

**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 April 2019**

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

**Present:** Vince Hoar, Dan Taylor (EA), Paul Kenny, Tim Readings (Surrey Fire & Rescue), Hannah Wiggins-Bettles (Royal Life Saving Society), Phil Collins (Maritime Volunteer Service), Steve Collins (RUG8 Chairman), John Adams, 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), Rex Walden (Residential Boat Owners Association) and approx. 50 representatives of organisations and interests from Teddington to Bell Weir.

**Apologies:**

Andrew Croxford (EA Waterway Manager), Barry Russell (EA Harbourmaster), Sgt Ali Dunlop (Surrey Police), Sgt Rachel Beckford (Metropolitan Police, Marine Unit, Wapping), Andy Littler (Surrey Fire and Rescue), Cllr Suzette Nicholson (London Borough of Richmond), Alan Woolford, Ian Lancaster, Wendy Piercy, Roger Wheeler, Janet Hales, Mark Marriott.

## **1. WELCOME and INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the EA representatives Vince Hoar and Dan Taylor; Paul Kenny and Tim Readings from Surrey Fire and Rescue; and John Adams, as new Reach Coordinator (reach 16). 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. NOTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING AND RUG 8 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The Notes from the meeting on **11 October 2018** were accepted.

Steve Collins recorded his thanks Thames Ditton Marina for providing a free berth for a SurreySAR vessel as a base to carry out patrols on the Kingston Reach during the Christmas holidays. The river was generally quiet but the crew were first on the scene one evening when a distressed male was threatening to throw himself into the river.

The crew and their support vehicles on the bank were a reassuring presence on the river on New Year's Eve. A number of boats rafted up under one of the arches of Kingston Bridge and had a party. Several unofficial and unsupervised firework parties took place on the bank.

Tim Rowsell of SurreySAR and SC presented a report to the Kingston Council River Safety group on 10 January. Fire, Police, and RNLI were represented. Vince Hoare now represents the Environment Agency on this group.

The RNLI are confident that they can get through Teddington Lock in 4 minutes, so a rescue vessel is not needed on Kingston Reach. However, it would be incredibly valuable to have a patrol vessel on the water to act as 'eyes on the river' with a direct line to the London Coastguard to reduce call out delays.

SC is investigating the possibility of setting up a unit of the Maritime Volunteer Service (MVS) in Kingston (see separate agenda item)

The proposal for a water sports centre including a base for a SurreySAR vessel at Hurst Park was refused planning permission, so SurreySAR will be looking for an alternative base.

The recent BBC programme 'Inside Out London' had a 10 minute feature on squatting boats on the Sunbury to Molesey Reach. SC thought that this was a reasonably well-balanced piece of journalism. It presented squatters' and local residents' views. It also included contributions from:

- A local historian who concluded that the failure to register the land was an oversight
- A property lawyer who concluded that a compromise has to be reached.

SC's view is that, as RUG 8 Chair, there is nothing more he can do. It is up to the local resident groups to use the democratic process to address the issue via Dominic Raab MP and their local Elmbridge Borough Councillors (this is now happening).

The public right of navigation on the Abbey River remains blocked by a weir constructed by a selfish riparian landowner. This is an issue which must be addressed and solved by the Waterways department, not Flood Risk and Coastal Management (FCRM). It was confirmed that FCRM do not consider the obstruction to be a flood risk. However Fisheries and Waterways wish it to be removed. Operations will speak with the landowner to notify him of timescales to remove the obstruction.

### **3. REACH COORDINATORS'S REPORTS**

**Bell Weir to Chertsey:** Bernard Hales reported. No significant items on this Reach, apart from the obstruction of the right of navigation on the Abbey River.

**Chertsey to Sunbury:** Chris Murdoch reported. No conflicts, good communications, but a recent tour of the reach revealed un-named boats at every mooring location, and no space for visiting boats to moor on any of the public moorings.

**Sunbury to Molesey.** Jane Chambers reported. The reach calendar has been completed, thanks to Steve for putting it on the website. The planning application for the Sea Scouts water sports centre at Hurst Meadows has been refused. On Steve's behalf, Jane attended the inaugural RUG Chairs meeting with the EA Team Leaders & Harbour Master at their offices in Reading on 14<sup>th</sup> March. This should prove useful as a way to improve communications between the EA and river users. Other RUG Chairs complained about the lack of attendance by the EA at their meetings which, typically, have a maximum of 20 people. That just serves to emphasise the particular problems and strength of feeling on our stretch of the river. The proposal is to continue these meetings twice a year – in early March before RUG meetings and mid October after RUG meetings. The EA Team Leaders will be asked to contact RUG Chairs a month before a meeting to identify any potential issues and give feedback.

