

RIVER USERS GROUP

AREA 1 & 2 INGLESHAM to SANDFORD
(1 of 7 GROUPS SET UP FOR COMMUNICATION AND
CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ALL USERS OF THE RIVER THAMES)

CHAIR : Margherita Davidson
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Minutes of River User Groups 1 & 2 Meeting held on Wednesday 14th November 2018 Oxford City & County Bowls Club Marston Ferry Road Oxford OX2 7EE

Present:

Margherita Davidson, Chair RUGs 1&2 (MD)	Greg Wheeler, Secretary RUGs 1&2 (GW)
Shirley Wheeler, Minutes Sec' RUGS 1 & 2 (SW)	Les Wright, Osney Marine Engineering
Trevor Tate, RTS	Steven Miles, Environment Agency (SM)
Sebastian Cooke, Environment Agency (SC)	Ian Lindsay – Lechlade Marina (IL)
Alan Hill, SRCC (AH)	Bob Timms, ATYC, SRCC
Keir Bowater – Rowing Sabbatical Officer	

1. Welcome to Delegates

Margherita opened the Meeting at 7.45pm by welcoming every-one.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Robert Heavens - Osney CC, Graham Paterson - RUG 3 (GP) , Faith Miles – Osney, Alan Graham - SRCC, Michael Shefras – RTA, Dave Hanson - SRCC/ATYC.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 20th June 2018

These were approved.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

At the previous meeting the cost of EA Uniform was raised – here is the full reply.

At our last meeting I was asked how much we spent on uniform for our staff working in Windsor during the Royal Wedding and where the money came from. The total cost of new uniform items was £15,000. This was planned-for expenditure from our 2018/19 operational budget. We purchased some items earlier in the year than we originally intended to ensure all staff working from our patrol launches as part of our Royal Wedding operations were in formal uniform. Having our staff smartly dressed in formal uniform added to the overall sense of pageantry and occasion and was in keeping with our professional partners in the emergency and armed forces, and the Police, who were re-issued new traditional style helmets specifically for the event.

We also know from feedback and the reaction of the majority of our customers at other events they like to see our staff in formal uniform. It enhances their overall boating experience, adding an additional –albeit relatively small – heritage element which is part of the overall attractiveness and appeal of the river. For our commercial customers, those operating hire boat and passenger boat fleets, we know this is an element they value. And if it helps nudge their customers towards a decision to buy a boat for their own use on the Thames, then we benefit too.

More importantly perhaps, it gives our staff an additional sense of authority, and customers are more inclined to follow direction from an officer in formal uniform, and less inclined to challenge them or

Royal Wedding, and other busy, large scale events where prompt responses to our officers' instructions are vital to avoid accidents and injuries, the value of this cannot be over-stressed.

It is our intention that all staff operating from patrol launches will be provided with formal uniform to wear as directed, when the occasion demands.

Steven Miles

Waterways Team Leader St Johns-Kings Lock

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5. Finance Update

There continue to be financial constraints, there is not enough money to achieve everything. Some staff have been kept on and there is some discussion of improved lock coverage for 2018. A resident lock keeper shall be moving into Buscot lock.

i. Navigation Consultation

This was completed, and the response is attached. An independent review was also undertaken, and this is also attached. It was agreed that if similar documents are released prior to meetings that these will be distributed as received to members by SW. It was felt that more information should be included in boater's renewal packs and that consultations and working groups were too narrowly concentrated and did not represent enough people. Additionally, it was hard to establish who they represented exactly. RUG 1&2 need to do more on website - SW to look into this. Members asked to invite new faces to our next meetings and also bring a list of numbers/description of whom they are representing so we can be clear on how far the reach of this particular group is and who it is representing. No-one was happy with the above inflation increase in licence fees as it was felt that whilst it was agreed more funding was required and inflation busting increases had previously been agreed, it was not intended those rate of increases would continue. It was perceived that the boater was being disproportionately targeted as a softer target to raise funds than tackling other avenues.

ii. Investment Programme

This has been distributed via email and members happy with way they received these updates. Anyone not receiving who wants them can sign up to receive them. SW gave a summary of GP letter as he had had to send apologies, but the main thrust was the slow speed at which Culham Lock was now operating which is out of the scope of Rugs 1&2.

