

River Thames Alliance Moorings Group Annual General Meeting Minutes: 'Leading through success'

Date: Wednesday 29 February 2012

Location: Reading Borough Council Civic Centre, Council Chamber

Attendees: David Allister (Richmond Borough Council), Stephen Anderson (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Chris Ashton (Wycombe District Council), Heather Brown (Choose Abingdon Partnership), Matt Carter (Environment Agency), Michael Chambers (Regional Fisheries Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee (RFERAC)), Graham Child (Pangbourne Parish Council), John Copley (Oxford City Council), Alan Dawe (River Thames User Group 3), Cllr. Pat Dawe (South Oxfordshire District Council), Jason Debney (Thames Landscape Strategy *on behalf of* Royal Borough of Kingston), John Edmonds (River Thames Alliance, Chair), Cllr. Kellie Gehrman (Henley Town Council), Andrew Graham (Environment Agency), David Harvey (Thames Anglers Conservancy), Chris Jackson (West Oxfordshire District Council), Louis Jankel (NABO), Caroline Juby (RTA Secretariat), Julian Kennard (Environment Agency), David Lambert (River Thames Society), Mannie Marway (Adaptis Solutions), Nick McKie-Smith (Environment Agency), Robin Major (Adaptis Solutions), Graham Paterson (NABO Mid Thames Representative), Barbara Penniall (Electric Boat Association), Basil Rickard (Residential Boat Owners Association), Carole Robb (Henley Town Council), Brian Roberts (IWA), Sarah Russell (RTA Secretariat), Michael Shefras (RTA Moorings Group, Chair), Andy Soper (The Barge Association/RFERAC), David Sowter (RFERAC), Jes Spencer (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Ben Stanesby (Reading Borough Council), David Steele (Marlow Society), Alan Woolford (RYA).

1. Welcome and introductions: Michael Shefras (MS)

- 1.1 **MS** welcomed attendees to the meeting and thanked Ben Stanesby (**BS**) for offering the Reading Borough Council Chamber.
- 1.2 **MS** acknowledged there had been many achievements since the first meeting in 2008 and was particularly pleased to see the wide range of local authority stake holders attending the meeting.

2. Keynote Address - leading through success: Matt Carter (MC)

- 2.1 **MC** summarised the waterways managed by the Environment Agency (EA), which total £1billion in assets, and explained the sources of funding, stating that on the Thames £3million is required to maintain the locks and keep them open, whilst an additional £5-6million is needed to maintain the river, its structures and the staff to run it.
- 2.2 **MC** summarised Thames enforcement priorities, the structure of the new enforcement team and highlighted the benefits it will have to the River Thames. He also highlighted recent successes achieved by this team (see attached presentation).

3. Working in partnership

3.1 Unlawfully Moored Boats Enforcement Group (UMBEG): John Copley (JC)

- 3.1.1 **JC** noted that the RTA Moorings Group meetings maintain a sense of momentum for the partnerships involved and seeing action and success by one partner encourages others. **JC** thanked **BS** for his previous work in Reading, as this provided inspiration and offered many processes and techniques that could be transferred to Oxford.
- 3.1.2 **JC** summarised that although Oxford City Council manages a relatively small section of the River Thames, it has approximately 50 riparian owners, in addition to some areas of un-owned land. An additional challenge is that there is a surplus of craft on the network relative to mooring locations.
- 3.1.3 **JC** summarised a list of problems experienced in Oxford City in relation to moorings (see presentation attachment) in addition to highlighting a couple of example case studies. The first related to an issue where a boat was not well maintained and eventually became submerged. The boat therefore blocked navigation in the river and posed a second problem to a nearby residential development with views of the river (see photograph in presentation). The second example related to a boat moored in the area that erected tents on the bank, causing obstructions on the tow path (see photograph in presentation).
- 3.1.4 **JC** presented the many achievements to date by UMBEG (see presentation).
- 3.1.5 **BS** asked **JC** how Oxford City Council managed to get all the information together on the ownership of the land? **JC** replied that it took a long time (around 8 months) and a fair amount of budget to work through all the relevant planning registers, land registry and planning control records.

3.2 Abingdon Waterfront – a focus for 2012: Heather Brown (HB)

- 3.2.1 **HB** noted that Abingdon is now called Abingdon-on-Thames as it hopes to attract more visitors to the town.
- 3.2.2 **HB** commented that Abingdon is the only location that still offers free mooring sites, however they may be on the cusp of re-thinking this policy. Abingdon is starting to receive complaints regarding boats overstaying on moorings in the area, whereas this had previously not been an obvious issue. **HB** emphasised that Abingdon would like to tackle this problem early before it escalates to the scale other areas experience. However there is a lack of funding for this as the council will not allocate money for an issue they do not consider currently exists.

