

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)

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Minutes of River User Groups 1 & 2 Meeting **held on Wednesday 6TH March 2019** **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 (LW)
Russell Robson, Environment Agency (RR)	Phil Page, Medley S.C
Sebastian Cooke, Environment Agency (SC)	Ian Lindsay – Lechlade Marina (IL)
Alan Hill, SRCC (AH)	Bob Timms, ATYC, SRCC
Colin & Prue Reynolds, River Thames Society	Alan Graham, SRCC
Dave Hansell, AMC, SRCC	John & Sue Greenford, TTBS
John & Gina McNichols Brandy Island Moorings	Faith Miles, Leap of Faith, Oxford

1. Welcome to Delegates

Margherita Davidson (MD) opened the Meeting at 7.45pm by welcoming every-one.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from Robert Heavens - Osney CC, Graham Paterson – NABO, Trevor Tate - RTS, Steven Miles & Dan Taylor, Environment Agency, Susanna Pressel, OCC

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 14th November 2018

These were approved.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

See Items 10 and 11.

5. Navigation Report & Finance Update (EA)

i Investment Programme

Russell Robson (RR) gave an update report on the investment programme – regular updates are sent out on this. Sandford, Ifley and Osney are covered and Days will be in next year's plan. There is some internal reorganisation in that the FCRM (Flood Risk) arm of the EA will now own all assets. The new gates do not have the life expectancy of the older hard wood gates as they are now made of softwood, but the work at Culham is now complete, including an extension to the tail layby. This is so long that at times additional moorings may be available there. The speed of emptying and filling of the lock has also been investigated. There is ongoing work to be done at Culham bridge.

ii Staff and Volunteers

The EA have been working closely with the unions to improve lock manning resulting in better coverage as a whole. The way the rates work has changed and placements for Summer Lock

All the lock houses will have a resident lock keeper this year, with the only exception being Blakes but this is managed differently and has cover. Holiday processes have been changed and the result is that for 2019 there will be a lock keeper for the key periods for all locks other than the exception, such as illness. There will be 220 volunteers in addition to the staff. It was noted that this is be a much awaited and frequently requested improvement in the Rug 1 & 2 area. A new job agency is managing open positions and it has been noted the geographical advertisements that have been a problem in the past, will now be targeted to the local areas to the vacancies. In additional plans are in place for lock controls if the dry period continues and manned locks are a requirement to manage this.

iii Customer Charter and Lock Service. Closures and works Summer Schedule

The Customer Charter is not yet published – as above, the new staffing schemes will improve lock service. There is a reserve plan for lock controls as above if the dry period continues.

iv Trees and Shoals

Susanna Pressel raised the issue by proxy of the Sandbank by Port Meadow just south of Godstow Weir. Seb Cooke (SC) was able to confirm that the marker buoys were moved this very week to mark that particular sandbank up properly and in fact lots of new marker buoys were available and being put in place especially in the RUGS 1 & 2 areas.

He went on to advise that a lot of work has been done of late regarding the issues of overhanging trees. Some with the Oxford University and also working with farmers. At the last meeting Ian Lindsay (IL) had raised ways in which it might be possible to encourage farmers to do more cutting back of their trees because actually they had had subsidies to do this work. It transpires working with Countryside schemes and other contractors it may be possible for farmers to break even or make a profit on cutting back trees as at present wood chippings are at a high value. Whilst wildlife has to be protected there are also issues that willows are not as good for wildlife and for nesting as perhaps other plantings. The National Trust have come aboard and that is going well. A lot of work has gone in to this particularly in RUG 1 & 2 areas and it was noted at the meeting how hard Steve Miles and his team had worked on this and what great progress was being making. The attitude was very positive around the table and ideas to enlighten and to bring in younger people, such as in a junior citizen scheme with RTS and working with other groups, were all discussed. There is more work to be done here.

v Enforcement/Compliance & Registrations

So far RR reported it was one of the best years to date with an evasion rate of only 10% out of 4800+ boats. Of 800 boats being chased 250 had since paid up. Every boat has been physically checked and as it is early in the year there is some margin where boats are licensed, but the licence has just not been put on display as yet. Of the problematic Castle Mill boats – those that are abandoned are to be removed from the waterway and crushed. Areas now being worked on are clubs – i.e. where a club has 64 boats registered which 64 are they. Les Wright (LW) and IL clarified that if an owner was selling a boat privately such as on eBay or gum tree as might be the case at Lechlade Marina then that boat WOULD need a licence. However, a boat on brokerage – not being used by the owner and being sold under a brokerage arrangement such as at Buscot or Osney Marine with Trade Plates for any trial then a brokerage list would cover these. The boats must clearly be marked as For Sale and be on the list. It was mentioned that Boat rental Air B&B is still a growing problem for the enforcement teams.

vi Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

Some of the Scheme is in the Vale of White Horse area and so the planning has not got as far as might have been expected – It is now looking as though planning will be submitted May with

TNUF and RUGS to be kept informed – a contingency plan is in place as above. RR had to make his apologies at this point.

