

FOREWORD

What a year, and still we sit with all the issues brought about by the global pandemic. As I write, we have a Step-plan leading towards 'normality' in June if all goes well. Boating took a major hit early on with almost total stoppage during LockDown-1, then mid-year when restrictions lifted there was a huge surge in activity by existing boaters exceptionally keen to get out onto the water and indeed also a surge in new boaters of all sorts looking for untried avenues to expand into from their earlier restrictions; hire fleets recorded unprecedented levels of bookings, and sail-boarders, wing-foilers, paddle boarders, free swimmers all added to a general sense of potentially congested waters. Here follows a snapshot variety of NSBA initiatives through 2020:

Tolls: As the pandemic took hold, the Broads Authority recognised considerable income short-fall particularly for The Navigation, while outgoing commitments remained largely level (for dredging, bank-side maintenance, safety etc) and many employees therefore remained key-workers not eligible for furlough. During May 2020, the BA's Chief Executive was due to have an emergency (on-line) meeting with DEFRA and turned to NSBA for help with identifying some key issues to raise and to fight for support in maintaining The Navigation; a few days previously a very sensible suggestion had been mooted by an NSBA member which we considered and duly fed into the equation. While the BA was predicting a mismatch between income and expenditure equating to some 7% of Tolls income, the resultant additional and exceptional grant by DEFRA to navigation resulted in significantly less pain for each toll-payer; NSBA while very pleased indeed to see such level of mitigation has maintained its stance that any increase during these times in particular is quite reprehensible.

Planning: During June, there was an application to place a new landing facility to service Peto's Marsh on Oulton Dyke; we quickly identified the proposed position as extremely poor and a potential pinch-point obstacle; at a consequent site visit, landscape architectural interests, lacking a feel for waterways, suggested relocation to an even more restrictive position; it was through NSBA's considerable input that

there was agreement for what we believe is a safe, useful location in favour of navigation.

Bridges: During August, NSBA became very aware that access to the sea through Great Yarmouth was being obstructed due to Haven Bridge breakdown. A small group of affected businesses, individuals and NSBA pulled together to elicit a highest possible response from owner (Norfolk CC), operator (Peel Ports), Eastern Electricity and BA; eventually with NSBA also involving RYA (legal) for some background pressures, there grew some mitigating measures. Presently we have a huge issue with the other "Southern Gateway" through Mutford where the Network Rail Swing Bridge is currently out of operation; this remains highly vexing and NSBA has brokered highest level personal contact with NWR Management.

Motor-Boating release-from-Covid permissions: During let-up from Covid restrictions the NSBA set up consultation directly with BA and RYA. What transpired was vexing mismatch in advice for Motor-Boating coming from different Government Departments; DEFRA, in directing BA, took the view that Motor-Boating was "travel" to be treated in the same way as car-travel, while DCMS in directing RYA viewed the "mental health" and lifestyle aspects of Motor-Boating as being just as important as wellbeing and fitness associated with physical sports. Despite considerable pressure from NSBA, these two positions could not be married, and the BA as the local waterways authority prevailed; the issue was again highlighted with RYA to ensure earliest and deepest consideration between DCMS and DEFRA, before they should come out with conflicting advice. We now believe this has led to commonality and Motor-Boaters have been told that their activity, as long as conducted in "Open-Air" is acceptable for Stage-1 release.

I wish everyone a happiest boating season, whatever their craft.

Ben

*Ben Falat, Chairman, NSBA,
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