Cruisers, who are generally at the poorer end of the boating community, is forcing out those on a tighter income.

*A - Robin spoke about the issue. BW values the genuine continuous cruiser, but others, 'liveaboards', give them a bad name. **'BW recognises the value, both culturally and economically, of genuine continuous cruisers.'***

• It is not a continuous cruising problem, but a continuous mooring problem.

Q - What is BW doing about congestion? It is lovely to boat at this time of year, but dreadful at the height of the season.

A - BW is trying to encourage people to moor and cruise on the underused canals, such as the Leeds and Liverpool canal.

Q - BW does not value its customers, the people, having closed so many waterside offices.

A - An error had been made with the restructuring, and steps have been taken to remedy the situation. It costs £25,000 to keep smaller offices open, and BW must be more efficient.

Q - About BW's credibility and the value of consultation. In the Lee Valley, the Veg Pledge and dredging policies are not being adhered to - who is in charge, headquarters or the local office?

A - Robin stated that he has visited the area and does not agree with what the local office is doing: he will tell them what to cut if necessary.

• The member had been aware of RE's visit, but there had been no discernible change in the attitude of local staff at the user group meeting afterwards.

Q - Why is there no central core of good ideas? The paddle gear on the Kennet & Avon Canal is badly engineered, the gear paddle cogs do not mesh properly and they are impossible to lower quickly. The member had seen a design created by someone on BW's staff in the Midlands which is brilliant.

A - This would be looked into. (Eugene Baston wrote it down.)

Q - What is BW doing to facilitate the private sector into providing moorings, and couldn't something like the connection charge be lowered/dropped to give encouragement?

A - Whereas before BW would think of reasons to prevent the building of new marinas, now they are approaching private bodies with a booklet which facilitates them doing so. The connection charge cannot be altered, as the BMF would complain about unfair trading.

Q - It had been noted that Robin had said that the current licence consultation was not the end of the story, and had hinted about consultation with outside bodies. The member suggested that BW should come to NABO **now** to consider the problems.

[Robin is reported to splutter and splash at this point!]

A - As for talking openly, I absolutely agree that we should do more talking, Stuart has been a supporter of the British Waterways Advisory Forum. I actually believe that that forum is the place where we discuss issues that we daren't normally discuss, and it has a way to go. I personally was disappointed with the first meeting because we were skirting around the issues, now that's probably inevitable because it was the first meeting, but I really hope the BWAFF will mature into an organisation where we can talk frankly. People like Stuart and other representatives there all have a common interest with different areas but are absolutely the same, we want this network to thrive and survive. And there aren't enough open, honest exploratory discussions.

Q - The Basingstoke Canal is threatened by lack of funding after years of hard work by volunteers. Would BW consider taking it on to extend its network?

A - The choice had been given to BWAFF, "Should £1 million be used to enlarge the system or to maintain the existing waterways?" The answer was that both are wanted, and BW should ask the government for more money! BW could provide a specialist to manage the canal, someone with experience and know-how: as there are no career prospects in managing that canal, maybe the right person was not doing the job, but BW could still offer the promotion ladder to that person. Robin feels that not enough has been done to increase awareness about the economic value to the local communities.

Q - BW should be talking to farmers about creating small off-line mooring facilities rather than just developers. Not everyone wants full marina facilities, but just somewhere to park a boat.

A - There is very little difference in cost between the two.

Q - Has Robin spent time afloat without his BW hat on?

A - *Robin replied that he can never switch off. He would feel a fraud going up to people and not declaring who he is.*

Q - How long has he spent afloat?

A - *Four days.*

Q - What is BW doing to support the retention of current duty levels on red diesel?

A - *Not a lot.*

Q - Why not?

A - *The decision was taken that, as it has many ongoing battles with government, it didn't want to open another front.*

Q - Regarding congestion, why doesn't BW move half of the Canaltime fleet from Sawley Marina? These boats cause the congestion when they all come out at once. The hirers receive no tuition and the local boaters are sick and tired of having to show them what to do.

A - *It is of great concern to BW when one of its operations is causing problems. This will be looked at. (Eugene Baston wrote this down.)*

It is unacceptable that people can hire a boat without a qualification.

Q - Why does BW continue to use terminology that is not used within the 1995 Act? For example, river registration certificates are not licences.

A - *We will look into that.*

Q - What am I? I pay for a winter mooring, so I am not cruising throughout the period of my licence. I only have a mooring during the winter: what am I?

A - *Difficult.*

Q - Why is £7 million being spent on the Leeds and Liverpool extension?

A - *You might well ask.*

At this point, it was suggested that the Canaltime boats be moved to Liverpool docks.

As the end of the allotted time had arrived, the chairman presented Robin Evans with some vinous thanks for giving up his time to attend our Annual General Meeting.

Waterscape's loss = Users' gain?

It seems the commercial and advertising side of www.waterscape.com has not been paying its way so the team has rejigged the website to become more of an information source for boaters and other waterway users. For instance you can now renew a BW licence through the site and it features the Boater's Guides, more on that on page 22

RED DIESEL - FIRST BATTLE WON

Gordon Brown announced in his Pre-budget report on the 5th of December that: *'While more information will be required to inform the case the UK makes to the European Commission, the Government is minded to apply for an extension of the derogations for fuel used in private air and pleasure craft navigation ...'*

In other words we have convinced our MPs, now it remains to convince the EC. To this end Howard Pridding of the British Marine Federation has been to other member states canvassing support, and all interested parties will need to present further evidence for a government 'impact assessment' early in 2006. NABO has pledged support to the BMF and RYA on this.

