River Thames Boat Project

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 14 November 2023 at St Mary's Church Hall, Church Street, TwickenhamTW1 3NJ

The meeting was attended by 31 members and supporters.

Welcome and Introduction

Chairman Chris Deavin welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reminded everyone that the report and finances related to the year 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023. There would be an update on the current year later in the meeting.

Review of 2022-2023

2022-2023 was the first full post Covid year when things were gradually getting back to normal but some of our regular, more vulnerable clients were still reluctant "to get out and about". It had been an unsettled year with staff changes and problems with the boats. Thames Venturer had taken some of the cruises while Thames Discoverer was out of operation but we had a small number of skippers who could take her out so we had to pay for external qualified skippers.

It took some time to resolve the Thames Discoverer gearbox issue; supply of parts was very slow. Glenn Collins inherited the problem when he arrived to replace Gunnar Christensen. We also needed to improve the freeboard on TD following an inspection. Glenn had introduced more systematic training regimes, reviewed the Safety Management Systems and introduced procedures to implement processes. All this had stood up to scrutiny following the incident when Thames Discoverer hit the upstream lock gates at Molesey Lock in September 2023. Education bookings had recovered well and we had increased the number of schools from Kingston and Merton. After Kate Dodds left, the Trustees decided to recruit a General Manager. Ivona Huszcza joined early in the year but, due to personal circumstances, left after a few months although she continued to do some work remotely and provided a handover to Neil Couzens who joined early in 2023 – 2024. The 'gaps' did mean that there was less focus on fund raising and that needed to be addressed given the current deficit. Chris thanked all the donors who had kept the charity going especially Lest We Forget, CH Dixon and the Kay Pemberton Trust.

Richard Boult reported that, income was up in 2022-23 (£154k compared with £13k1 in previous year). However, expenditure was considerably greater because of the need to rectify faults on Thames Discoverer, meaning she was out of service for some six weeks, and other maintenance issues. While Thames Venturer was able to cover some of the cruises, this meant paying external skippers with the appropriate qualifications. The result was expenditure for the year of £211,246, a deficit of £57,189.00. At present it looked as though RTBP was also heading for an operating deficit for the current year 2023-24. RB encouraged everyone to consider ways in which the charity could raise more funds including individual initiatives. (See also Annex A)

Chris Deavin thanked the Trustees who had given considerable time outside their meetings, particularly in small groups to focus on specific areas – boats, fund raising and volunteer recruitment, the latter resulting in a successful open recruitment day in early May 2023 which 65 potential volunteers attended. Some were already part of the crew or education group.

He thanked the staff team who kept the charity operating and the volunteers who were valued – we had received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service that year. He read some of the feedback quotes from clients.

Minutes of the 2022 AGM.

The Minutes were agreed as a correct record. Acceptance was propose by Jon Chapman; second by Paul Barry and passed unanimously.

Election of Trustees:

Under the Articles of the Company, a third of the trustees need to stand down each year but can stand for re-election. Jon Chapman was standing down as a Trustee but would continue to provide legal advice and volunteer for the charity. Chris Deavin was prepared to stand for a further period and was duly re-elected. Heather Dawson had been working as a Trustee for several months but her appointment needed ratification by the AGM; this was given by all present. There were two people who had agreed to stand for election as Trustees; their biographical notes had been tabled. Maria Netley and Matt Harrison were elected unanimously as Trustees for a 3 year period. Chris mentioned the sad loss of David Bell during the year, someone who had done a great deal for the Charity. A memorial event had been held recently on Thames Venturer.

Chris thanked Jon Chapman for his contribution as a Trustee. Jon had been central to our negotiation of the lease for Canbury Wharf which had taken skill and a great deal of patience! Chris presented Jon with a framed picture of Thames Venturer hosting the 2012 jubilee beacon. In thanking Chris, Jon took the opportunity to praise David Bell's contribution to the Charity and also that of Peter Low who had also sadly died recently. Peter had played a pivotable role with Miranda Jaggers and Peter Oldham in the construction and delivery of Thames Discoverer.

Chris Deavin announced he was standing down as Chair of the Charity. Trustees had agreed Steven Wibberley would become Chair and Heather Dawson had agreed to become Vice Chair.

Update on current year and activities

Chris invited the staff team members to report on events in their areas.