6. REPORT from TNUF MEETING – MD

MD presented information to the TNUF meeting regarding RUG 1&2 concerns, advising despite being involved with RUG1 and 2 for many years, and covering these topics, many of the same issues were still a problem. She mentioned 7 key topics. Compliance, particularly traveller type boats, Oxford. Restricted navigation due to trees. Shoals restricting navigation. Lock manning, and locally advertising for positions. Issues with Oxford Cruisers hire handover process. Litter and travellers effluent waste and finally the way funding was distributed along the river, and that more could be done for the Upper Reaches. Please also see attachment.

7. REPORT from TNUF MEETING – GW

Greg wheeler (GW) was unable to attend this meeting to represent the RUG groups as our RUG 1&2 can only have one delegate. He attended this meeting on behalf of British Marine Trades. At the meeting he presented a paper on shoals and trees particularly effecting the RUG 1 area. Within it there were suggestions and recommendations on how to work more closely with the EA to tackle these particular issues. One of the ideas was small working groups but they would be more local to the RUG 1 area.

If we were to split the RUG groups in to 2 separate groups, we could have more representation at the TNUF meetings and at the other meetings where RUG delegates are invited. The TNUF advised that splitting the groups would be a local issue and that could be done locally by voting on at our meeting. With this in mind GW had written to MD – see attachment - to suggest looking at the possible split of the 2 groups, the requirement for this was to put forward a Chair and a secretary, so this was just recently proposed after the TNUF meeting. At present with GW's BM slot the Upper Thames has 2 representatives but when this finishes, we would only have one slot in the whole group of The Thames group meetings.

There was much, at times heated, discussion on this and also various separate letters in the back ground concerning the split. Not all those present had seen all the paperwork. The report from TNUF Meeting heading on the agenda did not specifically refer to the split discussed at TNUF so not all members knew this had been discussed. It was agreed Shirley Wheeler (SW) would put together a package of all the letters and correspondence and send this out prior to the next June RUG Meeting. This would enable attendees at the next meeting to vote for or against this proposal with the full information and for those unable to make the meeting to send an email/postal vote. In the mean time it was agreed SW would write to TNUF (Which she has done) to clarify why Rugs 1 & 2 can't have 2 representatives and to ensure that if we split that we definitely could or clarifying whether we could stay as one but have 2 places. At the time of writing we are awaiting a response.

8) Harbour Master notice

These can be signed up to in order to receive automatically by email and are also posted on Facebook – every-one knew how to access the information.

9) Swimming, River and Boat Safety

Most of the swimming events have now been posted in Harbour Master notices. SC mentioned the ones 16/6 7.30 am Eynsham to Kings and 14th July also 7.30 am plus a large event in central Oxford on Sunday 1st August.

The subject of EA representation at swimming events, the likes of Henley and Charity events was also raised – and the RUG group questioned why the EA could not charge for some of what they

was decided to bring this point up again when Dan Taylor was able to attend the meeting as this would be his area.

10) Reports from Members to include events 2019

The Thames Society mentioned an event at Radley, Spring Bank Holiday, last weekend in May – this is not yet on their website, so a heads up.

Relaunch of winterised boats is planned at Grafton for April 6th and at The Trout April 13th.

Lechlade Festival Voted 'The Best Festival in the Cotswolds' returns for its 9th year over the bank holiday weekend from Friday 24th to Sunday 26th May 2019.

There is to be a Steam Boat event as part of a National event this year for the first time around Lechlade Marina. This is from the 31/5 to the 3/6 and ties in with the Trout, Lechlade-On-Thames Steam fair – all steam powered transport on the 1/6 – the New Managers of the Riverside Inn at Lechlade are also involved over the weekend. There is to be more river-based activity at Lechlade Marina over the Summer.

The British Moth Cup Sailing Event is at Medley Sailing Club on 15th June this year.

Both The Trout and The Swan at Radcot will have a music Fest alongside the River in June. The Swan at Radcot were runners up in the Lechlade & Fairford Business Club Bob Warren Hospitality award (In memory of this former Landlord of the Trout Inn) for 2018-2019 for offering great hospitality, excellent customer service, and providing a fantastic all-round experience.

MD is due to attend the Chairs of all Rugs meetings on March 14th – where the subject of who pays for the RUG meeting rooms raised at our last meeting will be on the agenda.

11) Correspondence and any other business

LW updated us on the requirement for CO2 devices though the exact details are still be finalised – i.e. how many per boat or per cabin.

SW advised since discussed at the last meeting that we can now access the RUG web pages via RUG 8 – training is to be given for each RUG group at one of the Chairs of All Rugs meetings but has been postponed for the time being as cannot be done at the 14th March meeting. In the mean time we can email our agenda and minutes to be uploaded.

Discussion raised last meeting about getting more people at the RUG meetings this is to be covered in the information covering Rugs 1 & 2 information package.

Robert Heavens had submitted a letter advising that he felt that there was no benefit to splitting the RUG groups based on the information he had received so far – that will be in the information package.

Graham Paterson sent his apologies and a letter supporting the splitting of the groups as he had been at the TNUF meeting and felt it to be a good proposal based on the information he had so far – that too will be included in the information package.

12) Date of Next Meeting

Due to the current Brexit situation there is to be no Summer TNUF meeting this year, so the next RUG 1 & 2 meeting was called for Wednesday 19th June 2019 in Oxford with the venue to be confirmed nearer the date. Papers regarding the proposed RUG and 1 & 2 situation will be emailed prior to this.