

**MEETING WITH LORD SMITH 21 DECEMBER, 2011**  
**with**  
**LADY SUZANNE WARNER & PROFESSOR RUTH HALL**  
**Delegates Briefing Paper**

**PLEASE NOTE:**

These submissions were used as a brief when Users delegates addressed Lord Smith and colleagues and as necessary amended through the Aide Memoire Note of the Meeting TUGn 1127.

After the meeting this paper was then shared was with the EA.  
 We are advised that they do not agree with some of the figures and assumptions.

(The Comparison Paper TUGn 1128 annexed to the portfolio contain agreed figures)

**A. MICHAEL SHEFRAS effect introduction**

a..	Thank Lord Smith for meeting with us	
b.	<b>Introduce:</b>	
	Peter Finch	Chair of River Thames Society
	David Jones	Vice Chair Association of Thames Yacht Clubs
	Louis Jankel	REFERAC & National Association of Boat Owners
	Michael Shefras	River User Groups (TUGn Coordinator – Chair ATYC & RUG8 – Vice President RTS & RTA Managing Committee)
	Andy Soper	REFERAC and Residential Boat Owner living on boat in Cookham.

	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="295 239 667 322">John Pleace</td> <td data-bbox="667 239 1399 322">BMF – Thames Valley</td> </tr> </table>	John Pleace	BMF – Thames Valley
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c.	<p><b>Who represent a very wide spectrum of those who use the River Thames and not just those who navigate!</b></p> <p><b>Reason we have called is for the meeting is to express the unanimous opposition to the SE EA plan for the ongoing management of the River Thames as announced on 7 October, 2011 which suggested:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Freezing recruitment or Resident Lock Keepers</b></li> </ul> <p><b>And</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Lease the vacant “Tied” Lock Cottages on short term rental</b></li> </ul>		
d.	<p><b>Colleagues with Lord Smith’s permission will present the Users arguments in opposition to the suggested proposal and suggest an alternative that would be cost neutral and deliver sustainable service for the next decade.</b></p>		

## B. THE FINANCIAL DIMENSION – Louis Jankel

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<b>e.</b>	<p><b>Louis will give a copy of the above to Lord Smith, Ruth Hall and Suzzane Warner plus any support EA people and in support say:</b></p> <p>Amended 30 December, 2011</p> <p><b>COMMENTARY TO BACK UP THE FINANCIAL DIMENSION – LOUIS JANKEL</b></p> <p>This is not a request for increased funding. We recognise the current fiscal limitations.</p> <p>I offer our take on the fiscal situation. Despite promises we have had little information so we must resort to gleaned data from our meetings over the past few years.</p>						

The firsts group of figures on the sheet in blue refer to the NNUF meeting chaired by Ruth Hall on April 12<sup>th</sup> when we were given the EA budgets for 2011-12.

The capital budget was to be a cut from £4.8 spent in 2010-11. You will note revenue was held at the 2010-11 level with a “technical” increase of 7%.

We were relieved to note the maintained revenue budget as the river had been operating under a manning strain. Over the winter of 2010-11 the staffing level of 72 was the lowest ever deployed (77 the previous year).

We had been assured by Defra and the EA during 2009 and 2010 that there would be no front line cuts in staff and service. We were confident this would allow for the recruiting for the then three now five empty lock houses.

In April 2011 we were told that no vacancies could be filled until internal candidates had been redeployed. Lock/weir keeper vacancies need some relevant experience so internal candidates would be easily identified. Vacancies continued to remain unfilled. **At the end of the summer there were some 13 full time vacancies all being from the retirement of experienced long serving river staff.**

I refer you to the Blue figures on the sheet. The significant under-spend during the first half of the fiscal 2011 year achieved on the revenue budget from the unfilled posts and the extra “technical” 7% has all been transferred to capital spend.

As explained in the green section of the sheet, the MATRIX money is derived from and due to revenue budgeting and is all part of the EA non-capital GiA. We have been told that these savings are not and should not be used as capital.

The second set of blue figures makes it quite clear that the EA have trimmed the revenue budget by £1.6m and are spending the bulk of that figure this winter on Chertsey Lock and a few others.

