

THAMES RIVER USERS GROUP 8 (Bell Weir to Teddington Lock)

NOTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON GOOGLE MEET ON THE 29th April 2021

Attendees:

Steve Collins (RUG 8 Chair); Bernard Hales, Chris Murdoch, Jane Chambers, John Adams (RUG 8 Reach Coordinators); Jonty Steel (RUG 8 Chair designate)
Maria Herlihy (EA Waterways Manager, Hurley Lock to Teddington Lock), Peter Collins EA Navigation Capital Lead; Andy Croxford, Vince Hoar (EA Waterways Team G)
24 others

Apologies: Sue Sharp (RUG8 Sunbury/Shepperton Reach Coordinator designate)

1. OUTGOING CHAIRMANS REPORT

Steve Collins gave two presentations on-line. He acknowledged that RUG 8 was the busiest stretch of the non-tidal Thames, and the stretch with the biggest pressure on mooring and social issues due to its proximity to London. RUG8 mailings go out to a list of 294 individual river users and friends of the river, and to 80 clubs and organisations, representing water sports, leisure boating and river businesses. Most recently Stand-up Paddle boarding and Open Water swimming organisations have been welcomed into the river users' community.

RUG8, uniquely among the six RUG area, has four Reach Coordinators who work very effectively together as a team, and with members of the local EA Waterways Team. Steve commented that communication with the Waterways Team has developed particularly well over the last year, starting with open air meetings at the Molesey Boat Club café and then reverting to Zoom meetings during the peak of the pandemic.

RUG8 members have voted overwhelmingly on two occasions for a civil enforcement approach to the management of moorings to address the problem of unconsented mooring against EA Land. Steve commented that none of us like paying car parking fees when we visit town centres, but we accept that we have to do so. The imposition of car parking style charges with penalties for overstaying is an infringement of our public right of navigation, but something that has been forced upon us by the actions of selfish minority.

Steve's second presentation summarised the research he has done on the abuse of the public right of navigation on the Thames which he took to the All Parliamentary Parties Group on the Thames in April 2019 (facilitated by Michael Shefras in his role as secretariat to the APPG). The Thames Conservancy Act 1932 gives us all the right to pass and 'bypass' on any part of the River Thames that we want to, in the course of *ordinary pleasure navigation*. It is equivalent to the 'right to roam' legislation on land. It does not give anyone the right to put a boat on the Thames, choose a spot that they like and decide to live there. Or to run a commercial accommodation barge operation from there. Unfortunately, Steve commented, the EA's National Navigation Team "do not get this" and it is a lack of will at the national level that has stymied progress to solve the problem.

2. EA QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Maria Herlihy delegated the responses to questions to Peter Collins.

District Enforcement

Q1 What happens if a boat owner refuses to pay the £150 payment charge for overstaying? Will further daily charges of £150 be imposed?

We would advise all river users to not overstay on our visitor moorings to avoid the associated charges and to enable other river users to benefit from these facilities. If, however, someone does overstay and 'refuses to pay' they are likely to be managed through Small Claims Court process. I am sorry that I am not able detail what costs would be associated to this.

Q2 If you ask DE remove a vessel to an alternative location, will this be on EA land? If not, what will you do in no other landowner is prepared to accept the vessel?

We would not ask District Enforcement to remove a vessel from any location as they do not have the warranted authority to undertake this activity. Vessel owners are ultimately responsible for their vessel and

we would always plan to work with a vessel owner to use the Navigation in a compliant manner. Landowners also have responsibilities in relation vessels (e.g. sunken, stranded and abandoned vessels) adjacent to their land. We will consider removing vessels when they are a hazard to the Navigation and we have the resource to do so. We would then look to recover all costs from the vessel owner, if they are known.

Q3 It's good that you can pay by phone to a person as an alternative to the internet, but have DE increased the number of call handlers to do this?

We will use this question as a form of feedback and encourage District Enforcement to make their 'payment by phone' system to be easy to use and well resourced.

