

PLA RIVER USERS CONSULTATIVE FORUM (UPPER)

NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT BAKERS' HALL ON TUESDAY 25TH NOVEMBER, 2008

PRESENT

David Foster (DF)	Harbour Master (Upper)
David Phillips (DP)	Deputy Harbour Master (Upper)
Julian Parkes (JP)	Harbour Master (SMS)
Dudley Curtis (DC)	Deputy Harbour Master (Upper)
Alex Brown (AB)	River Manager (Putney/Teddington)
Martin Garside (MG)	PLA Press & PR Manager
Katherine Harris (KH)	PLA Environmental Advisor
Sandra West (SW)	Assistant to HM (Upper)
Neil Caborn (NC)	RAFT
Chris Livett (CL)	Thames Luxury Charters & PBA
Dave Cottrell (DCo)	Marine Policing Unit – Met. Police
Janet Kelly (JK)	RNLI Tower Lifeboat Station
Steve Davies (SD)	RYA North-Kent Region
Kevin East (KE)	British Canoe Union
Russell Robson (RR)	Environment Agency Sports & Recreation
Colin Woodward (CW)	Environment Agency Sports & Recreation
Peter Finch (PF)	River Thames Society
Michael Shefras (MS)	Association of Thames Yacht Clubs
Phil Myers (PM)	London Coastguard/MCA
Gary Davies (GD)	London Home & Water Safety Council
Derek Mann (DM)	Thames Clippers/PBA
Andy Griffiths (AG)	London River Services

1. Apologies for Absence

Alex Hickman, T&GWU
Bryan Hopkins, MCA
Darren Munro, LFB
David White, MCA – represented by Phil Myers
Jon Averbs, LPHA
Rod Shaw, MCA
Roger Flitter, PBA – represented by Chris Livett & Derek Mann
Chas Newens, Company of Watermen & Lightermen

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th May, 2008 were held to be a true record.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

No matters arising.

4. PLA

(i) Regulatory Update

- Public consultation underway on guidance document for use of Personal Water Craft in lower and estuary areas. Consultation closes 31 December.
- Three yearly review of General Directions – minor changes, consultation notice should be sent out in January
- Three yearly review of Pilotage Directions – consultation process should start in early 2009, minor changes
- Leisure Users Guide – under review, will be produced in fold out, water resistant paper rather than booklet form. Hope to have available by start of next leisure season with annual reviews.
- Code of Practice for Ship Towing – three-yearly review underway. To include operational safety guidance and tug allocation tables.

(ii) Draft Thames Byelaws – Informal Consultation

Thank you to all who responded to the informal consultation on the replacement for the current River Byelaws during the summer. PLA received approximately fifty responses from users and interested parties. A number of issues were raised, one in particular was the proposed speed limit in central London. Feedback has been reviewed and some amendments made to the proposals. Will Publish PLA response in the next few weeks. More work has to be done on assessing the speed limit proposals – opinion for and against. Plan to seek PLA Board approval in the spring before embarking on the formal consultation through to the Department of Transport. Hopefully, the new byelaws will be in place by end of next year.

(iii) Rowing Code & Rowing and Recreation

AB - the Rowing Code is being updated, will show buoys etc. which have been placed since first publication. There will not be a new printed edition but will be available on the PLA website. Reported incidents have dropped by 70% since introduction of Rowing Code but there has been an increase in reports of incidents re large boats in the wrong place which in fact are in the correct position. DF asked the PBA to ensure it's members provided where possible the numbers shown on the rowers' boats when incidents occur. All complaints are now dealt with by DP who judges the facts from both sides rather than accepting one side of the story.

DF - last week the PLA Safety Awards were made, with Vesta Rowing Club winning top prize, followed by Barnes Bridge Ladies Rowing Club and with Mortlake, Alpha & Anglian most improved club. CW added a voice of compliment on the achievements of the Rowing Code. PF suggested a meeting with both rowing and motor boat clubs might be of value, DF said if they set the meeting up locally we would send a representative along. JP thought that the PBA could also find it useful being pro-active with the rowing clubs and he would send Roger Flitter contacts.

(iv) Code of Practice for Passenger Boat Operations

DP reported extremely good progress and thanked all the members of the Working Group. The first draft is pretty comprehensive and will now be cut down further to produce second draft hopefully before Christmas. Photographs will be taken 9th/10th December of boats crews etc. and DP will be in contact to arrange. MPU have been added to the Working Group. DF thanked Roger Flitter and DP for all their hard work.

(v) Corporate Affairs

MG - a new licensing system for events being discussed, hope to have new arrangements in place in the new year. TV programme "Thames Wrecks" had a very large audience and the river was/is featured in Capital Cities and the new Sherlock Holmes film, all of which are good for tourism.

(vi) Environment Issues

Marine Bill – when DEFRA consulted on the draft Bill they received 3,500 replies, only approx. 400 of which were 'non-campaign' responses. The draft Bill did not contain anything for the PLA to be particularly concerned about.

Personal Water Craft Code – developing Code of Practice in the Thames estuary, out for consultation now. The code educates personal watercraft users about safety and environmental issues, and provides a simple list of dos and donts.

Maintenance dredging – not much in our area but programme being put together for early spring.

(vii) General

Electronic charts being prepared Teddington to Coalhouse Point. Will be hard copy to start, Putney to Crossness first. Talking with MCA about correction criteria.