The policy of funding lock infrastructure work in excess of routine maintenance in preference to achieving a competent lock/weir keeping staff is derived from incorrect advice and is consequently dangerous.

Every consultee – now without exception - has cautioned against this course of action. In the right climate, a more realistic picture might even be obtained from experienced River Thames front line employees. Almost every level of

<p>EA navigation staff has expressed serious misgivings to us.</p> <p>To hold what are now reduced revenue budgets and inflate capital budgets will only lead to further consequentially disastrous settlements. The capital funding cannot be justified at its current level.</p> <p>This change of expenditure profile makes you a hostage to your own fortune when cuts are assessed against achieved expenditure.</p> <p>To paraphrase the report from the independent panel on forestry set up by Caroline Spelman “Electoral timescales do not match the lifespan of the River Thames”.</p> <p>The EA has a duty to prepare to handle any credible set of conditions. Be assured at the proposed level and mix of staffing they will fail in every instance save the most benign of conditions.</p> <p>The EA must achieve the staffing establishment that can deliver their statutory duty. The current proposals are a distance from this not least because of the insistence on infrastructure renewal at the expense of indubitably indispensable, properly trained, re-motivated and customer service delivering waterside staff.</p> <p>“The loss of full-time resident weir keepers will result in the management’s desired flexibility but at the expense of intrinsic experience lost with retiring staff, which in the short term is irrecoverable.”</p>
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**C. THE 'TIED' LOCK COTTAGES – Peter Finch**

a.	During 2007/08 discussions took place on the future of the lock houses.
b.	By 2008 a successful public campaign led by Lock Keeper's wives through local MP's brought undertakings that the houses would never be sold.
c.	<p>On record there are guarantees from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lord Smith</li> <li>➤ Howard Davidson</li> <li>➤ Many Thames Side MP's including the Prime Minister and Home Secretary</li> <li>➤ Plus huge public opposition to removing resident lock keepers</li> </ul>
d.	I cannot believe that all these names will renege on the undertaken given at that time.
e.	As we have explained it cannot be money as we have shown there are other alternatives
f.	What is the motive for the 7 October proposal?
g.	<p><b>RTS STATEMENT TO MEETING WITH EA CHAIRMAN LORD SMITH 21/12/11.</b></p> <p>RTS members, as individuals or members of clubs or corporate bodies, share a common interest – to protect and promote the river.</p> <p>We have been broadly supportive of the Agency's work, through its different departments who work for the river, to the extent that we feel it would be a serious mistake to hive off one aspect, navigation.</p> <p>Our support was severely tested in April 2008 when the A. announced plans to sell or rent 22 lock houses quote " as part of an efficiency review " , with the consequent disappearance of a number of resident lock and weir keepers.</p>

Together with many other groups, individual members of the public, no doubt influenced by the 2007 floods, and riparian MPs we argued against this decision. A new All-Party Parliamentary Thames Group was formed specifically as a result of the lock house decision, which was seen as detrimental to the safety of those who travel on or live nearby the river and that it would alter the character and traditions of the Thames while dealing a serious blow to a loyal and skilled group of employees.

In December 2008 we were pleased to hear that the A. had listened and agreed not to proceed with the house disposal, while retaining lock & weir keepers at each of the 45 sites.

With the exception of Chertsey, whose house, worryingly, remained unoccupied the agreement was honoured while discussions proceeded with your staff and, early in 2010, we welcomed a joint A/Union statement announcing an agreement.

Quote “ These terms and conditions allow the EA to maintain a resident lock & weir keeper at each lock site along the river.”

We thought this particular problem had been resolved and sought to support the A. and DEFRA, faced with the new Government’s financial stringencies.

It was therefore a shock to see last October’ statement in which the A .appeared to renege on its earlier commitments by putting some lock houses on the market for rent and not appointing residents to vacancies.

Presumably, the logic of this , over a longer time-scale, as lock-keepers retire or resign, is to reach the 2008 goal.

This is unacceptable and completely counter to the previous assurances given to the public, your staff, users and to Parliament.