There may be some merit in lobbying your MEPs now so here are a few pointers raised at the 'Stokie Red Diesel Campaign' you may not have thought of.

1. If we cannot use red diesel it will increase the likelihood of theft of white diesel and petrol. Security could become a major problem.
2. A second tank will become necessary on boats that use red diesel for heating or cooking. This could be hazardous if additional fuel is stored on deck in loose containers. [BSS are already concerned about portable tanks feeding permanent installations, and vice versa.]
3. The likelihood of boat owners carrying cans of fuel along towpaths will be increased if marinas do not stock white, which would be uneconomical for them so to do.
4. Petrol power would be a feasible option. Storing and carrying petrol would vastly increase fire risks aboard inland boats.
5. Boats use about 0.05% of total fuel consumption against 2,732 million litres for road fuel and 7,492 million litres for other usage. What practical point is there in losing derogation?
6. Loss of derogation will result in loss of value of boats. Many people have invested life savings in an alternative way of life. Their investment is threatened by loss of derogation because boating will suddenly become very expensive. Who would buy their boats when they become so expensive to use?
7. There are about 451,000 pleasure boat owners. To accept loss of derogation would be a huge 'own goal' for government if those voters publicly turn against such a governmental policy.
8. If derogation is lost it would produce £2.87 million increase in taxation. How much of this would be invested in Inland waterways?
9. Why should leisure boat owners subsidise road maintenance?
10. Use of low sulphur content white diesel could damage older diesel engines.

THE MAKING OF "A VOYAGE BETWEEN TWO SEAS"

Part 5 of A PERSONAL VIEW by Stuart Sampson

So far this tale of the making of the BBC North film in the early 1980s has covered the journey from Liverpool as far east as Shipley. The next section of my writing was headed:

BOATS SHORT AND NARROW

Monday morning was spent filming the traditional style cabin of the trip boat *Apollo*, after which David Lowe's company is named. David himself explained it all, showing the tiny living quarters used by the families that worked the boats. The *Lady Galadriel* borrows some of the features and styles of these old working boats, but would never claim to be the real thing as is the case with *Apollo's* cabin. David Lowe also runs 'Short Boats', the native craft of the Leeds and Liverpool, one as a restaurant boat, and another was there fitted out in its original role for bulk cargo carrying. One fact about David that escaped the film is that he is also an organist of international repute (and a NABO member - Ed.).

Once out of Shipley, through a particularly tedious hydraulic swingbridge and past the point where the Bradford Canal used to branch off, the cut returns to the country. There is another 3-rise, then a 2-rise with a BWB maintenance yard in attractive stone buildings near Apperley Bridge. We used facilities here and cruised on down to Rodley for the night. We filmed in this charming spot next morning, returning to industry behind the big crane works.

We were joined by the lock-keeper from Leeds at this point, another

Peter, who helped us all the way to his native Office Lock. We were glad of him, particularly as he warned us of a great spit of sediment thrown out by a stream that stretched almost right across the canal. This was the result of Sunday's downpour, which must have played havoc with his water level management.

Filming featured the rural nature of the canal so close to Leeds, the experience of hearing Kirkstall Forge through the trees was almost uncanny. Unfortunately so many films use dubbing to get sound effects like that that it is hard to tell the real ones, but this was genuine. We went on to get shots of Kirkstall Abbey and Armley Mill. This is an industrial museum, and we took some film there, but something had to be left out. A sadder omission was the sunken ice-breaker by the bank there. The skeleton of this old craft was still visible, waiting to tell the story of how a team of horses would drag it through the ice while a gang of men would rock it and cause waves to break up the ice sheet.

The approach to Leeds has lost its rural charm soon after Armley, the urban skyline dominates the hillside, and factories and warehouses crowd the valley floor, as the canal makes its final descent through spaced locks. Curving under the railway, with the Aire close beside, the canal comes to Office Lock, where we were met by Joe Bridge. I took a back seat while this venerable boatman described taking sugar across the route in fifty-two hours "wi' 'orse". It took us ten days

according to the script, quite a realistic figure if one works normal hours in the day, but with filming it was of course longer. What was horrifying in his day, from those snippets of the interview I heard, were the methods and weapons used to gain domination over other boatmen that made such times possible. The term 'cut-throat' was not so metaphorical.

We stopped just above Office Lock, and rejoined the film crew the next day to finish off Leeds Basin and River Lock. The filming of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal was over. Pete did a piece to camera on the steps below the lock, intended to finish program three, but there had been some argument whether he should say goodbye to the *Lady Galadriel* at this point. I was adamant that a version should be worded so that she could be used again, and that was what in fact happened.

BOATS HUGE

The next leg of the "Voyage" was down the Aire and Calder Navigation to Goole, aboard the tanker *Humber Princess*, and it soon became apparent that there was a fair section of river between River Lock and the oil depot where she discharged. This would mean leaving a gap in the voyage in the very city where the program was being made, so Doug realised he needed the *Lady* again and she was left by Office Lock. We slept aboard one more night in a state of depression and anticlimax, and were surprised by a visit from the crew the next morning on some pretext about leaving something on board. We joined them for coffee at the Basin

Eating House, and on our return to the boat discovered that Andrew had smuggled aboard a bottle of champagne. It was a heartening gesture from the camera crew, dispelling the Leeds Basin Blues as we all celebrated the completion of the canal journey.