Jane then reviewed the latest situation concerning the problems caused by accommodation barges and expressed her disappointment, shared by many river users and residents, at the slow progress made by the EA. The situation at Cherry Orchard Gardens is complicated by the issue of land ownership, in relation not only to areas recently fenced off by boat owners, but also to areas fenced off by local residents in past years. Requests that these should be considered separately have been rejected. Jane's full report is attached.

**Molesey to Teddington.** John Adams Introduced himself as the new Reach 16 Coordinator. The Reach Calendar issued earlier in the year has been reformatted, with increased information on Reach clubs: their normal activities as well as special events; and contact details as per Club websites. Any corrections and additional details requested. All event organisers should check the calendar and coordinate prior to finalising the time and location of the event with clubs whose normal activities would be affected by the event. Noted there are two dates with events taking place on the same reach when close coordination between clubs is required. Updates to the calendar will be issued shortly.

## 4. LOCAL EMERGENCY SERVICES UPDATES

Representatives were unable to attend but reports were received as follows:

### **Surrey Police:**

Sgt Ali Dunlop's written report is summarised as follows: Updates from the Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne Specialist Neighbourhood Teams in the three boroughs: main issue in Elmbridge is illegally moored boats, SP have a good relationship with the EA and continue to work with them and the council to support related interventions and evictions. Minor ASB and crime include stolen dory and outboard near Walton Bridge at the end of October; stolen rib and outboard from vicinity of Bridge Marine, Shepperton in early December; theft of outboard, Staines, 22/23 March; theft of outboard from a boat at Pharoah's Island, Shepperton, 7 April.

### **Metropolitan Police Marine Policing Unit:**

No report available.

### **Surrey Fire and Rescue**

Andy Littler has replaced Paula Hartwell as Borough Commander for Spelthorne, Community Safety and Risk Reduction.

## 5. UK DROWNING PREVENTION STRATEGY 2016-2026

Paul Kenny, Surrey Fire and Rescue (Tim Readings also in attendance) gave an overview of the corporate governance and funding structure of the service. National standards now help local fire services to coordinate their actions in dealing with civil contingencies i.e. fire and rescue, but there is no statutory duty where flooding is concerned. Paul presented global and local statistics showing that more people die from drowning than die in fires. 62% of the people who drown, do so on inland waters. Death by drowning is third in frequency in unintended deaths.

Surrey FRS have rescue units with boats at Fordbridge (Spelthorne) and Walton (Elmbridge).

Arising from incidents such as Virginia Water Lake, Beesleys Ait (2016), and Kingston (2005) it was decided to have a strategy in partnership with London Fire Brigade, RNLI, and Royal Life Saving Society UK.

Following a 2017 survey of Thames hazards in Surrey, Surrey FRS have worked with Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne councils to install throw ropes in locked steel cabinets at strategic points along the river. 22 have been installed so far. Passers-by can ring 999 to receive a code to unlock the cabinet in an emergency. A comment was made from the floor that this could be a slow process. Paul said that the system had been tested on people with a range of ages and physical abilities and found to be satisfactory – it ensured that users rang 999 and also gave them time to think.

Training is offered to riverside premises e.g. pubs - as successfully used by a bouncer in an incident at Kingston Bridge.

Comment from the floor: a boater who was on the river at the time of an incident attended by Surrey FRS had offered his assistance but this was turned down. In discussion, it was suggested that it would be useful to issue clearer guidelines on what river users could do in such circumstances. It was noted that an Incident Commander has to use his/her own knowledge and initiative in making decisions on rescue attempts.

Question from the floor: are the emergency services in the area considering encouraging the use of the What3Words app on mobile phones to confirm the location of incidents? Hannah Wiggins-Bettles of the Royal Life Saving Society (who had kindly travelled all the way from Worcester to attend this meeting) explained that this is a geocoding system for the communication of locations with a resolution of three metres. What3words encodes geographic coordinates into three

dictionary words which are much easier to remember than OS coordinates or postcodes. She explained that members of the public who observe an incident could look up the location on the app, and then phone the three words given to the emergency services. Paul commented that Surrey FRS are not currently promoting this app, but would look into it.

