

Minutes of the 48th Annual General Meeting of The Inland Waterways Association, held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 29th September at the Assembly House, Norwich

PRESENT

62 members were present.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

John Fletcher, national chairman, introduced himself and welcomed those present to the meeting. He introduced and welcomed Audrey Smith, a vice president of the Association, who had kindly agreed to chair the meeting. He introduced members of staff present.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: Gillian Bolt, Peter Bolt, Libby Bradshaw, Ivor Caplan, Stu Carrie, Ray Carter, Roy Chandler, Chris Coburn, Colin Davis, Madeline Dean, Neil Edwards, Steve Haywood, Ron Heritage, Bill Joyce, Brian Martin, Erica Martin, Alan Platt, Brian Roberts, Helen Roberts, Jeffery Roberts, John Webb, Roger Wilkinson.

MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the 47th Annual General Meeting was proposed by Brian Holt and seconded by Helen Whitehouse. They were approved unanimously and signed by Audrey Smith.

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Helen Elliott-Adams introduced the Association's Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2006.

Acceptance of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2006 and the Report of the Auditors thereon was proposed by Ian West and seconded by Joanna Dalton. This was unanimously approved.

AUDITORS

Chard Wadley proposed and John Reeve seconded the proposal to appoint auditors to the Association in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act 1985 and that Council be authorised to fix their remuneration. This was unanimously approved.

ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

The meeting voted to elect the candidates together, and Paul Strudwick, Vaughan Welch and Ian West were unanimously elected to Council to serve a term of three years.

RESOLUTION CONCERNING MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

A proposal from Council recommending that:

(a) from 1st January 2008, the subscriptions be amended as follows

Ordinary Member (UK)	£26.00
Family or Joint Adult Membership (UK)	£33.00
Overseas Single Member (Outside UK)	£44.00
Overseas Family or Joint Adult Membership	£48.00

Under 26 (For any member under the age of 26)	£18.50
Senior Citizen (UK)	£17.50
Joint Senior Citizen (UK)	£19.50
Overseas Senior Citizen (Outside UK)	£26.00
Charities, Voluntary Bodies and Navigation Authorities	£45.00
Charities and Voluntary Bodies with turnover of under £1,000	£31.00
Small Companies, with up to 20 employees	£50.00
Large Companies, with more than 20 employees	£100.00
Single Life Membership (UK)	£390.00
Joint Life Membership (UK)	£495.00
Single Life Membership (Outside UK)	£660.00
Joint Life Membership (Outside UK)	£720.00
Senior Citizen (over 60) Single Life Membership (UK)	£262.50
Joint Senior Citizen (over 60) Life Membership (UK)	£292.50
Senior Citizen Life Membership (Outside UK)	£390.00

(b) that monthly membership rates be one twelfth of the annual rate, rounded up to the nearest ten pence, and

(c) that the qualifying age for senior citizen membership rose to 65 in 2007, but that those qualifying from age 60 will continue to do so.

was unanimously agreed.

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

John Fletcher thanked all volunteers and staff, and remembered those the Association had lost over the year, commenting that there are few now who go back to the beginning of IWA.

Firstly, John Fletcher commented on the past year, concentrating on people rather than events or places.

He said that the Association had benefited from a high parliamentary profile, helped to a large extent by Candy Atherton.

John Fletcher had given evidence to the Select Committee review of British Waterways along with Roger Squires and Neil Edwards. He added that the Association had been the first to give evidence and had done so for an hour and a half when British Waterways and the minister had been the only others to be allocated more than half an hour. The Select Committee report almost exactly followed the layout of IWA's submission, and the Committee seemed to be very much in accord with IWA.

John Fletcher mentioned Essex Waterways, and its chairman, Roy Chandler. He commented that the venture had been successful but had also given an insight into the problems of running a waterway, such as flooding and finance, but IWA had fared well at managing volunteers.

Jude Palmer had ably managed The World Canals Conference.

Regarding the National Festival, John Fletcher expressed admiration for Ian West's leadership and calmness. The weather this year had presented the greatest challenge to making a surplus, or even opening at all, that IWA had ever faced. The committee is looking to how it can mitigate such risks in future. The whole community had supported the event and sponsors, in particular, came and played their part. The event had brought advantages for the waterway.

Harry Arnold has announced that he is retiring from Waterways. John Fletcher spoke of his great knowledge and photograph collection of prior events, and paid tribute to his editorship of Waterways and his significant contribution to IWA.

John Fletcher announced that Liz Payne was retiring from the Deputy Chairmanship after nine years, having also chaired two national committees and served on Council. He said that she also retires from Council, and IWA owes her a great debt.