As I have mentioned, the *Lady* had still a role to play, but filming was to stop for a few weeks while the crew took their summer leave. I had leave too, not a busman's holiday - a boatman's holiday, giving mother and brother a trip up the Calder and Hebble! The boat was in Leeds, and needed again there, so I opted to explore a waterway not so accessible from Skipton. The first leg involved using the Aire and Calder to Castleford, so we invited Doug and Pete to share a preview of this section, and took them as far as Woodlesford. The holiday was very wet, in fact we were stranded on the Calder waiting for the flood water to subside for two days, but we got back to Leeds in time for the last assignment.

The *Humber Princess* was leaving early in the morning, so the plan was to film out of sequence. I took the *Lady* down to Knostrop BWB depot the previous day and spent the night aboard. Very much aboard, as I would have been eaten by a pack of wolves, sorry, guard dogs, had I stepped ashore. Very early the next day I went up to Leeds Lock to use the facilities, then moored near the oil depot. I chatted to the barge crews and we awaited the film crew, who were late.

When they came we set out into midstream and filmed drawing alongside the *Humber Princess*. She is

huge, piling the Lady into insignificance. Pete then climbed aboard her, greeted her skipper and the Lady's role was done, or done when the other angles were shot. I put her back on the yard mooring, and abandoned her and ran off with a Princess, but more of that later.

A few days later I rescued the Lady and we filmed the missing section, starting below River Lock, doing a full speed turn into the current and making all speed down the river.

Unfortunately Leeds cared little for its river frontage, the banks were lined with bus parks and scrap yards. At one scrap yard there was an Alsatian which had barked every time I had passed, but we had to bark at it to get it to perform to camera!

Below the bridge are some more attractive warehouses, and Leeds Lock. River Navigations are unlike

canals in that you have to look for the lock cut to reach the lock rather than be swept down a weir. This one was well signed, and we entered the lock cut past the Sea Cadets HQ, where a gun stood guard against any remaining Norsemen who might mount an invasion via the Aire.

Although part of the Aire and Calder, Leeds Lock is no bigger than those on the canal, but it has another set of gates that I assume could accommodate bigger craft.

The run down to the depot has few attractions, there is a smaller tanker discharging quay, and a foundry with a conveyer that slowly trundles a selection of its wares round the outside of the building, presumably to cool off. We turned where we had started the previous day and the *Lady Galadriel's* contribution to "A Voyage Between Two Seas" was truly over.

To be continued

FULL STEAM AHEAD FOR THE IWA CAMPAIGN RALLY BASINGSTOKE CANAL - BROOKWOOD 26th to 29th May 2006

The organising committee are delighted to announce that, even at this early date, more than 60 boats have booked to join the rally. We would naturally welcome as many boats as possible. The entry fee is just £15 and a special commemorative boat plaque will be available for purchase. Booking enquiries to James Bell on 01932 830493. Entry forms can also be downloaded from:

www.waterways.org.uk/festivals/campaign06

Included in the programme of events for the weekend are live entertainment and BBQ evenings (DIY) for the boaters. During the day, there will be craft stalls, talks and waterway society stands. There will also be an illuminated cavalcade, decorated boats and boaters' costume competitions. During the weekend, the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society will be celebrating their 40th birthday – so do come along and join in the fun.

The event is being held at what will eventually be Woking Borough Council's "Brookwood Countryside Park" and the official opening of the park will take place during the weekend. All the site facilities required are now being organised, including marquees. A jetty is to be built specially for the event.

Sally Schupke, Publicity – Organising Committee IWA Campaign Rally
Brookwood 2006 Email: publicity@brookwood2006.com

HORNS LOCKED OVER MARINAS



It has come out into the open that private marina operators are still unhappy about the commercial advantages alleged to be being enjoyed by British Waterways Marinas Ltd. Although private operators are specifically represented by The Yacht Harbour Association, the issue now has the full attention of the British Marine Federation (BMF) who have reached a stalemate position with British Waterways.

At the 2004 BW Annual Meeting the then chairman, George Greener, under fire from a barrage of questions, vowed that fair trading guidelines were being drawn up and acted upon. However BMF were refused a transcript of the recording of the session so the promises made were not put in writing.

Since then the issue has remained behind closed doors until very recently when BW went public with a statement that an 'expert review' of BW's practices is going ahead through OXERA and deploring the fact that BMF is unwilling to present its case to these consultants.

Robin Evans says, *"I want to assure you that I take very seriously any allegations about BW competing unfairly. It is essential that BW trade fairly and support inland boating business"*

He went on to request examples of unfair trading and extol the virtues of BW's streamlined Internal Complaints Procedure and the strengthened Ombudsman scheme, pointing out that two out of the three 'stakeholder' members of the Ombudsman Committee are from the marine trade.

In reply BMF says:-

'BMF would like to be able to reassure its members that BW is competing fairly in the marinas and moorings market. We are unable to do so.

As a public corporation, competition law requires that BW must have in place all of the detailed processes and procedures to ensure that they are competing fairly.'

It acknowledges that BW has taken some steps to achieve this but doesn't feel that, after five years, an adequate code of practice has yet been laid out. This has eroded the confidence of private sector operators. Many of these feel that registering complaint will prejudice their future dealings with BW, upon which their livelihoods depend.

BMF wants a truly independent body to mediate, particularly in terms of the legal aspects, which are outside the accountancy brief of OXERA and the remit of the Ombudsman, and that BW accepts *'that its Code of Practice be drawn up by an independent third party with advice from DEFRA, the Office of Fair Trading and the Waterways Ombudsman and that this Code of Practice be binding on BW.'*

From a NABO point of view it is not our position to take sides as our members are customers of both parties in this dispute, but we must be concerned about anything that threatens the services we rely upon. We do know for a fact that two senior members of BW management are on the board of BWML, and that BWML

enjoys the use of BW's 'Shared Services' division in Leeds. Whether these effect fair trade remains to be seen.