Hannah also reported that the RLSS promote the formation of local Water Safety Forums (WSF) to bring together local emergency services, navigation authorities and local authorities. The RUG Chair commented that he was aware of the existence of the Tidal Thames WSF and suggested there should be a Non-Tidal Thames WSF. Hannah commented a Surrey WSF was a more realistic option. The RUG Chair expressed his personal hope that the former Surrey county town of Kingston (which still has a Surrey postal address) could be included.

## **6. MARITIME VOLUNTEER SERVICE**

Phil Collins, London Regional Volunteer Officer of the Maritime Volunteer Service gave an introduction on its work. There are units at Putney, Gravesend, Thanet and it is proposed to set up another unit upstream at Kingston, providing "eyes on the water" to assist at all times when required. The MVS was established in 1994 when the Royal Navy Auxiliary Service was disbanded and is a self funding, non profit charity. Units operate their own vessels including those at sea. Training in boat management is to national levels using established RYA procedures.

## **7. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY AND LOCAL ISSUES**

In the absence of Andy Croxford team leader, Vince Hoar, Waterway Officer, reported. Dan Taylor also in attendance.

"E Team" cover from Teddington to Romney Lock. There is now a resident senior lock keeper for Teddington and resident lock keepers for both Chertsey and Sunbury have been recruited. This was welcomed by the meeting. In total, there are 13 lock and weir keepers, 5-6 seasonal lock keepers, 50-60 volunteer lock keepers and some voluntary boat crews, and two enforcement officers with police background (Stuart Jenkins and Nick Mason) have been recruited in the Compliance (formerly Enforcement) Department, working with Nick McKie-Smith's compliance team.

During the winter both sets of gates at Molesey were removed, repaired and re-sheeted. The timbers were also replaced in the launch lock at Teddington. The pedestal operating systems at both Romney and Bell Weir are being replaced. The seals on the radial gates at Teddington weir are currently being replaced.

For 2019/20 Government has supported additional funding of £8m across all Environment Agency navigations and although allocation is still to be confirmed we hope for an increase for essential infrastructure on the Thames.

"Flag Days" continue to take place on a monthly basis across the whole river in addition to normal patrols. Of the 8 launches, 2 are in our area and continue to promote water safety, with visits to rowing and sailing clubs etc. There is a busy schedule of events this year and Vince thanked the reach co-ordinators for their hard work.

EA plan to have a daily patrol during the Hampton Court Flower Show (1st-7th July 2019)

A new contract is being negotiated for the further removal of sunken and derelict boats which continues to be a very resource-intensive operation. He hoped that the sunken tug Endeavour on the Waterworks Reach in Surbiton, could be lifted and removed this year, but some work on land registration of the riverbank on this reach had to be completed first.

Dan Taylor, EA Strategic Engagement Manager, reported that a new contract is being set up for the management of visitor moorings and will shortly go out to tender. This follows the trial year operated by Thames Visitor Moorings and Dan expressed his appreciation of Rex Walden's excellent service (endorsed by the meeting).

David Garrett, representing 300 members of the pressure group Reclaim our Riverbank 2, said there were still 50 dilapidated boats and wrecks in 4 miles in the Molesey – Walton section. He expressed his continuing anger and frustration at the EA's inability to remove such vessels in a timely fashion. He commented that it is a lot easier and less expensive to tow a boat away than to lift and remove it later when it had sunk. This frustration was shared by members of Friends of Hurst Park and Hampton Court Crescent Ltd. who were present. David also withdrew his agreement to act as coordinator for complaints being sent to EA (as requested at the last meeting to reduce officers' time-consuming admin workloads), in protest at the apparent lack of action.

## **7. OTHER BUSINESS**

SC: Andrew Ogilvie of GoBoats Ltd briefed members on their plans to put four electric hire boats on the river as a pilot scheme, following their success in running a successful operation on the canal network in Paddington. The boats will operate from the steps outside the Cote Brasserie on Kingston Riverside. Andrew reassured members that strict rules on alcohol consumption and behaviour would be imposed on his customers.

## **8. NEXT MEETING**

Thames Motor Yacht Club, October 2019 (date tba).

Bernard Hales – 14/4/19

### **The “one stop” incident call numbers**

**POLICE      101**

**EA      0800 80 70 60**

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