

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **BWAF considers future licensing**
- **C.S.Standards forum on WW_Reports**
- **An end to river boating?**



Issue 4 – June 2008

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Editor's Notes

'You Say' is taking a break in this issue due to needing more comments - any waterway subject considered.

Articles

Sorry, a thin issue this time, maybe because boating is preferable to writing. More articles welcome, especially from non-political folk. Humour, practical tips - need more.

Photos

Colour isn't needed so you can send it as a greyscale image if it saves you time or hassle .

The subject part of a pictures doesn't need to be any bigger than 1500 pixels wide so you might want to crop or reduce the definition of a shot before you send it.

2008 CALENDAR

Council meeting	NN Copy date
12th July	19th July
6th Sept	13th Sept
22nd Nov	AGM
29th Nov	6th Dec

DANGEROUS DOGS - AND MINISTERS?

DEFRA consults!

The Waterways Minister, Jonathan Shaw, invited waterway ‘stake-holders’ to the second six monthly meeting on June the 12th to discuss high level strategy . Unfortunately, having arranged to get everyone together at reasonable notice, the ‘meeting’ was a quick passing handshake in the entrance lobby and an apology that he had to lead a debate in the House about dangerous dogs, which he showed no signs of looking forward to. Such is the nature of parliamentary timetables.

However the meeting went ahead chaired by Sarah Nason, his leading Official. The general theme revolved around the steps DEFRA were taking to measure the benefits of the waterways for different sectors of the community and hopefully share the financial load with other Government departments. The Inland Waterways Advisory Council was working with Sheffield Hallam University to put a monetary value to these benefits and DEFRA’s Inter-Departmental Group is discussing money from other pots.

Perhaps the most significant development is the ‘Strategic Steer’ that the Minister’s team is giving BW. As well as directing BW to concentrate on network maintenance rather than restoration, it seemed to confirm our suspicions that money made by BW’s property business has been ploughed back into property rather than used around the network, and that more of it should be spent on maintenance rather than re-invested.

The EA wasn’t immune to a bit of a steer either, this time from the attendees of the meeting. They gave a quick presentation on their funding strategy but couldn’t avoid the thorny matter of the sale of Thames Lock Houses. It was agreed that they



The tree lined corner of Smith Square where waterway decisions are made, DEFRA’s Nobel House. Transport House is to the right of it.

should dispose of the unused properties but the manner in which they handled the affair came in for some vehement criticism.

BW also gave a presentation about their Customer Services Standards, an issue on which your chairman had a few words to say - more of that later in this magazine.

Perhaps not the best of meetings but certainly something DEFRA should continue.

Stuart Sampson

MERSEY GATEWAY PROJECT

Richard Carpenter reports:

Members in the Northwest may not be aware that a major project is underway to build a new Bridge over the Mersey to the East of Runcorn to relieve traffic and make crossing the Mersey easier. NABO is included in the massive consultation that is taking place – reams of studies, structural and environmental, have and are taking place and as the bridge and its infrastructure passes over both the Manchester Ship Canal and the Bridgewater Runcorn Arm so we have an opportunity to comment and advise as required.

It does seem at this stage there will be little if any affect on boating issues (probably short stoppages or supervised passages when the bridge building takes place) however the conservationists amongst you maybe be more interested in the affect that building may have on the entrance to the old St Helens Canal on the northern bank of the Mersey. Disused of course for many years but still in water in parts the builders will need to fill a small section during the bridge building but are charged with complete restoration of the Entrance Locks and initial pound “ in case of and to allow for the possible reopening of this canal in the medium to long term future”. Check out more at www2.halton.gov.uk/merseygateway/

I have the task of keeping an eye on things for you and am willing to bring along the very interesting documents and drawings prepared by the developers and Halton Council to a location to be determined on the Bridgewater Canal (well a pub!!) during the summer. Any members or friends who are interested – or are just plain nosy would be welcome – get in touch with me on 01772 600886 if you are.



The St Helens Canal entrance is left-middle on the picture just near the small square pool, it then runs back into the picture top left and disappears off into the distance alongside the north bank of the Mersey. The Manchester Ship Canal runs all along the right side and off into the distance.