We could also question BW's motives in terms of its opposition to the Jericho boatyard operation in Oxford. While BW has a stake in marinas and boatyards it should not be in a position to determine the fate of other such businesses.

Two other points emerge. One is that after the elections we voiced concern about two trade members being on the Ombudsman Committee with no representation from BW's paying 'leisure' customers, in reply to which BW assured us that they were appointed democratically on their individual merits and would not be representing their 'constituency' interests. Robin Evans is now implying that the trade members on said committee would be looking after the trade's interests.

Secondly BMF is calling for an independent adjudicator. NABO has been campaigning for an independent regulator for the waterways for years now, and is only biding its time to see whether BWAf will have the teeth and respect to be an effective 'third level' arbitrator in disputes regarding BW policy that are outside the remit of the Ombudsman. The absence of any non-executive BW board members to hear the views of BWAf at its last meeting does not inspire confidence. Ironically the chairman of BWAf is a major player in this dispute, his 'day job' being the Executive Director of BMF. Luckily we have a man of sufficient integrity to cope with this but will the outside world accept that fact?

It would be nice if NABO, another user group or consortium of groups could field enough commercial law and finance expertise to offer its services to help arbitrate in this dispute, having no particular axe to grind but just an interest in getting the matter resolved.

VEG PLEDGE - SPOT THE DIFFERENCE!



On the left, a picture of Whittington Bridge in 2004 from the NABO News article where the term 'Veg Pledge' was first coined and we posed the question, "*Will we be able to see what's coming through the bridge next year?*" On the right, same view thirteen months later. BW Central Shires does promise to tackle these reeds. However, to give them their due, they have removed many saplings from this stretch of the Coventry Canal and there are also many more cut stretches for casual mooring. Keep up the good work.

RCR Advert

NOTICES

FORGET RENEWAL HASSLE - TAKE OUT MEMBERSHIP FOR LIFE

£150

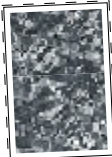
+ £50 for each
'family member'

POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 1/06 the editor will be at home so please send contributions by email to news.editor@nabo.org.uk

Failing that by post to:-

48 Old Lane, Bramhope,
Leeds LS16 9AZ

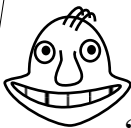


£5 OFF YOUR SUB

Money back for you when a new member joins up having put

your name in the 'introduced by' box on his or her application form (up to a maximum of 3)

See page 19



NEW ADDRESS for BW NW

The new address for the BW Wigan Office is:

Waterside House
Waterside Drive
Wigan
WN3 5AZ

Phone number to follow

Proposed by the crew of 'K2': that everyone who went on the Severn Cruise has a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Seconded Carole Sampson.

Amendment: That 'went on the Severn Cruise' be followed by 'and/or is reading this'.

All in favour - Motion carried.

Point of order - chairman cast his vote and now can't find it.

Text your waterway reports to:

07930 419 981

07961 001814

07989 441674



RIVERS



EA Registration Charge Increase

We have had the following letter from the EA:-

Dear Sir/Madam

NAVIGATION REGISTRATION CHARGES 2006

As you know we have been in discussion with RFERACs and User groups over the summer on our proposal to increase the registration charges next year by 8.5%. Whilst this was supported by some representatives we have listened to the range of views and we will now be setting the increase at 6.9% for 2006. 6.9% is 4% above Retail Price Index but 2.6% below inflation on the building and construction index, this latter being very relevant to the costs associated with maintaining the navigation infrastructure. Typically the increase would equate to £13.10 for a 25 ft x 8 ft Thames cruiser or £1.45 for an unpowered craft.

I understand that some users may find this level of increase hard to swallow but all the income will go towards supporting the annual maintenance budget, delivering enhanced facilities and maintaining level of service for boaters. For example, with more visitors to our waterways we recognise we need to provide more moorings and that boaters are increasingly having to share in the meantime. We are also providing out of hours power to a number of locks on the Thames and making locks on the Anglian rivers easier to operate. Over this next three years DEFRA will have made £30m capital investment in the waterway infrastructure, and whilst the priority is addressing our maintenance backlog, at least 10% of this will fund direct improvement for boaters.

Great strides forward have been made in recent years with the support of users and stakeholders, for example in building the Waterways Plan and securing additional investments from DEFRA. User commitment, demonstrated by willingness to pay a fair contribution through registration fees for example, is critical for maintaining this investment and in turn users will see real benefits delivered.

We have an e-mail address:

registration.feedback2005@environment-agency.gov.uk if users wish to comment.

We are now working towards a three year finance and charging strategy for our waterways, ready for implementation in 2007. Thank you for the time and commitment you have given to working with us on this.

With kindest regards

Yours sincerely

JULIA SIMPSON - Head of Recreation and Navigation.

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR NEW TREASURER

Having been elected by Council to perform the duties of Hon. Treasurer of NABO, I would like to introduce myself and share a few concerns with members.

If you were at the AGM you will have heard the outgoing Treasurer (Gordon Reece) report on the ongoing problems that we are having with members who are paying their subscriptions either too little, too much or too frequently. It is a tradition within NABO that each Treasurer threatens to resign if membership fees change - simply because of the problems it creates with people having to change standing orders, inform their banks, etc.