Unregistered land above Cherry Orchard

Q4 Will District Enforcement's powers to impose mooring charges including the £150 payment apply to the vessels who are currently moored on this stretch of land as the EA cannot prove ownership?

We have asked District Enforcement to prioritise our formal short stay Visitor Moorings at this stage, but will look to extend their remit in the future.

Enforcement Powers

Q5 Accepting that enforcement was suspended for a period during 2020-21 due to Covid, and that there is a massive backlog of cases in the criminal justice service, how many warnings and cautions did you issue as an alternative to prosecution? And in 2019-20 for a fuller picture?

Here are the whole river details that were shared with TNUF recently.

Jan - Feb 2020 – No enforcement due to flood incident

March – June 2020 – No enforcement due to Government Lockdown restrictions

July 2020 – 11 Patrols, 1355 Registration Checks, 35 Speed & Wash Notices, 22 No Boat Name Notices, 5 EA Short Stay Mooring Checks, 4 Section 16 Stranded / Abandoned Notices,

August 2020 - 13 Patrols, 220 Registration Checks, 23 Speed & Wash Notices, 2 EA Short Stay Mooring Checks, 2 Section 16 Stranded / Abandoned Notices,

September 2020 - 16 Patrols, 1334 Registration Checks, 90 Registration Offences Served, 17 Speed & Wash Notices, 42 No Boat Name Notices, 2 EA Short Stay Mooring Checks, 2 Section 16 Stranded / Abandoned Notices,

October 2020 - 7 Patrols, 187 Registration Checks, 29 Registration Offences Served, 15 No Boat Name Notices, 2 Section 16 Stranded / Abandoned Notices,

November 2020 - 12 Patrols, 24 EA Mooring checked, 50 Registration Checks, 12 Registration Offences Served, 13 Directions to Moved Served, 1 Notice to Removed Unlicensed Structure, 2 Section 16 Stranded / Abandoned Notices,

December 2020 - 6 Patrols, 299 Registration Checks, 9 Registration Offences Served, 4 No Boat Name Notices, 2 Directions to Moved Served, 2 Section 16 Stranded / Abandoned Notices,

I will work with Andy and Vince to prepare updated figures for 2021 ahead of the next RUG8 meeting.

3. REACH COORDINATORS' REPORTS

Verbal reports were presented by Bernard Hales (Chertsey Reach) and Chris Murdoch (Sunbury Reach).

Written reports were as follows

3.1 MOLESEY REACH (Jane Chambers)

Ferry crossing at Sunbury – thanks to Chris Murdoch for letting me know.

Hotel barges – Two remain at slipway at Hurst Park along with the usual associated detritus and smaller sunken vessels.

Other illegal moorings – One very new looking barge 'Hannah' moored at Hurst Park for several weeks with couple living aboard. Presumably District Enforcement will be visiting them?

Cherry Orchard - Most boat owners have appealed against the refusal of retrospective planning permission for residential mooring. I'm not sure whether that means further delay in Elmbridge Council proceeding with enforcement notices? At the last RUG meeting in January, Andy Croxford assured me that I would be receiving a written update regarding the submission of a revised adverse possession order but this did not happen. In fact, further requests from me and Elmbridge Councillor Steve Bax have also been declined or ignored. I am

asking again – what is happening please? *(Peter Collins still declined to comment – a response was received the following day from Maria Herlihy following my letter to Dominic Raab).*

As a result of lack of registration, the situation at Cherry Orchard is, as predicted, deteriorating. In the last few days, additional pontoons, possible bases for houseboats have been moored up and additional fences and ‘keep out’ notices have been erected on the towpath. All relevant authorities were informed as soon as this came to light. Of course, District Enforcement have no jurisdiction to patrol this unregistered section of the riverbank.