Secondly, John Fletcher spoke of the future. With the minister's reply to the Select Committee Report not yet available, John Fletcher made some guesses as to what it might contain, saying that those who knew the contents of the response had not indicated that the guesses were inaccurate. John Fletcher presumed that the report would indicate that the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs had failed to anticipate predictable financial constraints; it would recognise how unfortunate the pre and during year cuts were, especially for British Waterways; it would congratulate British Waterways on managing those cuts with minimal impact. However, John Fletcher anticipated no promise of increasing revenue funding despite a hint at capital funding which would provide some mitigation. John Fletcher said that he anticipated the report confirming Government's recognition of the wide agendas to which the waterways contribute. It is, therefore, likely that it would promise to investigate and support all opportunities for freeing the constraints on British Waterways (short of privatisation) but including opportunities John Fletcher had discussed with the Treasury in November and December 2006.

John Fletcher commented that, unless a general election is announced it is unlikely the Comprehensive Spending Review announcements will be formalised until at least the end of October. Barbara Young had kept a tight council during much of the year but had been outspoken in House of Lords regarding flooding. Flood defence is expected to benefit from the Spending Review, and navigation might benefit from spending on flood defence.

The effects of the cuts will be felt most keenly by restoration. John Fletcher emphasised the need to keep those schemes that are not progressing alive and supported. He added that Council might need to reconsider its policy on how best to support the variety of restoration schemes.

With Nigel Johnson as its Legal Director, British Waterways had been unnecessarily averse to risk but, faced with financial pressures, is beginning to relax. For example, it is now allowing trials of unaccompanied boat passages through Standedge Tunnel and the approach to volunteering may improve.

John Fletcher commented that it is a fast changing world and that the situation for the waterways is now brighter than it was a year ago – there is a minister with whom IWA can talk, and more people, especially in Westminster, are now aware of waterways and IWA.

John Fletcher said that IWA also needs to change, and has listened to concerns since its first foray into this area. Jo Gilbertson facilitated discussion at last Council meeting, and would be presenting on the revised structure, but first John Fletcher first invited any questions on his talk.

QUESTIONS

In response to David Stevenson's enquiry about what government department IWA considered should have responsibility for British Waterways, John Fletcher referred to the assurance he had received that The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs was not looking to privatise British Waterways, and was looking to lessen the financial strictures on British Waterways. IWA

has commented on the type and quality of waterways it seeks but not the detail of who should have responsibility for them. British Waterways has commissioned consultants to carry out a report on its structure. The Treasury indicated to British Waterways that such a study must consider all options including privatisation even if it is to be discounted. John Fletcher reported that, when questioned by the Select Committee whether he favoured one navigation authority or more, he responded that it would be worthwhile to consider the cost effectiveness and efficiencies and that a single authority would be easier for users, but did not come down firmly on one side or the other. He continued that The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs was not necessarily the right department for waterway responsibility but that, while government can change the department, it is not easy to create a willingness for such a move. He added that the department for local government might be suitable. John Fletcher said that in Barry Gardiner's day he did not consider the Department fit for purpose. On the other hand, waterways were well suited to the rural affairs aspect of the Department.

David Stevenson expressed the opinion that waterways were not suited to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and waterways became a minor consideration amongst other issues such as flooding and foot and mouth.

John Fletcher argued that waterways were, however, a strong consideration in the appointment of Jonathan Shaw as waterways minister.

IWA STRUCTURE

John Fletcher introduced the presentation on the revision of the IWA structure by saying that the role of the national chairman as it currently stands is not sustainable. This makes it difficult to find a successor to maintain the role at a similar level, especially as the pressures to stay in paid employment later in life increase. However, it is on branch and region structure, rather than these areas, that the Association has made progress.

Jo Gilbertson explained that Council had agreed to split its functions. Trustees would deal with governance and strategy, lead by the IWA chairman. The appointment of trustees would be against selection criteria agreed by the board of trustees [initially by the present council] trustees and elected at the AGM with vice presidents making recommendations to the membership for candidates for election. The trustees would be responsible in law as directors of IWA under the companies act. It is necessary to achieve an appropriate number and mix of people and abilities and expertise to move IWA forward and it might be appropriate to select trustees who may have specific political or networking skills, social inclusion expertise, or expertise and influence in leisure and tourism etc in addition to fulfilling the requirements for plain governance. They should be volunteers with a genuine proven interest in the inland waterways and IWA.

An Operations Executive Committee would perform a coordination and networking function and would consist of the chief executive, Heads of Committees, Head Office staff as required, and three area representatives, and meeting quarterly. As regions currently give constituency representation at Council, area representatives would provide a further link between the Operations Executive Committee and the membership.

