

SUPPORT (SAVE) OUR WATERWAYS

MINUTES OF AGM

HELD ON SATURDAY 30 MAY, 2009
COMMENCING AT 1100
AT STAFFORD BOAT CLUB
STAFFORD

PRESENT: Will Chapman – Chairman
 Martin Clark
 Sue Day
 David Henwood
 Brian and Jill Rich
 Steve Parkin
 Michael Shefras
 David Stevenson

APOLOGIES: Cameron Abercrombie, Paul le Blique, Richard Carpenter, Peter Caswell, Chris Coburn, Graham Collett, Steve Davis, Andrew Dyke, John Edmonds, John Evans, Ian Fletcher, Brian Goggin, Chris Gooch, Andrew Goodland, Dave Green, Clive Henderson, Sandra Henstock, Ron Heritage, Rodney Hinton, Julia Hones, Roger Hutchinson, Louis Jankel, John Laidlar, Tony Lenten, Stewart Marchant, Roger Millin, Arthur Naylor, Roger Olver, Lynda Payton, Jan Roden, Phil Sharpe, Graham Speechley, Richard Tanner, Vaughan Welch

1. CHAIRMAN’S REPORT OF PAST YEAR

1.1 Will reported that it had been an interesting year. There had been three major areas of activity which were worthy of comment:

1.1.1 From the last open meetings we endeavoured to attract new members to what had been **turned into a “members” organisation at a fee of just £5 per year.**

a.	Money had been spent on advertising materials and as will be explained during the Treasurers Report there are still stocks of banners and other such material for future campaigns.
b.	Despite the efforts on a number of members to ensure wide circulation of posters and leaflets this approach was disappointing. Membership increased by 60 from 129 to 189 where we had hoped to recruit several hundred over the summer. From personal experience when meeting boaters and other users on the towpath and socially it was easy to get a £5 membership fee which suggests that a personal approach is more effective.
c.	Consideration on the way forward if SOW continues will be required.

1.1.2 **SOW arranged a meeting for senior representatives of stakeholders with Anne McIntosh the Conservative Shadow Waterways Minister.**

a.	Will reported to the meeting that he had “flown a ‘kite’” from a comment made
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	by David Cameron at one of the Conservative conferences.
c.	He was surprised to get a response from Anne McIntosh asking for a meeting. From that reply, working with Michael and others he invited senior officers of the major waterway organisations to join SOW at a meeting designed to brief the Conservative party on inland waterway policy.
d.	Through e-mail correspondence and one meeting held after the Waterways Minister Stakeholders meeting it was agreed that we would deliver under six headings an outline of the ongoing waterway problems.
e.	The meeting was held at the House of Commons on January 14 th 2009 and notes of the meeting can be seen on the SOW Web Page.
f.	It was becoming apparent during the revision of the Waterways for Tomorrow policy document, that no consideration was being given to how strategic issues concerning the waterways would be managed by the very small waterways section of DEFRA.
g.	Accordingly Will developed an outline of a strategic waterways authority and how such an organisation could work. It was hoped that this paper will initiate a debate of how the nation's waterways be managed into the next decade.
g.	It was later discovered that David Pearce of AWCC had developed a similar paper in 1999 and so, with the agreement of AWCC, Will combined the two papers for further consideration by other stakeholders.
h.	Michael Shefras had introduced the idea to the RYA Inland Waterways Working Group, and it is to be an agenda item at a forthcoming RYA Stake Holders Meeting to be held on 17 June, 2009.

1.1.3 More recently Will had introduced the SOW Committee to the idea of a National Waterways Awareness Campaign which would highlight the need for local communities to take more responsibility for their section of the waterways. Tentatively named 'It's Your Waterway' a copy has been distributed to all members and can be found on the SOW website. It is interesting, but coincidental, that BW's Twenty Twenty proposed plan for the next 10 years is also moving the same direction.

a.	Will felt that many of the issues on which SOW had been formed to protest had been superseded by changes in Government attitude and improved working relationships between other user groups. The attempt to attract significant numbers of non-boating members had started slowly, yielding just under 200 members at the end of the first year. At that rate of growth, income coming from member's subscriptions was insufficient to justify its continued existence. The recruitment campaign also lacked focus in that it appeared to be competing directly with other user groups. The concept of the awareness campaign funded by third parties would address those issues.
b.	Accordingly together with Richard Carpenter and Michael Shefras he met with

	Simon Salem at BW. From that meeting BW agreed to provide seed funding of £5,000.
c.	Based on this Will has spoken with other waterway organisations who all expressed initial support for the idea, but so far there had been no firm commitment of involvement.
d.	BW have agreed to make the £5,000 unconditional and if the meeting today agree that SOW should continue the idea could proceed.
e.	There had been comment that it was just a ploy to attract new SOW members. Of course if this is a by-product so be it, but the entire desire is for all the various waterway bodies to work together to build a campaign that involves local residents of riparian communities for the future benefit of the entire system. Rather than focussing on attracting new members to SOW, a central theme of the campaign is to give existing all user groups and societies an opportunity to promote their organisations in the general context of greater community ownership of their local waterway.