5. MCA District Safety

PM reported re-organisation progressing. Industrial action on-going but has had little effect on search and rescue. Vessel incidents 70% down but busiest year yet with, to the end of October, 222 people rescued, 65 Class Vs and 35 lives lost. DP asked for breakdown of incidents, PM said the attached table is for whole tidal section so will send through more area relevant figures. DF said we used to get daily report from London Coastguard but since industrial action started this has become a casualty – it was a very useful document.

DM - MCA statistics showed 500 incidents at Tower Pier – PM replied these figures came from Lifeboat Association, raised the matter with MCA. DF felt incidents needed to be graded. JK pointed out that the RNLI is a charitable organisation and these statistics help to raise money but she acknowledged they could be misleading, DM asked whether these statistics could be shown as positives instead of negatives, i.e. "matter closed". DF said this information had been an ongoing problem since 2002.

Airwave is being fitted and hope to have Met. Police and TfL cameras at TBNC. AG advised LRS have it as well. DF thinks the system is working better as people now know who to call.

6. Navigational Safety

A list of incidents had been circulated prior to the meeting. As far as the "Hurlingham" incident was concerned DF told the meeting that the MAIB were coming to the end of their investigation. These findings would be revealed at Stakeholders meeting a week on Friday (05/12). No draft available but they have been very thorough. This incident is also subject to a police enquiry.

DP said figures were down on last year's, but reiterated need for proper reports to look at both sides of story. AIS has proved useful both for and against river community. MS asked how many were motor yachts, could the type of vessel be identified. It was agreed to revamp this list to include extra information. DCo advised that, as unable to prosecute, Snatch and Grand Cru were both seized, master of Snatch told to come back when sober. DP asked whether they could be prosecuted under PLA byelaws? DCo said that the Railway & Transport Safety Act does not cover recreational craft, the PLA can only stop people navigating.

7. Other Updates

- (i) Police – Security level (non-maritime) is at Severe (top of). DCo requested Class V operators to make them aware of any onboard incidents – patrols are being increased over Christmas period, notice to mariners to be published. Police had worked in partnership with MCA to prosecute Russian master following drink charges. All MPU crews qualified first aiders so can be called if assistance required. 34 bodies recovered from the river since April 2008.
- (ii) LRS – River Passenger Service Concordat has been set up to bring together major operators, PLA, GLA, pier operators etc. with a non-binding agreement between parties. LDA commissioned Pier Plan, guided through by TfL and GLA – actual plan hopefully available for next meeting. Tower Pier seems to be highest priority. PF asked AG when Greenwich Pier would be finished, MG replied that more than one party was involved and in some ways completion could be connected to current economic climate.
- (iii) EA – CW introduced Russell Robson, Principal Officer, Recreation to the Forum. Significant re-organisation within EA as to how river is managed. Recreation department is being restructured, national changes taking place and area staff changed. Steering Group being set up for SE England, now a region rather than area. EA looking to work with ARA for a national boat registration scheme – DF suggested EA speak with PLA as different projects already in place.

8. Future Events

Notice to Mariners will be published first week of December, amendment to New Year's Eve arrangements. The river will be closed from 100m. above Westminster Bridge, could the PBA inform their members.

9. River Works

Thames Tunnel – just about to start core sampling, ninety locations, notice to mariners to be published. First hole at Beckton Sewage Works, last at Battersea.

Thames Gateway Bridge – project cancelled. Blackwall Crossing being looked at again.

Prescott Lock – lock almost finished however ODA took over the preparation of berths etc. and have not organised dredging so there are no berths. ODA say should be up and running by February/March 2009.

Tower & Southwark Bridges – contractors start work in No. 5 arch Southwark Bridge before Christmas. Middle arches will not be worked in during high season to avoid disruption to passenger trade.

Blackwall & Rotherhithe Scour Protection – rocks are being placed into the river to protect the tunnels, Harbour Service launch will be on station most of the time.

Hermitage Wharf – all pontoons in position and first two houseboats moored. Services still to be connected, all berths should be full before Christmas. PF asked whether there were going to be any visitors moorings – DF replied one. PF also asked if Tower Lower moorings had been removed due to the Hermitage development – DF answered yes.

Barnes Railway Bridge – start work in the spring of 2009. PLA negotiating with contracts to keep the main arch navigable whilst work taking place. Notice to Mariners to be published.

Any Other Business

CL pointed out that next year it is unlikely there will be any investment on the river and asked that any increases in charges be kept as low as possible.

JK asked if passenger boat operators had a good year (2008), CL replied that upriver business was bad, charter levels were acceptable. AG advised passenger numbers in 2008 were 30% ahead of projection.

AG – Woolwich Ferry no longer run by London Borough of Greenwich. Serco now operating ferry with initial eighteen month contract. The terminals need investment but the boats are in good order, looking at investment package for the whole operation. AG to forward new contact details to PLA (Received with thanks)

DC – seventeen cruise ships visited London this year, twenty one booked for 2009, no cancellations yet received.

SEW – Ian Yarnton, River Inspector (Upper) finishes his six monthly term in the upper district on 28th November and will be replaced by Mick Scarce.

DF – Dudley Curtis has been on secondment to HM Upper office since April 2007 and he will be returning to Piloting in the spring. Recruiting will start for new Deputy Harbour Master (Upper) shortly. Also, DF advised PBA represents most of the Class V operators and best placed to go to for information etc. Recognised that they are a more effective body than previous trade associations.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 21st May, 2009 at 1030