CUSTOMER SERVICES STANDARDS

Are they working? Have your say

Temporary bridge number boards, three bollards at each narrow lock, illegible small name badges, the whole Yorkshire Leeds and Liverpool stopped this winter for second lock ladders - these are some the consequences of the Customer Service Standards we fanfares last autumn. As you may remember, BW created a list of standards in November last year that we were able to distribute hot off the press at the NABO AGM. Although fanfares seemed appropriate after so many years of waiting, what was manifestly lacking was any dialogue with customers before their publication and there was precious little about their implementation.

We will not apologise for bringing the subject up again in this magazine. A list of what BW intends to provide for its customers is, if you like, a peg board on which can be hung just about every issue that BW's main individual customers, private boaters, might have with BW, and so is plumb in the middle of NABO's target zone.

To try to rectify the lack of prior consultation, NABO conducted an on-line poll and presented the results to BW. We received a polite acknowledgment, plus a promise to pass the information on to their 'marketing department'. We have heard no more in spite of the many person-hours of time put in to it by both the creators and the respondents. Why? – because we care.

The next stage of our information gathering is a dedicated section of the Waterway Reports Forum as a place to debate these standards. If you visit www.nabo.org.uk/ww_reports you can find a forum page devoted to each item and we ask you, and the authors of these measures, to comment freely.

The fear is that, like with the NHS and Police, a rigidly defined set of targets may well deflect rather than stimulate the improvements they are intended to bring about. BW's shortage of funds, first from Government Grant-in-Aid cuts and now from the slump in the property market, is well known, and it is vital for the waterways that that money is spent wisely.

There are many who believe it isn't being spent wisely and it is time BW humbled itself and listened. It does intend to set up a panel including customers to monitor and improve the standards but we fear the horse has bolted. This panel may meet before the year is up to determine its terms of reference, but in the meantime BW will have spent a lot of precious resources on projects that appear on the face of it to be of low priority while more vital works seem to be being ignored.

The latest list of standards is on:-

www.britishwaterways.co.uk/accountability/customer_service_standards/index.php

You will see that it is grouped into three sections:-

1. People Standards
2. Minimum Safety Standards
3. Performance Standards

The first and third category are only really distinct through having the second category in between. Most of the standards are obvious and already achieved.

Items in that second category - The Minimum Safety Standards – are of course sacrosanct. They justify any expenditure and have been formulated by professional safety experts using well established risk assessment techniques and **should not be questioned**. It just hasn't occurred to BW to ask those whose safety the measures are aimed at to comment! It is all too easy to issue edicts that omit something glaringly obvious, like the fact that however many bollards are installed they won't prevent fore and aft motion of a vessel in a lock if the ropes are at right angles to the direction of travel, assuming any ropes are used at all – or that laminated paper bridge numbers on wooden poles will soon end up in the canal and become a hazard themselves.

Come on, BW, this is an excellent initiative but let's get the best out of it by having some dialogue. Perhaps a good first stage is for your safety committee to log onto www.nabo.org.uk/ww_reports and post an explanation of the rationale behind each standard and read the comments that come back before it is too late.

Some illustrations:-

Hawkesbury
Junction Bridge.

How long before
that recumbent
number placard
ends up in the
water?



Whittington Bridge

We have featured it
twice before but this
is in 2008

Structure sight lines?

Braunston Tunnel
Northwest Portal

Structure sightlines
again.

Does there need to
be two metre high
vegetation growing
on that landslip?



Bridge 80, North Oxford Canal

Safety Sign visibility - what does
the lower part of the sign say?

(Yes, it was a bit damaged
- still got a proper bridge
number though!)



BW Workwear? BW -Yes,
Workwear - maybe?

Bought from BW but so 'last
century'!

Even if it was paler blue on dark
blue, with lettering saying
'BRITISH WATERWAYS' and the
bridge and bullrush logo in the
middle, you might have some
chance of picking out a
lockkeeper wearing it from the
gongoozlers, even from behind.

BW BOAT LICENCES, A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE?

Stage 1 of BWAf's deliberations

After the recent BW licensing consultation and Robin Evans's first 'roadshow' there was a promise that all suggestions would be considered by the British Waterways Advisory Forum (BWAf). The first stage of this has happened.

The 'Select Committee'

Delegates from boating organisations within BWAf were invited to join a working party to concentrate on licensing. After some useful email debate, the first meeting, on the 12th of May, was attended by AWCC, APCO (hire boats), APCO (hotel boats), RBOA, DBA, IWA and NABO with Nigel Stevens in the chair and Sally Ash for BW.

