

**RIVER USERS GROUP 8
BELL WEIR TO TEDDINGTON**

**One of six groups set up and supported by the Environment Agency Thames
Region for communication and co-operation between all users of the River Thames**

CHAIRMAN: Steve Collins

HON SEC: Bernard Hales

NOTES OF THE RUG 8 MEETING held on 11 October 2018

at the Thames Motor Yacht Club, The Green, Hampton Court, East Molesey, KT8 9BW

Present: Andrew Croxford (EA Waterway Manager) and Barry Russell (EA Harbourmaster) for Items 1-6; Sgt Ali Dunlop (Surrey Police) for Items 1-3; Sgt Rachel Beckford (Metropolitan Police, Marine Unit, Wapping), Cllr Vivienne Leighton (Spelthorne Borough Council), Cllr Suzette Nicholson (London Borough of Richmond), Cllr Mary Sheldon (Elmbridge Borough Council), Chris Begley (Kingston Council), Steve Collins, Jane Chambers, Chris Murdoch, Bernard Hales (RUG8 Reach Coordinators), Mike Chambers (Association of Thames Yacht Clubs), Michael Shefras (River Thames Alliance), Kevin East (British Canoeing), Richard West (British Rowing), Barry Sorrell (Reclaim Our Riverbank), Rex Walden (Residential Boat Owners Association) and approx. 70 representatives of organisations and interests from Teddington to Bell Weir.

Apologies:

Sgt Greg Turner, Vic Smith (Surrey Police), Seamus Cairns (Surrey SAR), Stuart Jenkins, Paula Hartwell (Surrey Fire and Rescue), Peter Mason, James Hibston, Trevor Phillips, Liam Quinn, Ray Mears, Jonty Steel.

1. WELCOME and INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the EA representatives Andrew Croxford and Barry Russell. He thanked all present for ensuring a good attendance by river users. The purpose of the River Users Groups is to promote understanding, safety and goodwill amongst diverse river users, residents and organisations.

2. ACTION POINTS/UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes from the meeting on 19 April 2018 were accepted.

3. EMERGENCY SERVICES UPDATES

Surrey Police

Sgt Ali Dunlop reported on incidents in the area including two boat thefts (Molesey) and public order issues. Multi agency liaison with the Metropolitan Police, local authorities, the EA and boat owners continued.

With longer winter darkness approaching, property owners are encouraged to keep lists, photographs etc in case of burglary. Regarding anti theft precautions for outboard engines: covers, locks, security marking, recording of serial numbers and intruder alarms are all worthwhile but don't provide a perfect solution. Sgt Dunlop undertook to send details of the *Secured By Design* accredited marine and boat security companies and their products, these will be published on the RUG8 website.

Concerns raised by the meeting included:

- a recent spate of car break-ins in Hampton Court Crescent and Graburn Way near Molesey Boat Club. Sgt Dunlop undertook to speak to the local officers; policy generally is that police do not attend unless there is blood, toolmarks or a clear pattern of offences.
- night time use of fast speedboats and bright lights in the vicinity of Platts Eyot. Sgt Dunlop undertook to liaise with Met Police.

Metropolitan Police

Sgt Rachel Beckford was called away from the meeting before giving her report: The Marine Policing Unit assisted with the operation that the EA were discussing but due to resources most of their patrols are based in Central London.

4. REACH CO-ORDINATORS' REPORTS

16: Teddington – Molesey Lock. Steve Collins said that Peter Mason had now retired as joint reach coordinator and thanked him for his hard work over 15 years coordinating Reach 16a. SC appealed for a volunteer to take over as Reach 16 Coordinator. SC reported a very busy season on the Reach, helped by good communications between users, guidance for rowers/canoists, the use of Facebook and Twitter by the EA, and Harbourmaster's notices. SC has recently joined the Kingston River Safety Group on which the Met Police, London Fire Brigade and others are represented. SC welcomed to the meeting Chris Begley, Kingston Council Contingency Planning and CCTV Manager. SC has proposed having a SAR vessel or safety boat permanently based in Kingston, whether manned by Surrey Search and Rescue, RNLI at Teddington, or volunteers.

17: Molesey Lock – Sunbury Lock. Jane Chambers reported. The recent removal by the EA of sunken and derelict boats was welcomed. Progress has also been made in removing the unauthorised works at Hampton Riviera. However a newly arrived, large, unnamed vessel at Hurst Park, supposedly waiting for work at Platts Eyot, appears to be staying there and is lived on. A renewed planning application for Molesey Sea Scouts' water activity centre adjacent to Hurst Park is now in process. The EA has withdrawn their objections. The problem regarding "beaches" at Hampton Ferry has now been resolved. Communication with Molesey Boat Club - new email contact required. A new Reclaim our Riverside group (RoR2) has been formed for the area upstream of Molesey Lock.

18 & 19: Sunbury Lock – Chertsey Lock. Chris Murdoch reported. No conflicts during the season. Elmbridge Canoe Club are introducing a section for Stand Up Paddlers. Several narrow boats have run aground on an unmarked shoal which has formed just north of D'Oyly Carte Island.

20 & 21: Chertsey Lock – Bell Weir. Bernard Hales reported a quiet season as usual.