At the last meeting I said I was a bit concerned about large barges etc at **Hampton Water Treatment Works** – they are an eyesore, encroaching into the navigation channel and becoming a dangerous activity centre for youths in the summer. Andy Croxford said he would investigate and report back – I haven’t heard anything so far but am hopeful of an update today. *(Nothing forthcoming – either at the meeting or since)*

Work at **Molesey Lock** was finished more or less according to schedule and I haven’t heard of any problems so that is an excellent result. Thanks to Peter Collins and his contractors.

I have heard on the news of a fracas at **Hampton Riviera** allegedly involving the owner and one of his tenants. A report of the subsequent court case mentioned there was a danger of him losing the property so we shall have to watch this space.

Diary dates – I have Molesey Rowing Regatta and HSC Regatta (postponed until after lockdown restrictions are due to end). Aquarius Sailing Club has not yet set a date but I will circulate when it is known. I had hoped for a liaison meeting between rowing, skiffing and sailing clubs but I have decided to postpone it for the time being as the season is well underway and we are all sick of Zoom meetings.

Finally, I would like to thank Steve Collins for his tireless efforts on behalf of River Users. Without him, we would not be nearly as far ahead as we are with dealing with the problems of unregistered mooring on this reach but there is still a long way to go. I am delighted (but not surprised) that he is going to concentrate on other important waterborne activities and his work on water safety will be crucial in dealing with the ever-increasing problems with swimmers, inflatables and antisocial behaviour on the river – especially in the summer months. Personally, I have greatly valued his enthusiasm, leadership & support. Thank you, Steve.

3.2 TEDDINGTON REACH (John Adams)

- The Teddington reach is very busy with 74 special events in the calendar in addition to the regular activities for each organisation on the Reach.
- In preparation for the coming year and with the expectation that more people and undertaking a more diverse range of activities would be using the reach, a meeting was held via Zoom on the 18th April. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss safety on the Reach and what could be done to ensure that all activities could take place without causing safety incidents.
- 41 people attended from a range of organisations including the EA, wild swimming, the hire boat operators as well as the rowing/sailing/Stand Up Paddle Boarders/canoeing clubs.
- The discussions were wide ranging and served to introduce different activities to one another and to exchange concerns and needs.

Three resolutions were passed by the meeting:

1. To support greater enforcement of the regulations by the EA
2. To suggest updates to the current byelaws drawn up in 1993 to reflect the greater diversity of traffic on the river and present these suggestions to the EA.
3. Ask the EA to limit the number of licences issued to hire boat companies.

It was noted that already two incidents had been reported between different user groups on the river hence illustrating the need to be aware and considerate of other users on the reach.

4. ELECTION OF NEW RUG 8 CHAIRMAN AND SUNBURY/SHEPPERTON REACH COORDINATOR

Two candidates had volunteered for election:

- **Jonty Steel**, standing for RUG8 Chairman
- **Sue Sharp**, RUG8 Sunbury/Shepperton Reach Coordinator.

Both candidates had submitted impressive biographies, demonstrating the commitment to, and experience of, the river. These were circulated to all RUG8 members in advance. No objections had been received.

Jonty Steel was elected by a 'show of hands' on computer screens and is confirmed as the new RUG8 Chair. Sue Sharp was unable to attend the meeting and presented her apologies later. It was agreed to delegate her appointment to the incoming RUG8 Chair in consultation with the Reach Coordinators

List of Attendees at RUG8 AGM, 29th April 2021

First name	Last name
Andy	Croxford (EA)
Andy	Weston
Bernard	Hales
Boysie	Reynolds
Claudine	Ferguson
David	Biddulph
David	Garrett
David	Lambert
Derek	Prentice
Graham	Bartholemew
Graham	Johnson
Ian	Mawson
Jane	Chambers
John	Adams
John	Burnett
John	Fevier
Jonty	Steel
Linda	Varney
Maria	Herlihy (EA)
Peter	Collins (EA)
Ray	Mears
Reclaim our Riverbank	
Richard	Cannon
Robin	Burr
Roger	Day
Roger	Haile
Steve	Collins
Vince	Hoar (EA)
3 x Unknown	