Strictly speaking, if your bank pays us too much, or monthly instead of annually, this is something that you should take up with them direct. You are their customers and they are failing in their duty to you. We don't expect to profit from mistakes but it is initially the banks' duty to repay you and then if they ask us for a refund we will do so with a small deduction for our trouble!

In some cases of hardship we may make the refund direct to the member but it would be far simpler if every member would check that they are paying the correct amount at the correct time of year. You can always ask the Treasurer or Melanie in NABO Administration if you have any doubts.

That said, we have exacerbated the problems by recently changing bank accounts and you will be receiving a new bankers mandate form when your subscription is next due, so that payments go into our Barclays account and no longer into Alliance & Leicester. Please respond promptly to Melanie's requests because although we pay her for doing the job she doesn't want any unnecessary hassle.

If you missed the AGM you may not be aware of the recruitment drive we are promoting in 2006. Quite simply, if you introduce a new member, and put your name (and postcode if you are called Smith, Jones or Fletcher!) on the bottom of his or her membership application form, we will reimburse you £5 for each new member up to a limit of £15 per annum. So if you enrol 3 additional members you effectively get a **year's free membership**. I will pay the bounty by cheque and I hope to be busy sending money back to you over the year! Look out for further details in NABO News.

Finally, thanks to Gordon for the work he did as Treasurer over the past few years. A thankless, but nevertheless vital unpaid task.

Regards to you all from Stephen Peters (Hon Treasurer)

RIVER VS CANAL BOATS - *TONGUE-IN-CHEEK THOUGHTS*

There are two types of boater in the waterways - canal boaters and proper boaters. You can easily distinguish them.

Some people choose a narrow boat as their means of transport. Perhaps I should say as their floating homes because they seem to carry everything around with them including their gardens on the roof and solid fuel stoves with chimneys. They consider they are boating when they chug along at walking pace in a boat less than 7 feet wide, skimming the surface of a canal that is seldom nothing more than a wet ditch interspersed with little locks into which their craft are a piston-fit. In fact, they are so narrow they cannot even use fenders to protect their topsides. Come to think of it they don't bother about their topsides either. They just paint them black every time they get scratched. The waterways they choose to cruise are frequently so heavily choked with weed, supermarket trolleys and dumped cars that their boats require a weed hatch to untangle fouled propellers. You'll not find a proper boat with a weed hatch. If they incur damaged stern gear they will require expensive hauling-out at a swish marina.

Canal boats are essentially floating boxes with straight sides and flat bottoms - all painted black. Their basic design means that there is little opportunity for distinctive design or innovation, so to break the boredom their upper works are painted in bright colours and decorated with traditional designs and patterns. Riverboats, on the other hand, generally have white hulls and mostly white superstructures because white is the correct colour for a boat.

Perhaps the most obvious distinguishing feature of a canal boat is the curious means of steering. This involves the use of a tiller, the extension arm of which is connected to the main arm by means of a tiller pin. Lose the pin and/or the arm and you cannot steer the boat. A riverboat has a proper steering wheel just like a car. A few of them have provision for an emergency rudder, but generally if the steering system and linkages fail, you cannot steer the boat.

Proper boats on rivers have something termed draft - usually at least 3 feet of it, and they need deep water. Luckily, the rivers tend to be somewhat deeper than canals. Canal boaters please note - you do not have to navigate in the centre of a river, altering course at the last minute to pass an oncoming boat. You keep to the right. We river boaters call it starboard.

Some canal boaters are surprised when a faster river boat overtakes them. This is because they are not familiar with speeds in excess of 4 MPH. River boaters refer to speed in Knots and most cruisers have a speed and distance indicator called a Log. Operated by a small paddle wheel poking through the hull, it periodically gets damaged or fouled and must be repaired by taking it out of the hole in the hull at which time gallons of river water rush into the bilges until you can place a screw cap over the hole. That is proper boating.

No self-respecting river boat owner will venture out without having an echo sounder installed, or perhaps one of the more modern "fish finders" that have been imported from the USA

where they take water depth and large fish very seriously. Proper boaters need to know how deep the water is. Canal boaters know it will be shallow all the time and so have no need for such devices.

And proper boats have other essential electronic aids to guide them along the rivers. Miracles of modern science such as GPS (global positioning systems) that tell the skipper his precise position to within an accuracy of 2 metres in some cases. Larger vessels may also have radar installed to enable them to identify the riverbank on a dark night.

In order to make sure all the gadgets are working their owners are able to exchange messages using VHF radiotelephones that are equipped with a facility to transmit an automatic Mayday message when in distress, so that the coastguard and lifeboat can rescue them off the river when they unexpectedly run out of fuel from travelling at a rate of knots.

Proper boats come into their own when moored. That's why so many of them never leave their moorings. They are wider than canal boats and afford the opportunity for on-board entertaining and frivolity. Their broad beam makes them more stable and less prone to spill the contents of wine glasses. Many are equipped with large drinks cabinets and have loud stereo systems to broadcast the greatest hits of Julio Iglesias.

If moored in a public place, these boats will have inflatable fenders hanging from their gunwales to protect their delicate GRP hulls. Proper boats are usually made of this material rather than steel favoured by ditch crawlers. The vulnerable hulls mean that their owners will not take kindly to a canal boat tying up alongside either on a mooring or in a lock. River locks are large structures with persons called lock keepers to operate them after an unexplained delay during which time a proper boat will do pirouettes and be blown around by the strong wind that you always encounter outside each lock.