**D. WHY RESIDENTS – Andy Soper**

a.	They make a strong contribution to <b>Safety</b> . They have detailed local knowledge of their weir and flood issues, lock usage and risks, enabling them to anticipate problems, clear potential blockages and provide the detailed expertise and training on their location and locality.
b.	Currently telemetry alerts are only on the upstream lock sensor and are a potential single point of failure. An on-site presence is relied upon to investigate and discount sensor failures. The technology is there to automate weirs and locks but it is only in its most basic form on the Thames. Even Radcot, just converted from paddle and rymer for H & S reasons, still relies on a weir-keeper turning up to press the buttons to open the weir gates. Automation needs significant investment with extensive CCTV and good communications to a manned control room but is still at the mercy of local technical failure or blockage requiring on-site attendance.
c.	It will always be safer to have an on-site operator available for most of the time to take Immediate action rather than rely on getting a relief operator through inclement weather in possible flood conditions to operate the weir or clear a blockage.
d.	Some locks and weirs may be suitable for remote operation, be easy to reach in all conditions by roving teams, and have a lesser impact from weir or lock failure but this must be assessed on a lock by lock risk assessment and not just implemented by whim when a lock-keeper retires or dies
e.	Your flood contingency plans call for EA ambassadors to inform the local communities of EA actions and expected future events. What better ambassador than a resident lock-keeper alongside local people that they know well providing reassurance.
f.	We are all concerned to increase the impact of Big Society and Localism in our communities. A resident lock-keeper living in the village/town will always be seen as a more involved

	member of the community than one who commutes from outside the area. He/she and their family will be seen as part of the community and it's issues and not just another incomer.
<b>g.</b>	<b>Volunteer encouragement, involvement, and employment are key to providing improved service standards, reduced costs and localism. The resident lock-keeper will provide the skills, energy and enthusiasm to recruit, train and retain volunteers that will ensure continuity of increasingly skilled volunteers who will give years of dedicated service - probably spanning resident's tenure.</b>
<b>h.</b>	<b>It is important to nurture and grow Commercial activity on the river. I have compared our lock-keepers on the Thames to the Beefeaters before now. The Beefeaters live in the Tower and our lock-keepers in their lock-houses. That is the image we should continue to market to visitors and tourists. Some may see this as anachronistic but it is the image of the Thames and it is very marketable.</b>
<b>i.</b>	<b><i>There is good safety, localism, volunteer and commercial reasons for retaining a resident lock and weir keeper at every lock.</i></b>

**E. THE TRADES PERSPECTIVE – John Pleace**

**VACANT LOCK-KEEPERS' RIVERSIDE HOUSES ON THE RIVER THAMES**

**I am with the delegation representing BMF Thames Valley; the Regional Association within the British Marine Federation which has some 180 Members, of whom over 80 are actually sited alongside the non-tidal and tidal River Thames.**

**I have already made my associations position very clear when with colleagues I met with Howard Davidson and have already offered assistance with your new commercial manager**

**At the BMF Thames Valley Committee meeting on the 13th October 2011, members unanimously voted against the letting of these or any other lock houses, on Health and Safety grounds re navigation, weir management and flood defence. We cannot understand how, having gone through the debate on Lock Houses only 3 years ago with the EA having to withdraw its then proposals, you can now bring forward, yet again, further proposals in the same vein and I fully agree with the points Peter has made earlier.**

**Our Committee also believes that the loss of residential lock- keepers will result in a threat to local water supply, general public safety and loss of local knowledge. It is also perceived that in some circumstances it will contribute to an increased frequency of anti-social behaviour on our waterways.**

**I agree with colleagues here today that further moves to rent these properties will be 'the thin end of the wedge' and will ultimately lead to the commercial letting of all lock houses on the River Thames, to the detriment of ALL users of the River.**

**Without a well managed River Thames which the Resident Lock keeper helps to deliver is vital for the health of those who deliver the services to the user on the side of the river.**

**I support the aims of this delegation in asking you to abandon the plan to let the Lock Houses and use the houses for the purpose they were intended housing trained and experienced lock keepers responsible for their lock management.**

**F. A BOATER'S PERSPECTIVE – David Jones**

**I am here to represent Thames Motor Boaters**

**There are about 7,000 on the Thames and circa 4,000 in our Yacht Clubs**

**Thames has been part of my life for about 70 years**

- i. Learnt to swim**
- ii. Paddle canoes**
- iii. Row**
- iv. Sail**
- v. Motor Boat**
- vi. Picnic**
- vii. Holiday**