- 3.2.3 **HB** summarised the history of the Choose Abingdon Partnership project and commented on how the project is now becoming more strategic. The project is now conducting market research on what river users and local people/businesses want and invited input from the meeting, and also advice from any member who had done similar research.
- 3.2.4 **HB** asked for advice from river users in the RTA Moorings Group and other Local Authorities regarding how best to deal with the moorings in Abingdon.

3.3 Kingston-upon-Thames Mooring Strategy: Jason Debney (JD)

- 3.3.1 **JD** notified the group that the strategy is due to launch in March following its 10 year review. The aim for the strategy is to enhance the river's status, its environs and to improve links between the river and the town.
- 3.3.2 **JD** discussed the 2008 moorings plan that identified the feasibility of different types of moorings in Kingston and where they could be established. The strategy also identified what other river users could contribute to improving the river side and mooring situation and the feasibility of funding for the plans. **JD** explained that the project was taken forward in 2010 and short term goals were set up. These included improving signage, setting up purpose built moorings at Town End Wharf and Queen's Promenade.
- 3.3.3 Funding was also obtained from the Mayor of London's fund for boroughs that were not going to directly benefit from the Olympics. This money is to be spent by the end of March 2012 and **JD** asked the group to view the plan online http://www.kingston.gov.uk/kingston_moorings_plan.htm, and respond with any comments or suggestions.

The email address for responses is:
moorings.plan@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

- 3.3.4 **JD** summarised the next step will be to decide how to manage the moorings. One option is to establish a trust to manage them or discuss management with an existing boat operator (e.g. Turks).
- 3.3.5 **MS** mentioned that Julian Kennard (**JK**) will be able to advise on signage as a RTA template has already been developed.

3.4 Introducing new moorings byelaws: David Allister (DA)

- 3.4.1 See presentation (attachment).
- 3.4.2 **DA** commented that dealing with mooring issues has become an increasing challenge in Richmond. There is currently no specific byelaw on mooring boats and at the RTA Moorings meeting in 2011, **DA** discovered Spelthorne Borough Council were creating a mooring byelaw. He hoped Richmond could use a similar

process to create one. The council are currently waiting for approval. Once approval has been granted, the byelaw will make it possible to prosecute and will minimise costs.

3.4.3 **DA** summarised the process of creating a byelaw:

- Local Authority (LA) writes the byelaw text
- Sent to consultation
- When the consultation is closed, the comments are considered and the byelaw is edited. If significant changes are made, the process starts over.
- Byelaw is sent to Secretary of State, who approves it and sends it back to the LA.

3.4.4 **DA** advised that the consultation is open until 8 April 2012, and so far the feedback has been generally positive.

3.4.5 After the byelaw is approved, the next step will be to set up a system of enforcing the byelaw and the council will most likely work with the EA.

3.5 Introducing DashBoat – a cashless payment system for waterways: Robin Major (RM)

3.5.1 See presentation (attachment).

3.5.2 **RM** described the benefits of the cashless payments system. These include being able to pay in advance or as you arrive in a location. A receipt and additional information (e.g. mooring instructions/laws, local area information etc) can be sent to the customer, and there is very little environmental impact as no infrastructure required (just signage).

3.5.3 A cash payment system could also be used, as Adaptis have a partnership with Payzone.

3.5.4 Adaptis are already working with Pangbourne Parish Council on a proposal for the Pangbourne Meadow moorings.

4. The new EA waterways enforcement team and plans for 2012: Matt Carter (MC) and Nick McKie-Smith (NMS)

4.1 **MC** described how implementing and integrating new technologies requires time and funding, as well as culture changes, acceptance and take up. MC stated the team is focussed on outcomes and wants to manage expectation effectively. The aim for next year's meeting is to be able to report back a significant increase in prosecution numbers and associated income.

4.2 **NMS** summarised the team structure, the way of working and plans for the future (see attached presentations).

4.3 The email address for reporting intelligence to the Enforcement Team is: thameswaterwaysintel@environment-agency.gov.uk

5. Should residential moorings be on the Local Authority agenda?: Ben Stanesby (BS)

- 5.1 See presentation attachment. **BS** summarised the challenges with on-channel mooring, which include lack of space, issues with connecting utilities, arranging bin collections etc. Likewise, off-channel moorings also pose their own challenges with lack of availability, and cost of land.
- 5.2 **BS** suggested that brown-field sites may offer the best opportunity to develop areas for residential moorings.
- 5.3 **BS** suggested forming a working group, including representatives from different authorities with expertise in planning and housing in particular, in order to help identify the issues and attempt to discuss possible solutions.