Unlike canal boats, proper boats are able to carry a small inflatable boat on davits at the stern which is launched to give the children the opportunity to annoy moored craft that get rocked around by their wash. Incidentally, wash is another thing that proper boats create plenty of. It results from a desire to travel at a modest speed in a cruiser that may be capable of 20 knots when both engines are opened up. Oh yes, I almost forgot to mention that most proper boats have at least two engines. Their owners dare not risk a single, small engine. It might break down and leave them drifting with the indignity of being rescued by a canal boat!

Stephen Peters

Tidal Severn Navigation Videos

A few spare copies remain, available to members. A donation of around £5 would be appreciated to cover costs and shipping. Apply to Carole if you would like one.

Waterscape Boating Guides – ‘Choose your own toppings’

Cast your mind back a few years to the time your Publications Editor tried to compile a NABO guide to places to tie up overnight and discovered that BW had no central list of Visitor Moorings. Since then BW has been taking stock of its assets and facilities in a big way, and, with our encouragement, has compiled the information into a database that we can all use through the *Boaters’ Guides*.

For those online, visit the page: www.waterscape.com/boating/guides. For those not online, be patient, it should be coming to a BW office near you.

It’s a bit like ordering a pizza. You choose the waterway map as the base and then the features you want added. All the ‘toppings’ are fresh from the database which is being frequently updated, with our help.

The website then ‘cooks’ the guide pages according to your order and delivers them as a PDF file to your computer for you to print off, or, in future, to a terminal in a BW office where they can be printed for you.

It’s all a bit experimental at present, slow, and only in shades of grey, but it has great potential. NABO has promised to provide feedback, as you can. For content comments email to boatersguides@britishwaterways.co.uk, or concerning layout, maps and operation: feedback@waterscape.com

Part of the ‘menu’:-

1. select waterways

Choose waterways:

- Birmingham & Fazeley Canal
- Birmingham Canal Navigat ons
- Strdgwater & Taunton Lana
- Culder & Hebble Navigat on
- Caldon Canal
- Chesterfield Canal
- Coventry Canal
- Crewash Canal

To select more than one waterway, up to a maximum of five, hold CTRL (PC) or the Apple key (Mac). Scottish waterways are covered in the recently-published *Skippers’ Guides*.

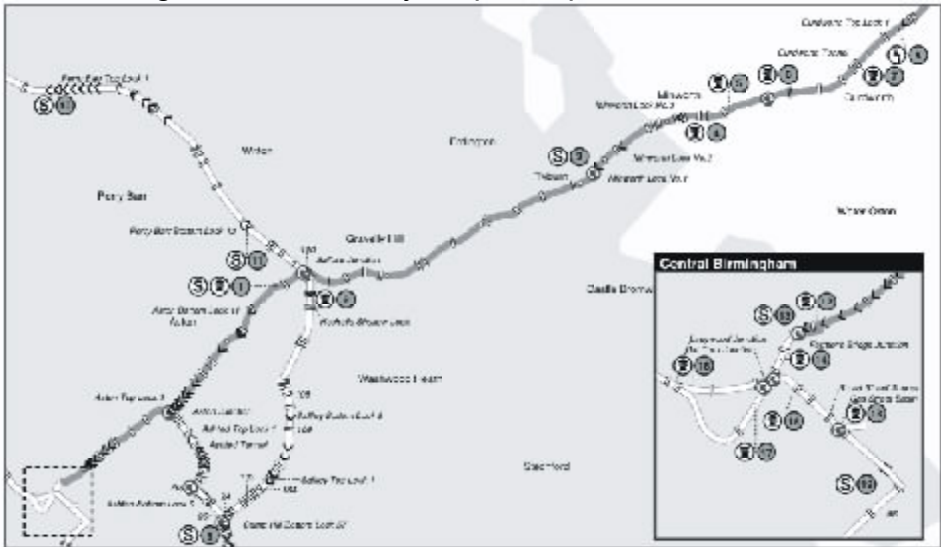
2. download guide

What would you like your guide to include?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Navigation notes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lock and bridge info	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stoppages and restrictions
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Facilities and water points	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visitor moorings	<input type="checkbox"/> Larger text
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Winding holes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Slipways and docks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bridge numbers

The guide will be in PDF format and may take a minute to generate and download. If you are using Windows, the window may go blank during that time.

The Birmingham and Fazeley 'Super Supreme'



This is the sort of map you get with all the toppings, below it will be text in three columns listing navigation notes, stoppages and restrictions, locks and bridges, services and facilities and visitor moorings according to what you have selected.

At the time of downloading we learnt, amongst much more, that headroom is limited to 6' 3" at Caters Bridge (it would be handy if the map showed where to duck!), Minworth Locks are closed from 21 Nov to 26th Nov, Cuckoo Wharf has Elsan disposal and Star City Visitor Moorings are 24 hours max.

You can't expect a system like this to give you the detail of a Nicholson or Pearson guide, but on the other hand the information is, or should be, bang up to date, especially if we all help.

The other spin off is that you, and BW, can see where facilities and moorings are sparse – you guessed it – we can perform GAP ANALYSIS!

WHY DO YOU HAVE TO GO TO THE NABO WEBSITE TO REPORT FAULTS TO BW ONLINE?

A fair question posed at the Autumn Boating Issues Meeting, Why indeed?

Because NABO's system keeps a public log of what is reported, and hopefully what is done in remedy. What's more, reports are instantly routed to the appropriate waterway office (and NABO members subscribing to the region list). It covers the whole connected system, not just BW.

Could Waterscape do this? Would more people use it if it was on Waterscape? Should we work with Waterscape? Your views?