6. EA Navigation Report

i) Enforcement/Compliance & Registrations Update

Going well, recently 1088 boats checked, 111 regulatory notices issues. 30 abandoned boats, 30 ordered to move, 12 towed and 8 crushed. At Bossoms 14/75 checked had issues, at Osney 5/49, Osney Mill 2/30 and Castle Hill 20/22. Discussion followed about how difficult it was to deal with the boats such as the 20/22 above where they were accommodation for in many cases vulnerable people. Schemes such as parking type meters have been muted as have fixed price penalty notices. Russell Robson is trying to work with the University. Making the landowner such as Oxford City Council responsible as a planning issue. New issues are people using vessels for Airbnb type activities, there are also issues with commercial BSSC v standard. This is going to be a big challenge for the incoming Compliance Officer. 35 operations were carried out in June including 24 joint operations, 9 marina checks and missing person checks. There are issues with waste pollution and how this is policed.

- ii) Customer Charter and Lock service. Closures and Works – Winter Schedule
Latest charter is attached. Double lock manning was discussed and the issue that volunteers could not work independently. Winter schedule has been issues as above 5ii.
- iii) Trees and Shoals

It is accepted that the trees and shoals in RUG 1 & 2 areas are a problem. It was requested that a last point of navigation sign is attached to the foot bridge just past Lechlade as boats are dangerously running aground upstream of this. SM to see if this is possible. Another green buoy was requested above the bend at Eynsham or at least a repositioning - SC actioning. SW showed a short slide show of overhanging tree issues over the recent months.

IL was able to tell SM/SC more about the funding farmers get for land management. They have to have cross compliance to receive this funding and not managing their riverside trees/riparian responsibilities would be a breach of their cross compliance and if investigated could be very expensive for them. 3% of a subsidy is the fine for unintended breach and purposeful breach once notified would be even more. This is an avenue it was suggested the EA look into in more detail.

Trees are better tackled in groups as the price to get a contractor to do one is the same as getting them to do 10. Hoping to do work at Rushey this winter. Dredging is not going to be possible as there is no equipment, but some re-profiling could be done to assist with the shoal issue. (Relocating shoal rather than dredging.)

SW provided some sample correspondence, Owners of White Spirit, one of their customers was giving up boating. Their letter said the Upper reaches of The Thames were too difficult to navigate for the older boater now with overhanging and fallen trees and lack of lock manning making navigation awkward and no longer a pleasure, offset at an ever-rising cost with no benefit to the upper levels of the river.

7) Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

Latest update document attached – members can sign up for updates.

8) RTA Subscription

The EA no longer pays for any of RUG funding and it is believed that it is no longer a legal possibility to do so. Therefore, there are no funds to pay an RTA subscription. Members must join in their own right. The Swan at Radcot Cruiser Club had not received an invoice despite asking for one and so had not joined as yet.

9) Harbour Master notices, River Closures & Restrictions. To include Boat & River Safety

The introduction of carbon monoxide alarms for the BSSC was raised – no-one had issue with this.

10) Reports from Members for Events 2019

RTA All Party Parliamentary group meeting in Westminster tonight.
British Marine legal meeting 30th November 2018.
Cirencester Flood Resilience meeting 23rd November 2018.
No 2019 events raised as yet.

11) Correspondence and any other business

It was agreed that the venue was a good location to hold the meeting with parking and facilities as required. The West Oxford Democrats club cannot be used due to roof issues and it was agreed that this would be a suitable venue to use again. We were also able to benefit from a discounted hire rate of £15 as RH is a member. SM to look in to funding as the other Rugs hire their venue. Rugs 1 & 2 has no funding, so MD had paid for the hire personally on this occasion. GW offered to reimburse her on this occasion if there is no EA funding as MD could not claim as a business expense and he could. This will need to be on the agenda for the next meeting. In the meantime, the venue was booked again for the next meeting.

12) Date of Next Meeting

Scheduled for Wednesday 6th March 2019 at the same venue.

The meeting closed at 10.30 pm