Licence still best

In a nutshell, in spite of the present system being branded as '*unfit for purpose*', the committee saw no reason for major change. What was needed was much better justification. A number of respondents to the consultation had come up with radical ideas for tolls and satellite tracking systems, but in the end such systems would be both expensive and open to dodging one way or another. It was acknowledged that a licence was a simple permit to allow people to enjoy the waterways aboard their boat and that any attempt to measure the usage, or create categories that attempt to reflect the usage, of a boat should not be attempted within the foreseeable future.

Does size matter?

Whether vessel size should set the fee was debated seriously. It could be justified on two counts, one, that bigger boats were owned by richer people who could afford to pay more, and two, that the fee was for the the occupants of the boat to enjoy the waterways and bigger boats had room for more people to share the enjoyment at any one time. Both assumptions had exceptions but to enable less well off and new boaters to boat, it was generally accepted that grading by size was desirable.

Whether beam should be taken into account was of course challenged by the Barge Association. Although there was no justification that it should be ignored, punitive 'area' charging was not seen as the only alternative. NABO's current thinking of a length plus beam formula could be one, or a very simple surcharge for wider boats.

Commercial supplement

Having accepted that usage was not to be taken into account in principle, there was no reason for hire and commercial boats to be paying more. This would mean private licences would have to rise by around 10% to balance the loss – clearly unacceptable to private boaters. APCO volunteered a solution, namely that supplementary licences be available for businesses, and private boaters if they wished, that offered a higher level of service, including compensation for

hireboat licences to roughly what they are paying now and private rates would remain the same. Various 'triggers' were suggested that defined which boats would have to have an operator's licence, e.g. those who needed public liability insurance. None of these triggers would apply to privately run sharing schemes.

Continuous Cruisers

The 'Continuous Cruisers/Moorers' issue took the stage and the distinction between the two recognised. As 'usage charging' had been ruled out of the equation, there was no longer a justification for any Continuous Cruising supplement. However it was also recognised that policing overstaying made very little financial contribution to BW and that dealing with licence evasion was always going to be a higher priority. Maybe some acceptable way could be found for continuous cruisers to help financially e.g. a small licence increase across the board coupled with a discount for proof of home mooring to bring the majority of licences back to their present level.

One representative quoted some well established members of the waterways community, including the late Mike Stevens, as being prepared to accept a small increase in licence fee for the privilege of continuously cruising, which, in effect, this measure would be. This might alleviate the stigma that they were 'not paying their way'.

At present your Council is opposed to any type of charge and has said so, but if you disagree please speak up and tell us what figure you feel would be appropriate.

Discounts

The range of other discounts was discussed and the general view was they needed simplifying. Prompt payment discount had overwhelming support in the BW consultation so would stay. Others, including the Rivers Only reduction, might be for the chop, but no recommendations could be made until BW provided the group with some figures for the financial impact any of the measures discussed would have. Discounts for OAPs were felt too easy to abuse, and 'loyalty' discounts difficult to implement because BW's records on computer don't go back far enough. One suggestion was a 'volunteer' rebate which may be a way to acknowledge the non-financial contributions of the waterway stalwarts.

In all it was a constructive meeting but far too early days for anyone to get alarmed. Much more consultation will take place once the analysis of the proposals has been made and there is plenty of time for more input.

Just as an aside, after the controversial claims had been made by certain individuals within APCO that there was a 98% support for both charging continuous cruisers a £1500 in lieu mooring fee, and charging all boats by area, NABO tested this with on-line survey. It showed 64% against the first and 55% against the second. Although the accuracy of an on-line straw poll of 441 entries may be questionable due to the opportunity of multiple entries, it is fairly clear that there is a much greater range of views than the APCO petition would indicate and that the pragmatic suggestions made by the committee were more appropriate.

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Still boating in England

Misinformation still abounds. Even the civil servants in DEFRA thought I had crossed the Channel! No such luck, we are stuck here with a house to sell – say no more. Rather than stare with forlorn hope at a FOR SALE sign, we are afloat and at large again taking each day as it comes. Perhaps the possibility of an end to cruising in England has made me appreciate it more.