In the meantime see what it is all about on:

www.nabo.org.uk/ww_reports/

FLY ON THE WALL



at Council

It was the first Council meeting after the AGM and of course I was there to spy on it

for you. Being the Saturday following the AGM your new Council turned out in force. A new Council but with those old familiar faces except for two...Simon Robbins from London and Andy Colyer from the K&A.

The first task was to sort out the responsibilities of Council members - what they could or would do. Your area secretaries will stay and Tony will be their coordinator. Not all secretaries are on Council and he wants to ensure that anything of national import has an open channel between Council and those secretaries. He'll try to meet them all too.

Simon will take on mooring and development issues. You'll see the whole list elsewhere.

Your Newsletter editor would like some help with the magazine during the summer when he's afloat. He'll also still be the Webmaster but

would like some feedback from those of you who use it. He does realise that some items could now be seen as 'tired'.

Your Council definitely wasn't tired! Your support at the AGM and the new members seemed to give an injection of vigour! They were saying the AGM had gone very well and especially enjoyable was the Q & A session with Robin Evans (Chief Exec of BW). Buzzer! - I missed it.

Next year's AGM is planned for the Bonded Warehouse at Stourbridge. It was suggested that the Ombudsman be asked to be the guest there.

Your new treasurer, Stephen Peters, impressed Council by producing, only a few days after the AGM a 2005/6 draft budget AND he promised to pay Stuart's expenses so Stuart would not be out of personal pocket, which impressed Stuart. Council also agreed to give a small contribution towards a new leaflet by the EA and Thames user groups about mooring abreast on the Thames, especially useful en route to the National next year.

As is now usual there was discussion on BW's licensing proposals. They had given an interim statement stating that continuous cruisers were not relevant to BW licence fees, but that any shared ownership boats would pay the higher rate. This would only affect about 230 out of 28,000

other opposed the reclassification of licences and thought higher cost licences should be restricted to profit makers.

There was some comment and speculation on canal congestion. How would BW encourage more boaters to the emptier northern canals? Would there be different licence rates for different canal areas? Would you have to pay extra to boat on a full (of boats!) canal? Images of NCP type signs at Reading and Bristol flashed around the room. How many empty spaces? How many allowed on to the canal?

More seriously your Council found itself short of time to reply to the BW proposals on licence structures. Christmas and the break between meetings were a major factor, so they will ask for an extension of the response time.

The Ombudsman is looking at the effect of the mushrooming of 48

hour moorings on the system and will be sending a draft response to NABO and BW.

Do you think hire companies should introduce their hirers to the basic etiquette of the cut as well as, hopefully, how to work a lock? Some issue a video on the latter, should it include the former? Do hirers watch it or even understand it? (especially the non-English speakers) And how about those who have never hired and just decide to buy a boat and go. (go, go?) Should BW issue something with their first licence? Or should you all do what you may now do and keep trying to educate the ignorant as you cruise along? Food for thought?

Happy Christmas and New Year to all. May your stoppages be few.

Byee!



NABO 2006 Cruise

Carole's thoughts are turning towards the Medway this year but she has had little time to research it, what with the AGM and all the extra work that creates for a General Secretary.

To take into account the length of the passage from Limehouse or Bow Locks to Allingham it would have to be done in a suitable tidal window in the longer daylight of late June or July. How the little river would cope with the influx of presumably mostly narrowboats has yet to be explored so numbers may be limited.

To register your interest (without commitment) or comment please contact Carole: <gen.sec@nabo.org.uk> or 48 Old Lane, Bramhope, Leeds LS16 9AZ

LAMINATED WINDOW SLOGANS

Members attending the AGM were treated to free window slogans. These are not self adhesive so we can't say they are stickers. They are made in house and measure 140mm x 65mm (5 1/2" x 2 1/2") with the NABO roundel, in colour, on the left and the following slogans on the right:-

- 1) Cut Crime - Report it
- 2) Thank you to those who pass us slowly
- 3) This is our home. Please respect our privacy
- 4) Please don't empty your dog here
- 5) Kill wash - Look behind and listen
- 6) Beware - Dogs aboard
- 7) Overstay sanctioned by BW
- 8) Nosey! [in small letters]
- 9) Be heard - be NABO
- 10) NABO puts boats first
- 11) NABO for Navigation
- 12) JOIN US Freepost (BM8367) Birmingham B31 2BR
- 13) Save Red Diesel - Lobby your MP



If you want to send for some please say how many (1 or 2) of which and include a big enough self addressed envelope to:-

Slogan Request
Gen. Sec.
48 Old Lane
Bramhope
LEEDS
LS16 9AZ



Clear film

WINDOW STICKERS

We have a new design 8" x 2" oblong sticker on clear film so it blocks as little light as possible. Classy and popular, with the letters NABO in white outlined in red with blue and black blocking, and the address stripe and the roundel filled in white with black lettering and blue and black embellishment.

For these apply to Melanie using the NABO Freepost address (page 23).

LETTERS



Rally on the Basy

I am writing in response to the article appearing in the August issue of "NABO News" on page 25 (Counter Points) which appeared to suggest that the IWA National Campaign Rally 2006 "at Brookwood? 200 boats?..... nearly tumbled off me counter laughing" was a joke. A couple of comments regarding the recent canal options report by the local authority also seemed to imply that there is the possibility that the Canal could close for good. All of it. I would welcome the opportunity to put the record straight.

Yes, it's true that in the report, there is "one of the options" to close part of the canal. But that is all it is - one of three options - and one that has to be included in this type of report if it is to include all possible courses of action. What the Basingstoke does need is more support, and more boats. That is why Brookwood has been chosen by the IWA as the venue for their national campaign rally next year.