1.1.4 Additionally SOW had involvement with the DEFRA sponsored meetings concerned with the revision of the **Waterways for Tomorrow** policy document: attendance at the **Waterways Minister's Stakeholders meetings**: attendance at the **RYA Annual Stake Holders meeting, British Waterways Advisory Forum meetings** and various other **meetings with officers of other waterway groups including IWA, NABO and other such organisations.**

1.2 Having received the report Sue Day felt that she was sure that her organisation would be help in the promotion of the National Waterways Awareness campaign but was not able to provide any funding. Will explained that a lot of decisions had to await the outcome of this meeting, but if it was all positive he would look at the way it had been left in and endeavour to move on the project.

Michael Shefras wanted to thank Will for the work he continues to do as chairman. Having worked with him for the past year he knew the dedication he has shown. He had been pleased to see SOW at the RYA Stake Holders Meeting which is chaired by John Edmunds. The meeting on 17 June will be the third and Michael's personal challenge is to get all the various waterway associations and groups to come together to provide where it is possible to give a united steer to government.

There are more than 30 different stakeholders at the Waterways Minister's Stake Holder's meetings, and sooner or later we have to be able to go to government with a solid claim for future sustainable funding and governance of the entire waterways system without losing any individuality.

The meeting received Will's report.

2. TREASURERS REPORT

2.1 With the Honorary Treasurer retiring for personal reasons during the past year it had been left to Will to take all the various documents and figures and produce a set of accounts.

- 2.2 Accordingly using the help of a screen he showed the meeting the current financial situation. *The accounts for the past 3 years are appended to these minutes.*
- 2.3 He had to report that due to the very poor take up from new members, the membership campaign regrettably went over budget by approximately £2,000.
- 2.3.1 Two members have generously agreed to cover the outstanding amount in the form of a non-interest bearing loan which will be treated as a donation for an unlimited period.
- 2.3.2 In the future should there be sufficient funds then consideration on repaying the 'loan' could take place at such time.
- 2.3.3 David Stevenson requested that a proper memorandum of understanding be kept on file explaining exactly what is expected.
- 2.4 Will reported that some members are not getting renewal notices as they have changed their email addresses from those recorded on the PayPal payment system also, a handful, had cancelled their subscription. He estimated that all told we had lost 20 members and the membership stands at approximately 170 from a peak of 190.
- 2.4.1 Depending upon the decisions of this meeting, should SOW continue we need to consider different ways of attracting new members.
- 2.6 David Stevenson asked if there was any reason given for the Treasurer's resignation.
- 2.6.1 The answer was personal pressures related to transfer of boating activities to Ireland.
- 2.7 The meeting accepted Will's verbal report as shown on the screen and would look forward to the published report when circulated.
- 2.8 Will was thanked by the tremendous amount of work he had covered in preparing the report.
- 3. THE FUTURE – THE OPTIONS.**
- a.. Launch the "Its Your Waterway" Awareness Campaign**
- b. Become a Corporate member of IWA or merge with another User Group.**
- c. Cease Activities**
- 3.1 Before the discussion opened, **Will** explained that that under a. above a sum of £5,000 was available from BW to underwrite the campaign.
- 3.1.1 Whilst many of the officers of the user groups identify with the campaign there is little chance of any additional funding, and so far none have provided assistance in the form of volunteers.

It appears that that the campaign is seen to be designed to generate members for SOW rather than the intention to widen the appeal of the waterways outside the traditional boater.

3.1.2 In conversations with the leaders of other user groups, it was generally felt that SOW should continue as a sort of 'ginger group' that could react quickly in the eventuality of the need for another protest. Will Chapman felt that was fair enough but the organisation couldn't exist on thin air and needed income from some source to cover the cost of running the organisation.

3.1.3 We received 36 responses to the AGM announcement, most made no comment about the future role of SOW, 2 thought we should call it a day, 5 thought we should continue and 6 said they would follow the majority.

3.1.4 In an email, **Graham Collett** suggested that SOW should continue at least until the Waterways for Tomorrow policy paper was published (December 2009).

3.1.5 **Dave Green's email** thought we should continue but suggested we merge with another group like NABO.

3.1.6 **Roger Millin's email** expressed support for the idea of campaigning for greater involvement of local authorities but, considering the current economic climate, wondered whether it was a realistic objective.