At the time of starting this column we are on the Ashby avoiding the Bank Holiday chaos. However it is still within range of a Canaltimer base and I watched two of their boats seemingly racing each other. The one behind hadn't noticed the one in front slow for a bend and nearly side-swiped it! Frantic reversing ensued and this brought back to my memory the death of that Canaltimer in Alrewas a year or two back.

Tragic reminder

BW's new Safety Standards don't cover submerged rocks (after all this is a canal, not the coast of Scotland) but I am convinced what happened was due to the boat's rudder catching on a sunken coping stone as it tried to get back to the end of the queue at Bagnall Lock. Fifteen tons of boat pushing on one end of the lever created by the rudder and tiller arm gave little chance to anyone within its arc above.

I imagine the poor guy being pushed off the stern would make a grab for the first thing that comes to hand, the engine control, so if the boat wasn't in gear astern before, it would be after. The effect of going in head first backwards and being dragged under by the propeller, possibly by loose clothing, doesn't bear thinking about. The Marine Accident Investigation Board couldn't

prove any of these events actually happened and so make an informed judgement. However someone who knows boats and has a fertile imagination could suggest some possible ways to prevent such a horrific chain of events happening in the future, even if it didn't happen that way then.

I still see people standing or sitting beside the tiller when traditionally they should be forward of it - even, if you remember, on boats loaded with VIPs! It may seem safe enough going forward but, would they get out of its way once in reverse?

One way to reduce the danger to them, and improve the canals anyway, would be to remove all sunken coping stones. Another possible measure would be to spring-load the reverse quadrants of single-lever controls so, should a steerer let go, the transmission would go into neutral. (There is a separate argument to spring load the forward quadrant beyond normal cruising revs to reduce speeding.)

New faces

We welcomed no less than three newcomers to our last Council meeting.

Patricia Putteril is a possible successor to the present NABO News editor. She is a retired medic who keeps her boat at the bottom of her garden in Fazeley and has experience in academic publishing.

Brian Rowland is webmaster for the Seamaster Club and is looking into taking over the NABO site too. He has a cruiser on the Thames and can bring some more river experience to Council should he choose to get involved.

David Fletcher ('at Hackleton' so as not to be confused with an ex BW Chief Executive) is a possible regional representative to cover the northern end of our 'South' region. He is also qualified in engineering so could help Trevor Rogers with the BSS and technical matters.

We haven't press-ganged any of them into formal co-option as yet but it is reassuring to know there are people prepared to get involved and I thank them for giving up a day for us.

Volunteering

Going back to the joys of being afloat, we must all agree is that boating is a lifestyle alternative rather than just a 'hobby' or 'pastime', as outside observers, particularly those in authority who matter, seem to think.

I think Robin Evans is even getting the message and beginning to appreciate that, even on the canal system, BW is only part of the waterways scene, a retiring part as they regroup into functional teams and reduce their visibility on the waterways. I challenged them at their autumn Annual Meeting on this very point having recently come off the Thames, and they admitted that face-to-face customer contact was the first casualty of manpower efficiencies. One respondent to our Customer Service Standard survey said you couldn't welcome someone using a notice, it needed a human. Too true.

However BW wants more 'footfall'. We now see a campaign to bring more casual visitors to the waterways and BW vans advertising 'Your Local Gym'. Politically this could be a good move to emphasise that BW needs more money from those who use the waterways for free, but as the boating community, do we want them? If not, are we prepared to pay more for exclusivity?

If not, and we are all of the same mind as Save Our Waterways, we should be welcoming all comers. Taking this further, can we somehow be more proactive. Should we devotees become the human face of the waterways? Rather than campaigning and pointing out all that is wrong, should we force a cheerful grin and greet the cyclist that has nearly mown you down as a long lost friend?

Difficult – but there may be a ray of hope lurking in the minutes of the BWWAF meeting: Volunteer Discounts. Supposing BW issued green shirts to people with 'Welcome to Britain's Waterways' or something on them and gave you tokens off your licence if you were to wear them in public and would agree to help and promote the waterways. You could become a 'para-lengthsman' or 'para-lock-keeper' with the emphasis on answering public queries, reporting problems to the official Functional Teams, tidying up litter, organising lock queues and giving boaters progress information and assistance with ropes and temporary mooring. All those little jobs that would bring back some of the camaraderie into waterways that BW cannot afford their employees to do, without, of course, threatening of their livelihoods.