**It is more than just a river. It is no canal or ordinary river.**

**It is THE THAMES**

- viii. Leisure [Walking, boating , fishing, swimming, etc. for millions of people]**
- ix. Provides Drinking water for even more millions of people**
- x. Allows treated sewage to flow away**
- xi. Major tourist attraction**
- xii. Residential**

**In reasonable shape currently.**

**But:-**

- xiii. Already declining levels of service to fee-paying boaters**
- xiv. Real danger posed by latest proposals to get rid of resident lock-keepers**
  - a. Incomplete and inexperienced line management**
  - b. Appears to be Poor People Management**
  - c. Poor levels of morale**

**d. Employees under constant threat**

**CURRENT STRATEGY APPEARS FLAWED**

- a. Words and Music do not match**
- b. Plan not fully costed**
- c. Personal Taxation issues unaddressed**
- d. Full cost of plan not included**
- e. Quality of recruits could decline [if there are any]**

**THREAT analysis is incomplete**

**The removal of lock-side support, in parallel with higher costs, will accelerate the decline in motor boating on the Thames and therefore income from licence fees.**

- i. About 30% motor boaters are retired. [Fixed incomes and getting older]**
- ii. Less pleasant to use the river**
- xv. Less level and flow control**
- xvi. Longer transit times**
- xvii. Fewer [available] moorings**

**Motor boaters are considered a soft target for fee increases. NOT ANY MORE**

**It would be sad if our trust in EA Management of the River is declines if the proposals are allowed to continue**

**G ENVIRONMENT AGENCY  
FUTURE OF NAVIGATION PROJECT – Michael Shefras**

a.	<p>We welcome the Board’s initiative in setting up the Future of Navigation Project and understand that consideration has to be given to the Minister’s original statement that ideally the EA Navigations be included in CRT.</p>
b.	<p>Defra have again announced in their November 2011 update that <i>“and the inclusion of the EA Navigations in 2015/2016 subject to <u>affordability and the agreement of the Trustees.</u>”</i></p>
c.	<p>We will return to this directly with Defra in the new year, but would like assurance that this EA program has no any influence in what is now being proposed with Thames management? Are we to believe that it is policy to manoeuvre river management in order to favour CRT .</p> <p>It seems to us that CRT concerns are addressed by EA to the detriment of the ongoing river management.</p> <p><b>High Capital Spend on maintenance to make this less of a hurdle for Cart Trustees</b></p> <p><b>Reduced Revenue Spend</b></p> <p><b>Increased licence fees [ for motor boaters]</b></p> <p><b>Reductions in Headcount</b></p> <p><b>Moving to Non Resident Lock-keepers—maybe no lock-keepers</b></p> <p><b>Lowering levels of customer service</b></p> <p><b>Claimed reliance on as yet proven volunteer program</b></p> <p><b>Inexperienced and ineffective line management</b></p> <p><b>Letting or selling property portfolio</b></p>

## H CONCLUSION – Michael Shefras

1	<b>My colleagues have now made clear the complete opposition to what you have suggested in your 7 October statement.</b>
2.	<b>We represent 125,000 people who y live, work and play on and about the Thames who virtually unanimousl oppose what you are suggesting.</b>
3	<b>We are not negative in any way! We have come forward with a proposal that is cost neutral and will protect the future of the river.</b>
4	<b>We have not heard any technical, financial or common sense reply what our proposal will not work!</b>
5	<p><b>We ask you to</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Cease the plan to lease lock cottages</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Man the river by employing Residential Lock Keepers to manage and service their patch of the river</b></li> </ul>
6	<p><b>On our part we will continue to</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Work with your local management team</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Agree service levels within the accepted budgets</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Encourage support from volunteers</b></li> </ul>

	<p>➤ <b>Work with the EA to develop a long term vision to find a pathway to the future management of the River Thames</b></p>
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**NOTE: If we have a completely negative response between us we will have to make it quite clear that there will be a public opposition to what is being suggested. I suggest that we will have to develop this as it runs.**

MS – 81211 – 1000 – 16 December, 0800 – 20 December 0800