Council determined that National Committees would have greater delegated authority to undertake work and make decisions without ratification by Council, thus undertaking the burden of work for IWA with delegated authority to make decisions and spend money but being accountable to the Operations Executive Committee. National committees would allow for and reflect regional representation as well as special interest group representation such as rambling, cycling etc. The roles and responsibilities and exact delegated responsibilities would be documented.

Council would vote on options for selection of three area representatives for the Operations Executive and to feed back views on a “universal” trustee job description by Monday 1st October.

Jo Gilbertson explained that it was a work in progress and that the next steps would be for a working group, consisting of the national chairman, deputy chairmen and facilitator, to resolve the detailed issues. They would form a detailed report by January 2008 in order to be able to offer a fuller explanation as part of an ongoing consultation in the February edition of Waterways.

QUESTIONS

Peter Scott commented that the proposals seemed to introduce another layer to the structure rather than simplify it. Jude Palmer explained that trying to do everything in one group is equally not a good way of working, and the division into two groups with specific roles should not be considered as an extra layer.

Nigel Long queried the extent of the three regional areas.

Jo Gilbertson explained that Council is still discussing the exact areas. There is a growing consensus that IWA regions and waterway consideration are less relevant for area representation than the regional government structure.

Mike Palmer added that the three area representatives are intended to provide for representation of the membership at a high level but that the exact area covered is immaterial since area specific issues will be dealt with not by the Operations Executive but by national committees.

Alistair Chambers commented that he sought a route to take local issues direct to Council as is currently the case via regions. He explained that Eastern Region, having no British Waterways waterways, is a special case and needs representation by a local representative who understands the situation.

Audrey Smith answered that national committees will continue with regional representation.

David Stevenson questioned whether Navigation Committee would have a representative from every region as it does at present.

Jo Gilbertson said that this would depend on who put themselves forward for the committee.

John Fletcher commented that national committees will be taking more decisions without referral to the trustees. There is a need to have appropriate representation at national committees from all areas where the Association conducts activity. He explained that something like regional representation would continue, with perhaps one regional representative for all committees, or different people representing a geographical area on different committees. For example, at present one region is represented at Navigation Committee by a representative other than the region chairman. Moreover, Restoration Committee has been seeking, but has not succeeded in obtaining, wider geographical representation, though not necessarily regional representatives.

Alison Smedley asked whether region committees would continue.

Jo Gilbertson responded that Council was polarised on this issue and had agreed to leave regions as they are for the present but relax the byelaws to make them more informal, encouraging branches to

form informal networks for grassroots engagement, with a view to reviewing regions in a couple of years time.

In response to a question, Jo Gilbertson said that all but two regions had been represented at the Council discussion on restructuring.

Roy Sutton commented that with fewer decisions to approve, Council should have less work to do, so there seemed little need to split it and increase it into two groups.

Mike Palmer responded that Council as such will no longer exist, and that the Operations Executive will meet less frequently.

Paul Strudwick questioned the need for the Operations Executive.

John Fletcher responded that there is a need for interfacing to resolve issues that go across committees.

David Stevenson commented that in his day as national chairman, IWA had increased the number of regions by three in addition to elected members of Council and the number of people on Council had grown. He asked how many people were envisioned for the Operations Executive and the trustees.

Jo Gilbertson advised that the Operations Executive would consist of nine plus Head Office staff and there would be between 5 and eleven trustees in accordance with Charity Commission advice.

Tim Lewis asked what would be the route of communications from ordinary members to the Operations Executive and trustees.

Nigel Long enquired about the roles of the Operations Executive.

Jo Gilbertson explained that their roles had not yet been defined, and Council was still looking at it.

Peter Winter asked how the three area representatives would be identified and elected.

Jo Gilbertson answered that Council was still discussing how the three areas would be defined.

Liz Payne urged those present to be understanding of Council's attempt to be open and share with the membership its discussions thus far, and any lack of finer details at this stage, which Council would continue to work on.

Julia Hones added that the proposals reached thus far had been the result of consultation and comments received.

Audrey Smith added that a sharing of information, which should not be seen as a firm proposal, had been brought to the AGM, and thanked Jo Gilbertson for his presentation.

John Fletcher concluded that there would be ongoing consultation, but that prompt responses will be needed if the Association is to move forward.

AWARDS

Audrey Smith presented Richard Bird medals to Jack Maiden and Ken Nelson.

She then announced the winners of the branch achievement award as IWA's Peterborough Branch, which had raised significant funds for local schemes, and created a new cruising ring by raising Ramsey Hollow Bridge.

There being no more questions, John Fletcher then gave an informal slide presentation.

Audrey Smith thanked members of IWA Ipswich Branch for providing an excellent venue, as well as staff, the national chairman and committees for their work.

John Fletcher thanked Audrey Smith for chairing the meeting, and brought the proceedings to a close at 4.45 pm.