Club and society members do this already but wouldn't the waterways be a friendlier place if there could be more, with a small financial incentive? Perhaps also incentives could breathe life back into the Waterway Reports Forum. People object to doing BW's job for them but what if there could be money off your licence for each useful report

Think on it, how can we make the waterways a better place?

Stuart

RCR Advertisemant



Will Chapman brings you the latest

As a membership-based organisation, SOW is unique amongst waterways user groups in that one of our aims is to attract members from amongst what we call 'casual users' of the waterways.

It is well known amongst the boating community that annual surveys by British Waterways show that fewer than 5% of visits to waterways are related to boating and other specialised uses like angling so it follows that more than 95% of waterway users are completely unrepresented by user groups.

Yet it is these casual users that are the main beneficiaries of the waterways. As well as providing a free recreational resource, a vibrant, well maintained waterway brings trade, employment and increased property values to the local community. It is the residents of these waterside communities who are the main target of the new SOW membership recruitment campaign.

This is clearly a target with huge potential. As boaters we regularly cover a much wider area than other users and as such we are more aware than most how the effect of Defra's cuts is impacting on BW's ability to maintain the canal properly.

We are also aware that whilst local residents make frequent recreational use of their local patch of waterway, a small, but significant minority are also guilty of misuse. After all, those who use the canal as a rubbish tip or the towpath as a dogs' toilet are primarily local residents.

I think it is fair to say that most local waterside communities have both positive and negative issues that need to be addressed and we believe that by attracting casual users as members and making full use of local media, we can better influence their local authorities and MPs to make sure that these issues are addressed.

At the same time, it is clear that, as a result of the protests we all took part in during the winter of 2006/7, Defra have at least got part of the message. The Waterways For Tomorrow (WFT) document has now been confirmed as official government policy and Defra, working with IWAC and other advisory bodies has already started to bring WFT up to date.

Importantly, on the advice of the EFRA Select committee, the waterways Minister has also formed an Interdepartmental Working Group (IWG) made up of his counterparts in those other government departments whose agendas benefit from thriving inland waterways. The idea is to get other parts of government – the departments responsible for Transport, Health, Recreation, Tourism, Treasury, Planning, Local Government, Communities, etc. - to make a more joined-up approach to the problems and opportunities that face the inland waterways.

I believe we have a better chance to influence the way that the IWG works if we have a membership base that includes waterway users other than just boaters. However, the current reality is that most waterways activists are boaters and so it is down to us to go out and recruit supporters from elsewhere. SOW gives us a platform to do that and we hope that you will all help us spread the word by distributing our posters and flyers.

Over the next few days we will be posting a new page on our website where you can volunteer to help us distribute posters and flyers in pubs (that'll be fun!) and other waterside locations visited by the general public.

For those of you who are really keen and would like to do a bit of campaigning on the towpath, we can also provide sensibly sized boat banners. The main theme of the campaign is 'Support Your Local Waterway' and the message is simple and direct and is essentially what is on the home page of our website.

So please visit our website (www.saveourwaterways.org) and order some promotional materials to distribute in your local area. These materials will be supplied free but we would of course welcome a donation to help fund the costs of printing and distribution.

Will Chapman, Chairman, Save Our Waterways

HANG ON TO YOUR FENDERS

I own a 30 foot Seamaster motor cruiser based on the River Severn and like all owners of plastic boats I need to protect the delicate white hull by the use of inflatable fenders (most canal boaters will now switch off).

Plastic fenders come in three basic colours – white, blue and dirty and in various shapes and sizes. I have a variety of different types on board my boat for one simple reason. I have acquired many of them over the years at someone else's expense. Let me explain.

As I cruise along the river I am always vigilant and wary of hitting floating or submerged debris. Sometimes, however the flotsam can be of some use. So far I have collected a number of sundry fenders. None of them bear any boat name or other indication of their provenance so I have put them to good use on board "Nattajack". The first task is the hardest – picking a floating fender out of a flowing river with a short boathook. The next job is to examine said fender for obvious damage because sometimes people discard them when they are punctured. I wish they wouldn't do it – I need usable fenders in good condition please! I then give them a good clean with a scouring pad and washing-up liquid and then they are as good as new. The only expense I incur is the cost of 1.5m of 8mm rope into which I splice an eye one end and hey presto they are ready to hang down the side of my hull.