3.2 **MS** explained that his feelings were that the founders of SOW have done a superb job and in the way it is formed is able to provide a wonderful "Ginger Group".

3.2.1 In his opinion based on what is coming to the fore from many different avenues there is a need to make the wider public aware of the nation's waterways and there are many planks of debate within that aim.

3.2.2 Personally he could not be part of SOW if it was to become part of any other organisation and the beauty of SOW is that it is able to respond quickly and providing it continues to work with all the other user bodies it in his opinion has a place in the wider scene.

3.2.3 For the above reasons he hoped that SOW would continue but it would require volunteers to assist Will as currently too much is on his shoulders.

3.3 **David Stevenson** had already indicated that while his time of being a SOW committee member had come to an end but that does not mean that he does not have the commitment to the aims of SOW.

3.3.1 He felt that at times SOW appeared to be a "one man" organisation which is probably inevitable because of the amount of work Will achieves. This statement is not to "knock" the work being done by Will which is admirable.

3.3.2 It should continue but it requires input from a working committee, and it requires to work with other user bodies in the campaign as it would be futile for SOW trying to do it on their own.

- 3.3.3 He believed that the campaign could be very important but must be advanced in cooperation with other user bodies. He had met with Clive Henderson and there is room for liaison between IWA and SOW. The situation has changed with the new officers in the past year.
- 3.4 **Sue Day** remembered being asked for money, but was not aware that volunteers were required for the campaign. She thought it was a good idea and she was sure that her organisation would be fully supportive.
- 3.4.1 We should put SOW into perspective. It had done a good job and should continue and it was comforting that relationships were good with IWA but it must be recognised that it does appear that IWA still has an enormous amount of work to get the message down to the waterside and with its regional organisation.
- 3.5 **Brian Rich** suggested that most boating organisations were very vertical whereas SOW was very horizontal in its management and this has worked well in delivery. It has no impediment in getting directly to boaters on the water.
- 3.6 **Jill Rich** commented that SOW came out of the bushes “like Zorro” in 2006 and was very active in delivery nationally with the protests. There is nothing wrong in a slight anarchist approach which gives an edge!
- 3.6.1 She asked what was the age of the members of SOW and it appeared that like all organisations it is an increasingly older person who is involved. She suggested that we should work hard to get younger enthusiasts on board and giving them guidance and assistance should they take a position.
- 3.7 **Martin Clark** recalled why SOW was formed originally. Perhaps in becoming a membership organisation it has lost some creditability. Whether or not SOW launches the campaign his feeling was that SOW should continue and he would be prepared to continue providing the services of the Web page, but requires more input to make the page work.
- 3.7.1 Perhaps SOW could develop into an umbrella organisation, but **MS** commented that this would not work; although in his opinion it was essential to develop an umbrella organisation of all the different user inland waterway user bodies, so that through whatever vehicle is deemed suitable it can work with IWAC and to Government and give a united front for the funding of the waterways into the next decade and this would be his target through the RYA Stakeholders meeting and other avenues.

4. **VOTE ON 3.**

- 4.1 ***MS proposed, seconded Sue Day seconded that SOW should continue and was unanimously agreed.***
- 4.2 ***David Stevenson proposed and Sue Day seconded that SOW should develop the National Waterways Awareness campaign providing it can be done in concert with other user bodies and this was also unanimously agreed.***

5. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE

- 5.1 After preliminary discussion the following were elected to serve.
- 5.2 It was noted that the majority of committee work is done via e-mail communication avoiding costly travel and meeting time.

Chairman	Will Chapman
Honorary Secretary	Michael Shefras
Honorary Treasurer	Brian Rich
Web Master	Martin Clark
	Richard Carpenter
	Sue Day

6. PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

- 6.1 New Corporate Group membership was accepted as a good idea to be worked up by the committee.
- 6.2 There was no decision on Proxy Voting which was left for discussion at a future meeting.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 7.1 Sue Day suggested that use of the word “Save” in the organisation name is not absolutely right under the current circumstances. “Support” would be a much better word.
- 7.1.1 Will advised that others had expressed this point and, indeed, the word “Support” was actually used in the last set of advertising material. He suggested that using the acronym SOW allowed us to use it as we wished. It was just a question of branding and marketing of SOW.
- 7.2 David Henwood thanked the meeting for allowing him to attend. He had enjoyed the debate. He wanted to be part of an organisation that directly represented the boater and had found that IWA and NABO had not delivered to him what he was looking for. Will Chapman pointed out that the leadership of IWA, NABO and RBOA had all changed and suggested that it was worth looking at them again.

There being no further business the meeting concluded in time for buffet lunch provided by the ladies of the Stafford Boat Club and with our thanks to the Officers and Members of Stafford Club for use of their premises.