Neil Couzens had arrived as General Manager just as the operating season started but had to concentrate on grant applications initially. He gave some information on donations and grants. Neil thanked Chris Deavin for all his support during his first six months.

Neil also gave the Boat Manager's report (in the absence of Glenn Collins). Glenn welcomed the influx of new volunteers, helping him to achieve the aim he outlined at the last AGM (12 skippers, 12 mates and crew giving 12 days). Training continued. The number of qualified volunteer skippers had increased giving us greater capacity for cruises. About half the crew now had had First Aid training and a defibrillator funded by Twickenham Rotary Club was ready for deployment. There had been general maintenance and improvements on Thames Venturer – both toilets were now working! Better communications had been introduced – regular Zoom meetings and WhatsApp groups

Pippa Butterfield commented that having a settled staff team aided operations although they would miss James Huddleston whose contract ended shortly. The availability spreadsheet had aided rostering crews and education teams. Bookings in 2023-24 were looking good. She had also been involved in training new volunteers.

Hannah Bottomley reported that, because of the footbridge refurbishment at Teddington, many of the Autumn term sessions had taken place at Kingston. Only one school had cancelled because of the change of location. There had been 56 school days but no other groups (cubs etc). All the deferred pre Covid bookings had now been honoured so all future bookings would be new business. The open recruitment day had brought people for the education team as well as crewing. 9 were already in training and others were to come. A larger pool of volunteers would enable us to take more bookings. A new initiative, Venturer Club had run for 7 sessions. It was designed to be non educational activity and fun but funding meant that some curriculum material needed to be included. Attendance so far had been low but children enjoyed themselves. So please promote it.

Pippa introduced and narrated a short photo display of activities throughout the year.

Forward Look:

Steven Wibberley confirmed commitment to the Charity's aim of making the Thames Accessible and the two strands of its work, cruising and education. The future would be a focus for boats and staff at Canbury Wharf, a 'hub', now that we had security of tenure. There was work to do to make it 'fit for purpose'. The nature of the Charity with two boats was that we don't know what was coming 'round the corner'. Thames Venturer was aging and we don't know how long she would keep going. The idea was that the paid staff would provide the framework, support and training, while the volunteers were responsible for the delivery. We were facing a deficit in the current financial year; fees covered about 35% of the total costs. Grants help to bridge the gap but other sources of funding were needed. All of us should see ourselves as fund raisers and do whatever we could to help. This could be joining the Friends, running an event – or other activities

Steven mentioned the latest plans by Thames Water to extract water from the River above Teddington Lock and replace it with treated water from Mogden Sewage Works to maintain the level. The construction work could affect our work as well as disrupt the local neighbourhood and the impact on the river ecology was largely unknown as yet. Thames Water had a poor reputation for preventing sewage discharges and failing to mend leaking water pipes so the future was uncertain. A public consultation was underway.

Steven gave a big thanks to Chris Deavin for all the work he had done whilst Chair; he was leaving the Charity in a much better position. In responding, Chris thanks President Richard Robinson for his support. Richard was a good listener and provided wise counsel.

Any other business and questions

Peter Finch asked about the canopy which had been lost from Thames Venturer and, as yet, not been replaced. He felt this was important to provide protection and shade and shouldn't be forgotten. Peter also thanks Chris Deavin, the other Trustees and the staff members for all their work to support and promote the charity. Chris Deavin assured Peter Finch that the canopy hadn't been forgotten; it was 'work in progress' to find the best design to meet the variety of needs. Chris confirmed funds were available for a replacement.

The meeting ended at 20.55 and everyone was invited to partake of light refreshments.

Annex A

Financial Highlights 2022-23

Income Statement	2023	2022	Change
Donations and legacies	111,854	93,066	-+20%
Income from Charitable activities	34,245	29,633	+16%
Other trading activities	5,482	7,448	-27%
Income from Investments	2,476	1,662	+49%
Total income	**154,057**	**131,809**	**+ 17%**
Total expenditure	**(211,246)**	**(153,666)**	**-37%**
Net outflow	**(57,189)**	**(21,856)**	**-162%**

It was a challenging time financially with *Thames Discoverer* out of service for much of the busy Summer season.

Impact:

- Loss of fee income opportunity
- Significant spend on repairs and maintenance
- Professional fees