I really have more than enough of these blessed freebies by now and would implore all boat owners to ensure that their fenders are adequately secured to their boats with a proper knot (a clove hitch or rolling hitch around a handrail) and clearly marked with the name of the vessel. All too often, they seem to be fastened with old or rotten rope showing indications of abrasion or simply disintegration in the case of polypropylene rope. Generally those that I pick up have no ropes attached whatsoever which makes me think that they have parted company from the vessel due to poor knot tying. Very rarely a short length of attached rope shows signs of prolonged abrasion or even vandalism.

I don't wish to be branded a fender-thief so if anyone can prove ownership of those that I have adopted they are welcome to reclaim them and have a free length of new rope thrown in!

Stephen Peters

WILL 2008 SEE THE END OF BOATING AS WE KNOW IT?

asks Grumpy Old Man of the River

Just like everyone else, boaters are feeling the effects of the economic recession that is afflicting this country and the rest of Europe. Whilst interest rates are being gradually lowered to give a boost to the hard-hit housing sector, the escalation in the price of fuel and other commodities is forcing consumers to make some harsh choices. The value of their investments is not keeping up with inflation which despite official figures must be closer to 10% for the average householder faced with soaring energy bills and ever-increasing prices of food products, not to mention petrol and diesel prices which are rising daily.

There is little doubt that the days of cheap fuel have gone forever, not helped by the massive amounts of fuel duty and tax that the government imposes. Look at the roads at weekends and you will notice a marked reduction in traffic volumes. People are having to question whether their journeys are really essential and boat owners who keep their boats some distance from home may come to the conclusion that the costs outweigh the benefits and pleasures of boat ownership.

With road diesel approaching £6 per gallon and still rising, how much will red diesel cost when the duty is increased on 1 November 2008? Some waterside outlets are already charging almost £4.50 for a gallon of the precious stuff and when the duty and VAT are added later this year the price of a gallon could rise to more than that of DERV and certainly more than petrol.

I predict that 2008 will herald the demise of the pleasure boating sector with boat owners giving up this unaffordable pastime which is faced with further price rises in licence fees and other costs for years to come. Some river boaters have already come to the conclusion that to get the best out of their boats they must move them to the coast where there are no restrictions, no licence fees, no Boat Safety Scheme and the mooring fees are broadly similar to expensive river marina locations. Other boat owners are abandoning marinas in favour of cheaper moorings, albeit with reduced facilities and convenience.

Inland marinas are beginning to have increased numbers of vacant berths, used boats are not selling quickly and more of them are being put up for sale every month. Diesel-powered boats which used to command a price premium due to lower running costs will lose value more quickly than petrol-engined equivalents. Thousands of craft will languish on sales jetties, reducing in value until someone decides to snap up a bargain. Boats will cease to be an investment.

In times of financial hardship, boat owners who manage to retain their vessels will have to cut back on non-essential expenditure such as routine maintenance and improvements to their boats and this will hit the income of boatyards. And builders of new boats must be pondering the future with considerable foreboding.

Boating has been booming over recent years but all good things must come to an end. Those of us with long memories and experience to match, have seen it all before. Many boat builders went out of business when VAT on luxury goods reached an all-time peak of 25 per cent in 1974. And hire fleets were decimated as a result of the recession in the early 1990's.

Will 2008 be the beginning of the end?

GHUMSTON AND SLAWIT?

Two more names not said as they are spelt

Cherwell (river joining R. Thames, and Oxford Canal in two places) is pronounced "*Char-well*", as in Derby, Hertford, or Berkshire.

Holcombe (swing-bridge etc. on K&A near Bathampton)

The L is silent, i.e. "*Hoe-cum*"; the late Sir John Knill, the famous canal trader, was very insistent on this point! He retired to the locality

John & Marion Pearse

LEEDS AND LIVERPOOL

More news from Richard Carpenter

Just to keep those of you who plan to come up to Liverpool next year up to date, more money had been invested by Liverpool City Council to transform the canal between the Eldonian village in Vauxhall, and Bootles Bedford Road. With the completion of the Liverpool Link in the Spring of 2009 this investment is made to encourage visitors. The new project will improve towpaths, bridges and access points. Sefton Council has a similar scheme to cover off their stretch of the canal with a separate and welcome plan to introduce canal rangers, to tackle security problems, pick up litter and remove graffiti.