Already 60 boats have booked to visit on the weekend of 26th-29th May (late Bank Holiday weekend) 2006. Not bad for nine months in advance. With this encouragement, the organising committee are now working diligently to make sure that our visitors have a marvellous time. Live entertainment, boaters' competitions, barbecues and special events every day have already

been organised. What we need now is more of your readers to join in the fun. So don't just say "it won't work" and sit back, come along and perhaps you will all fall off your chairs - laughing with enjoyment.

Sally Schupke
Organising Committee
IWA National Campaign Rally

AGM

Just wanted to say how much David and I enjoyed the meeting last Saturday at Stafford. The committee, and especially yourself and Carole, put so much into the running of the Association for the rest of us. Many thanks

Inviting Robin Evans to speak was very interesting and he gave us an insight into just what BW is trying to do in its latest re-organising phase, we don't agree with it all but at least we understand a bit better!

Val Fletcher

Chairman out of pocket?

I just want to re-assure those members worrying on my behalf that the new treasurer and I are investigating ways to reduce the inevitable expenditure resulting from me wearing the three most expensive hats on NABO Council, and that a NABO debit card was only one way forward. I have been relieved of two

Note – Views expressed in readers' letters are not to be taken as those of NABO as a whole

financial responsibilities already and a third is being worked upon. This should certainly bring my expenses down to a manageable level and may well make the idea of plastic payment unnecessary, for me anyway.

We won't dismiss it altogether but we will certainly keep all your notes of caution in mind if we pursue it further

I would like to thank everybody for their concern

Stuart Sampson

Veg Pledge

Extracts from a long letter sent to me detailing shortcomings of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal - Ed

I read with interest your comments on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal and the BW chairman's comment that you wanted it a bit too neat. (Such neatness would, of course, cost BW money better spent (they think) on more weeds to turn our canals into BWs idea of the country.)

...This year we travelled (as we do quite often) up the Worcester and Birmingham. This canal is actually controlled from an office in Fazeley so any management are far enough away never to see it. (Which seems to be another BW modern trait!) Mind you while the canal always had its bad points it also used to have some redeeming features. However BW seem to be trying to get rid of them year on year. In the end we found so much we felt should be improved that I wrote a letter to the Fradley office detailing my complaints.....

Starting at the bottom of the canal I complained as there is no landing stage to get on/off the boat for the wide locks

in Diglis. It seems there is one but I have never seen it so it's not obvious. The dredging criticism was again to a BW man who seemed to think an ever expanding reed bed should not worry boaters trying to get near enough to the bank at what he called the official mooring. We also commented to him about the lack of cutting at locks and the lack of bollards at some. He vouchsafed that the bollards had been issued to the lock-keepers to install and wondered what they had done with them(!) but was unbothered about the shortness of the cut areas (if any) at locks. We also noticed that where there were BW men living in houses at lock flights they each had a nice shiny sit-on tractor (of a much better quality than I can afford) but only seemed to use it over a very small area and not at all where it was most needed where the reeds encroached on towpath and canal...

Below Tardebigge we noted the pub pound as the only one where you were 'allowed' to moor. The long pounds below that one seem to have bushes growing and left to grow and/or shallow edges. Again BW throw their eco card here as they do with those blessed reed beds further down...

The last part of my letter complained about the terrible state of parts of the canal above Tardebigge with its shallows, lack of suitable deep edge moorings and the unkempt grass along the towpath edges.

David Cragg

BW's response on cutting quoted guidelines that a minimum of 100m per 1Km should be cut for mooring where it was safe and didn't threaten the appearance and biodiversity of the canal.

COUNTER POINTS

Views from the
tiller dahn sarf
by Canaldrifter

I have been taken to task by members of the IWA. My negative comments about their Campaign Rally at Brookwood on the Basingstoke Canal next May have been taken personally, it seems.

OK, for the record, I wish them every success. I don't deny their organising abilities. But I do hope the canal infrastructure holds up. The thought of 60 plus boats being stuck at Brookwood because of vandalism, lock failure, or water loss bothers me. If back-pumping fails for some reason, having to draw vast quantities of water from the upper reaches to get them out could cause yet another early closure next year. This would certainly highlight the Basingstoke's plight. On the other hand, if the rally is a success won't the Joint Management Committee take this as a sign that there is nothing wrong with the navigation.... it works on about one fifth the BW budget per lock mile after all?

The canal's owners, Surrey and Hampshire County Councils, are now demanding ten million pounds of

public liability insurance from any organisation holding an event on their waterway. Why? Are they trying to stop us using it at all? Such cover is very hard to find. It is also prohibitively expensive for smaller organisations like boat clubs.

After the AGM our council and its supporters are stronger and more vibrant than ever. The combined pool of expertise and knowledge now available to members is outstanding. I do hope members take advantage of this through the website, through the Think Tank in this publication, and through contact with their regional secretaries. That's what we're here for. I hope that the navigational bodies recognise this too, and come to us at an earlier stage to discuss problems that directly affect us, the boaters. After all, let us remember that "*Boating is at the heart of all that we do,*" according to BW Chief Exec. Robin Evans, addressing our AGM. I would like to see that slogan emblazoned on his BW executive hat.

Drifter

NABO THINK TANK

This is an extension to the 'Ask NABO' scheme but not only taps the experience on NABO Council, but beyond, e.g Graham Watts is prepared to field BSS queries, Eugene Baston will do his best to answer for BW.

Address your problem to the NABO NEWS THINK TANK, and we'll do our best to put you on course and share answers of wider interest in the pages of this magazine. More details in the next issue.

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