6. Embracing the Big Society – setting up a volunteers programme: Andrew Graham (AG)

- 6.1 **AG** summarised last year's successful Environment Agency volunteer recruitment programme and how this year's programme will differ. The new campaign for volunteer assistant lock keepers includes providing a clearer description of the volunteer role with defined boundaries and expectations. **AG** highlighted the Volunteer England website as a useful resource.
- 6.2 **AG** noted how numbers of expressions of interest received this year is positive and that the local media (particularly in the lower reaches of the Thames) has taken an interest and promoted the opportunity.
- 6.3 Recruitment of volunteers in the Upper Thames region is less prolific, due to the area being less populated and the residential/urban areas are further away from the river; so the Thames is less in the mind-set of residents
- 6.4 **AG** mentioned that volunteer roles with the Environment Agency may offer a route into paid employment for some individuals. Three of last years volunteers have been offered relief lock and weir positions.
- 6.5 **AG** reported the EA will also launch a volunteer boatmen campaign and **MS** and the ATYC (Association of Thames Yacht Clubs) have offered to help provide further Thames training for the experienced boatmen who are recruited.
- 6.6 **AG** summarised that it is important that volunteers feel part of the EA, and feel they are getting something from the experience and see their work, or issues, are being followed up.
- 6.7 **AG** suggested volunteers could help maintain mooring sites in the future.

7. Discussion:

- 7.1 Brian Roberts (**BR**) asked for consistency in signage, mooring fees and timings along the river. He suggested a 24hr free mooring period starts at 4pm to allow for visitors who wish to stay overnight and visit the local town. **BR** also requested that signage be large enough to be seen from the centre of the river.
- 7.2 **JK** reminded members that a sign template (that highlights key content) was discussed at last year's meeting, and offered to send the

template to anyone who requires it. Pangbourne Parish Council is already using it. Some LAs want to use their own branded sign and have the discretion to control content, although they should be happy to use the key messages outlined in the advised template. A jointly branded sign shouldn't be a problem as long as the advised content is included. JK said that with regards to the larger signage, the EA have been criticised for placing too many signs in the past and they have to be careful not to impact the environment unnecessarily, especially in rural locations.

7.3 **JC** described how Oxford have created signage as large as possible, but without exceeding the recommended size. They are using the template recommended by the EA and have produced them with multiple branding (Oxford City Council, EA and Thames Valley Police) to encourage all organisations to take responsibility for managing the moorings and enforcing the requirements.

7.4 Louis Jankel (**LJ**) asked whether the LAs at the meeting would welcome the involvement of the local RUGs?

7.4.1 **HB** said the Choose Abingdon Partnership would welcome the advice of the RUG, as the market research often captures the views of the general public rather than targeting river users.

7.4.2 Alan Dawe (**AD**) from RUG 3 (Sandford – Cleeve) agreed with **HB** and mentioned that they have parish councillors in the group.

7.4.3 Councillor Kellie Gehrmann (**KG**) also agreed, mentioning that many of the councillors are boat users, but would be open to more input from the RUG.

7.4.4 **JC** agreed with all the above and mentioned that often the local people voice their opinions louder than the river users, and any input from more river users would be very welcome.

7.5 Michael Chambers (**MC**) commented that bona fide residential moorings are expensive and he felt that creating new ones will not resolve the moorings issue; i.e. people that are not prepared to pay their way, will still not be prepared to pay to occupy new residential moorings. Therefore the issues with the large illegal conurbations, such as near Richmond, will still exist.

7.6 Basil Rickard (**BRI**) commented that residential moorings are only suitable for those who wish to stay within the rules, although he was pleased to hear Reading Borough Council will be considering increasing the number of residential mooring spaces, as demand on the non-tidal Thames is increasing.

8. Closing Comments– Michael Shefras and John Edmonds (JE)

8.1 **MS** reflected on how the RTA Moorings Group faces many challenges, but that successes are definitely being seen.

8.2 There is a notable absence of some LAs at these meetings, and a challenge will be to engage these so he encouraged the group to continue working together in partnership.

8.3 **At this point MS invited John Edmonds, RTA Chair to speak.**

- 8.4 **JE** stated how the RTA needs to review and update the Waterways Plan. The principles remain the same but we are now in different financial, political and social circumstances. **JE** encouraged the group to decide together on new objectives, to create a common aim and to work together to achieve a new plan.. The RTA management committee have agreed to delay this year's RTA AGM until October, which will allow the committee to prepare a proposal for a plan, which can then be presented to RTA members
- 8.5 **JE** reminded the group that a review of the plan will be a participative event and to make it a success, all RTA members must participate.
- 8.6 **MS** and **JE** thanked all the speakers, and the meeting closed.