More than £860,000 of the projects costs will come from the Mersey Waterfront Initiative with the rest coming from the councils. Work will start in January 2009 and be finished at the end of March for the Links planned opening.

This initiative shows that some local councils are getting behind the funding issues and this supports the SOW Campaign to widen the involvement of riparian councils who do not.

GET YOUR CHANDLERY AND SPARES ASAP!

Members may not be aware (or may have forgotten) that the Association has obtained special discount terms for our members wishing to purchase goods from ASAP Supplies.

ASAP are major stockists of boating equipment and spare parts ranging from gearboxes and engines, through sanitation, controls, engine gauges, electrics and general chandlery.

To obtain the special discount, members should contact either the Rivers Secretary or Treasurer (one and the same) – details can be found at the back of NABO News. He will reveal to you the secret Customer Number and Customer code which you will need to quote when ordering.

You may wish to firstly obtain a copy of the excellent 153 page catalogue from ASAP by calling 0845 1300 870 or visit their website at www.asap-supplies.com

The service is excellent and goods usually arrive within a few days. Give them a try.

Extracts from David Lowe's Report

Chairman's note -

BW holds a national consultation meeting every year to discuss the draft stoppage programme for the following winter. It tends to be a rushed job as all the Waterway Units have to set their drafts and consult local users before they are collated and presented to the national group. With the combined programme arriving but days before the meeting as a spreadsheet with no maps it takes some concentrated homework to assess the national picture of what routes are open when.

David Lowe kindly donned the NABO and HNBOC hats and travelled into the depths of Aire and Calder country, namely Stanley Ferry, to further our cause, along with free sandwiches and a trip round the broad beam lock gate workshops.

'Marina Connections'

Nine stoppages for connecting marinas were discussed in some detail. It was agreed that, while the number of off line marinas and moorings planned was commendable, the proposed 'four week window' shown for such 'connection' stoppages was not acceptable. BW needed to be more robust when dealing with marina operators and tie them down to something more specific. In many cases a stoppage was not needed, and in other cases the stoppage could be very brief, overnight even, with penalty payments for over running. The best option would always be for minimum disruption (cost not a factor) and combined, if possible, with another stoppage e.g. lock closure. Such stoppages may be shown in a different way on the list, but it will be made clear that the stoppage may be brief, or may not be needed at all – as much notice as possible to be given.

Lock and Bridge repairs

Moving on to the List and the other stoppages, it was noted that some locks and bridges were listed in the wrong order and a plea was made for lock and bridge names to be used as well as numbers (some discussion on bridge numbering). 200 gates (approx) to be replaced this next year.

Can more gates be replaced over night or in short stoppages during the season, as has been demonstrated by West Midlands? (Only possible if no other work needed – in some cases in West Midlands another stoppage was taken 'out of season' for the additional work e.g. cills, lock floors, pointing etc). None done 2007 for this reason.

West Midlands would provide 'windows' at weekends wherever possible, but User Groups had agreed not to do so where the cost was significant (in one case £30,000).

Why long stoppages for bridge works?

Aqueducts

Why are leaky aqueducts etc on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal not been attended

to? HNC is chronically short of water and hardly ‘fit for purpose’? Vince Moran, the chairman, explained how stoppages and engineering work was prioritised and due to funding problems only structures in the highest risk categories could be dealt with (at the moment). (Further discussion on this - e.g. risk of drowning when accident happens due to low water levels).

Christmas Opening

On the Leeds & Liverpool there are often no boat movements at all over this period so User Groups had agreed to some closures through Christmas (biannually).

Some stoppages had been re-scheduled for the New Year and would be amended to show correctly in the final draft. Cromwell Lock added for February.

The cost of opening the Anderton Lift at Christmas was prohibitive. Some windows to be added on the Trent & Mersey and it was noted that stoppages are not required at double locks if other one is available.

Lock ladders

All Leeds & Liverpool locks to be fitted with the additional ladders mandated for some time now and part of the Minimum Safety Standards – lengthy stoppages needed.

Safety at Lock landings

Could ladders be provided for egress from water where difficult due to high piling (has been done following accident at Whitley Lock)?



Perhaps not the best image for EA to use on public documents if it wants to encourage visitors!

FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

Stuart and Carole Sampson met with Tony Harvey - the 'Guru'

We invited Tony, General Manager West Midlands, aboard our boat to discuss various matters regarding BW West Midlands Unit, in lieu of the hopefully temporary vacancy for a NABO West Midlands Regional Secretary.