5. RUG8 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND Q&A

Steve Collins updated the meeting on strategic issues (Chairman's Report attached) – in summary:

Future of the Thames Navigation – no transfer to Canal and River Trust for the foreseeable future; concerns over EA funding; flood control issues; above inflation increase in EA charges; EA consultation with users on prioritising services; BMF report on long term decline in the leisure boating industry; EA works this winter (£2.4m) include major lock refurbishment at Molesey and Teddington and upgrading trot moorings at Sunbury Island. SC serves on the Thames Users Group (Navigation) forum.

Removal of sunken and derelict boats – significant progress with EA removing a number of derelict and sunken boats in the Surbiton/Kingston area. However the Surrey bank from Sunbury to Molesey is still a bad area, exacerbated by uncertainty over land ownership (EA action hopefully pending).

Abuse of the Public Right of Navigation and Illegal Mooring – a growing problem owing to housing shortage in London and the South East. EA's cautious approach on the legal side is of concern, as the 1932 Thames Conservancy Act seems to provide a clear definition of vessels genuinely engaged in pleasure navigation and thereby entitled to moor for a reasonable period of time.

Obstruction of the Public Right of Navigation on the Abbey River – the small weir erected by a riparian owner should be removed under the Thames Conservancy Act 1932.

6. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY AND LOCAL ISSUES

Andrew Croxford, Waterways Team Leader, Thames Area, and Barry Russell, Harbourmaster, reported:

Two new lock-keepers at Teddington, one resident, so now fully staffed; enhanced performance of duty desk and managing incidents; two new officers (with police backgrounds) have joined the compliance team (for the whole river but based at Shepperton as this will be the busiest area for compliance and enforcement work). The field operations team, based at Sunbury with tugs and cranes, is primarily concerned with watercourse maintenance, flood structures etc. but is also working with the enforcement team, starting at Kingston, now at Cherry Orchard Gardens and will continue up river. This is cheaper than using outside contractors. It is a phased operation, starting with abandoned boats, then non-compliant boats and then live-aboards. Recovery of costs from owners is pursued where possible and occasionally seized vessels can be sold to help cover costs. Enforcement on overstaying moorers is being pursued on the Walton towpath and in the Staines area. It was noted that new signage at Spelthorne and Hampton Court Palace mooring sites is effective. Some legally complex situations are under investigation and cannot be commented upon at present.

All present congratulated the EA team on the real progress with wreck removal and enforcement action, and removal of unconsented structures at Hampton Riviera.

It was noted that the EA in this area receives an excessive amount of correspondence and emails from individuals. Also, letters sent to senior figures in the EA come back to the local team for answers. Dealing with this takes up valuable time and resources and it is much more efficient for concerns to be raised via groups such as RUG8 – all are encouraged to use this well recognised and respected forum rather than contacting the EA individually.

Comments from the meeting:

- continuing frustration over the lack of progress on derelict and unauthorised vessels, with some intolerable situations existing for years in some areas
- ownership of the river bank upstream of Cherry Orchard - not yet resolved.
- Speed and wash problems have increased during the past busy summer - more EA action is requested. Answer: Flag days are planned with all EA boats on patrol; with fewer lock-keepers, users' help in reporting offenders via photos, videos, car numbers etc is sought.
- the dry dock at Sunbury – this remains out of operation during essential works which will take about three months, with the aim of reopening it as soon as possible.

7. RESOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY RUG8 CHAIRMAN

The Chairman proposed two resolutions to be voted on by a show of hands at this meeting. These are not intended to be binding, rather to act as an expression of collective opinion.

Resolution 1: RUG8 requests that it should be a condition of registration with the EA that any owner of a non-powered houseboat on the River Thames provides an address of the vessel's permanent or base mooring, and confirms that they have the permission of the riparian landowner to moor there.

Resolution 2: RUG8 requests that the Environment Agency, Elmbridge Council and Surrey County Council post 'no mooring signs' at regular intervals on all stretches of the Surrey river bank from Sunbury to Molesey for which they are the registered riparian owner*. These signs should include words to the effect that: "you may moor or remain stationary on this stretch of the river for 24 hours in course of ordinary pleasure navigation (Thames Conservancy Act 1932). By staying any longer you agree to pay £x per day."

*Excluding places where local residents have erected landing stages or other accommodations approved by the EA.

[Note: the Reach Coordinator for Chertsey to Sunbury asked for similar signs to be erected on the riverbank as far as Chertsey.]

The Chairman accepted a third resolution from the floor:

Resolution 3: [Proposed by Hampton Court Crescent Management Limited] RUG8 requests the Environment Agency to use its power under the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010 to revoke the registration licences for four barges owned by [name redacted] and presently moored unlawfully on its land in Molesey.

And further requests the Agency to demand that the internet company Bookings.com remove advertising from its site placed by [name redacted] which offers paid accommodation on vessels which are unlawfully moored on land owned by the Environment Agency.

All three resolutions were approved by an overwhelming majority. There were no votes against, but there were a small number of abstentions.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

9. NEXT MEETING

Thames Motor Yacht Club, **Thursday 11 April 2019**

Bernard Hales – 15/10/18

The “one stop” incident call numbers

POLICE 101

EA 0800 80 70 60

RUG8 website: <http://www.thamesriverusersgroup.org/>