One of Tony's specialities has been to spearhead the Functional Teams initiative, which has been 'rolled out' (to use a dreadful management-speak expression) across the BW network.

The main idea is to allow most staff to get on with their work with minimum risk of having to be diverted to cope with crises, and to allow people to specialise in skills rather than all having to be jacks-of-all-trades.

In West Midlands there are teams to deal with:-

- Vegetation Management - Three teams of 11 people covering specific areas
- Construction - Four teams of about 9 covering specific areas
- Mechanical and Electrical - One team of 5 for the whole area
- Customer services - Five regional teams, plus central teams for general support, length inspection and planning (including contractor management and water control)

The latter are the ones who will deal with day to day customer business and include lock-keepers.

We asked him about 'ownership' of specific lengths and he says that the system still allows a sense of ownership and pride without so much risk of leaving some lengths neglected.

He also took pains to point out that every member of his staff, including the office workers, were sent on a boat handling course as soon as possible after joining (which explains why the water-point outside the Peel's Wharf office was blocked by TR training vessel when we called in to empty out toilet!)

Certainly the quality of care when we left his area and ventured on to the North Oxford seemed to deteriorate. It seems BW Southeast have some catching up to do.



Ash tree and other growth between towpath and water on BW Southeast's North Oxford Canal

NABO CAR EXPENSES NOW 40P/MILE

In the light of high fuel prices, NABO Council has agreed to raise the minimum rate you can claim for NABO business to 40p per mile, the full rate allowed by Inland Revenue for employees without tax liability.

WHAT A GIVEAWAY!

Some cautionary tales for mooring overstayers

With BW clamping down on overstayers, it might be time to be a bit more discreet and not:-

- Run your engine to charge batteries during the day on a 24 hour mooring
- Leave a tell-tale black exhaust mark on the bank.
- Leave two foot high vegetation round your mooring pins when the rest has been cut.
- Position generators in the steering position of your boat so it is obvious you don't use it.
- Allow your rooftop garden to grow so high you can't see where you are going.

There could be legitimate excuses for any of these, but not this:-



- Allowing a moorhen to nest in your stern fender on a 48 Hour mooring! (as seen on the Visitor Moorings at the terminus of the Ashby Canal)

Just a Minute

I read your column in NN with interest. Speaking as a former Council member, I think it's a very poor idea to publish the minutes of meetings. As you know very well, at meetings Council members speak their minds frankly about the people and issues they are dealing with. It would not be helpful if, for instance, views on the competence or efficiency of individuals in a Waterways Authority were to find themselves in print (satisfying, though it might be!). More importantly, the risk of this happening could lead to self-censorship at meetings, depriving other Council members of a full picture.

Occasionally, Council members may strongly disagree over issues. This can, very rarely, become personal. This should certainly not be set out in detail for the world to see.

The alternative, as you point out, is highly abbreviated minutes. These would inevitably not present the full story, and therefore not add to the readers' knowledge. They would, however, create quite a lot more work and take up time that could more usefully be spent elsewhere.

Council members are elected to serve NABO. They can do so best by being able to hold free and frank discussions among themselves, in private. The issues they tackle are complex, and best explained by detailed articles published in NN, such as Simon's on Visitor Moorings.

Peter Lea

Erstwhile NABO Chairman

Don't rubbish them

Following a very enjoyable cruise up to Skipton for the May Bank Holiday Weekend we were encouraged by the initiative by Pendle Borough Council to provide a new jetty and safe secure moorings at their recycling depot between Nelson and Burnley. Lots of coloured skips for waste, a new water point, plenty of mooring rings but... it seems that no one has liaised with BW on dredging the canal bed which did not allow our quite moderate drought to get very close and then it rubbed all night on the rubbish still on the bed including and old sink or two!

Just have to say however that in general, and apart from the rubbish in the canal at Burnley and Blackburn (we watched BW lift out four supermarket trolleys from one bridge hole in 20 minutes by Asda here) everything was in good shape - good towpaths, well cut vegetation, clean lock areas, greased paddle gear and a few staff to help at some of the locks! I give BW a hard time sometimes but at least superficially they provided me as a customer (as they like to call us) with a good product on this trip.

Thankyou!

Richard Carpenter

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