



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES, TREDOMEN
ON TUESDAY, 31ST JANUARY 2006 AT 10.30 A.M**

PRESENT:

Councillor E.K. Griffiths - Chairman

Councillors:

D.M. Gray, E.K. Griffiths, K. James, S. Jenkins, M.H. Newman, M.G. Parker, Mrs. B.M. Toomer, D.T. Wiltshire

Together with:

D. Whetter (Senior Engineer), N. Liversuch (Principal Planner, Countryside & Landscape Services), R. Davies (European Officer), K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer Consultancy), G. Gordon (Senior Assistant Solicitor), J. Ridgewell (Parks Business Development Manager), P. Hudson (Assistant Tourism Officer), D. Penberthy (Senior Planning Officer - Countryside Services) H. C. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

Mr. R.J. Dommatt - Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miss. L. Ackerman and K. Etheridge and Messrs R. Webb, R. Morgan and D. Nutt.

1. COUNCILLOR KEN JAMES

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Ken James to the first meeting of the Working Group.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors S. Jenkins and Mrs. B. M. Toomer declared an interest as members of the Islwyn Canal Association.

3. MINUTES - 29TH NOVEMBER 2005

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th November 2005 were approved as a correct record.

Matter Arising

4. Best Kept Garden Competition (minute no. 11)

Reference was made to the existing initiative for best-kept gardens and as to whether it would be feasible to include a category of garden that runs to the canal bank. It was noted that the Islwyn Canal Association had undertaken a similar exercise in the past but only three householders had participated at that time.

In noting that such a scheme would enhance and compliment other proposals for the area, Mr. Ridgewell agreed that such a category could be included but indicated he would need to seek support from the Islwyn Canal Association and other council departments to promote the category via advertisements and leaflets to ensure its success.

With regards to landscaping generally it was noted that the corridor study reflects the landscape heritage of the area and the development of a landscaping strategy is part of the longer-term agenda. In pointing out that it is also necessary to improve the maintenance of existing areas and develop a strategy to enhance the area on both the public and private frontages. The Chairman indicated that whilst he appreciated the longer-term strategy for the area he would also wish to see enhancements developed in the shorter-term. Mr. Whetter indicated that he would liaise with Mr. Liversuch with a view to developing a landscaping project.

5 CRUMLIN ARM INTERPRETIVE PLAN

The Group received a slide presentation from Mr. D. Penberthy (Senior Planning Officer, Countryside Services) on the Crumlin Arm Interpretive Plan.

He reported that he has visited the site to examine access, signage, heritage features, the natural history and the wider environment and concluded that 'the legacy of the Crumlin Arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal continues to enrich the lives of the people who visit it today'.

Mr. Penberthy referred to the content of the plan which sets out proposals for the canal, reflecting its special qualities and enhancing visitor experiences. He then detailed proposals for orientation/ interpretive signs at the main entrances and other access entrances which would be in-keeping with the signs already in place and for location and name plaques on structures and places along the canal that have recognised names. Mr. Dommett indicated that the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Trust would be pleased to liaise on the content and proposed format of the signs.

Reference was then made to the provision of a leaflet or small booklet which could be made available to the general public to promote the canal and it was suggested that it incorporate some form of feedback/visitor survey in order that visitor usage and views can be evaluated.

Mr. Penberthy indicated that during his visits he had noted that there are various places to sit and enjoy the canal. He pointed out however that the footpath width makes it difficult to find further appropriate locations along the canal. He suggested that if additional seating is provided at strategic locations, artists designed and fabricated seats would provide opportunities for the interpretation of the heritage or natural history of the canal.

Members were pleased to note the content of the Draft Interpretive Plan which had been tabled at the meeting and in view of its detail were invited to forward comments on its content to Mr. Penberthy.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Penberthy for his informative presentation and for responding to the specific questions raised by those present and requested that any comments on the

contents of the interpretive plan be submitted as soon as possible in order that it can be progressed.

6 LOTTERY - LIVING LANDMARKS APPLICATION

Mr. Whetter confirmed that on 6th January 2006 the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership (MBCRP) submitted a 75% Stage 1 funding bid for £24,631,237 to the Lottery's Living Landmarks programme towards an overall regional "Living Links" project cost of £32,841,650.

He confirmed that the regional project includes for £2.06 million of works and associated fees to address the works that would implement the Stage 1 recommendations of the Council's 2005 Canal Corridor Study.

Reference was then made to the timescale for consideration of Stage 1 bids, submission and approval of Stage 2 bids and subsequent award of funds to enable works to progress. It was noted that in the event of the stage 1 bid being approved, stage 2 would involve a more detailed project application by January 2007, with the outcome not being notified until July 2007.

It was noted that the Council's ability to continue to progress its annual capital works improvements to the canal will, until 2007, be subject to the decisions that the Lottery make on the approval, or rejection, of the Regional Canal Partnership funding application. If the application is fully approved through Stages 1 and 2 it will delay the recommencement of major capital improvement works on the Canal until Autumn/Winter of 2007.

It was also pointed out that that much of the work that remains to be undertaken is weather dependant and the commencement of such works at the onset of winter may not be the most appropriate way forward. Consequently, continuation of major capital improvements could potentially be delayed until late Spring/Summer 2008 as a consequence of a successful Lottery bid.

In noting this information, the Members requested that the minor works progress as planned.

7. CANAL WORKS CURRENT STATUS

Mr. K. Kinsey reported that initial repair works to the Silver Street culvert have recently been completed. This work was concentrated within the culvert and consisted of pointing works to the stone masonry forming the annulus of the culvert structure.

The next phase planned focuses on the spandrel wall at the downstream entrance to the culvert. The work will consist of the removal of all vegetation, tree roots and stumps. Any disturbed areas of masonry will be rebuilt and the whole face of the wall pointed. These works are programmed to progress in February through to March.

It was noted that works recently undertaken to the canal at Pontywaun involved the excavation of trial pits to determine the depth of silt within the channel and the construction of the lining system. The trial pitting works revealed a depth of silt in the order of 0.5m and a lining system which consisted of 0.3m of puddle clay.

Further works are programmed over this length (during March) and consist of the removal of the silt and the existing lining. On completion of this element a temporary system of props and shoring will be installed within the canal channel to both ensure the stability of the structure and to allow safe investigation works to be undertaken. The development of restoration proposals for this section will then be progressed.

During the course of the discussions, reference was made to the initiative, in line with the

recommendations of the corridor study, whereby certain areas of the embankment are not longer cut in order to allow them to revert to a more ecologically friendly and natural environment. concerns were expressed that in those areas litter is allowed to collect and is not cleared. Mr. Ridgewell referred to the revised maintenance schedule and confirmed that at present litter is only collected from those areas which are programmed to be cut. Mr. Whetter indicated that this problem has already been brought to the attention of the relevant officers and a meeting is scheduled to discuss the matter.

8. PONTYMISTER ANGLING CLUB – SUGGESTED CANAL IMPROVEMENTS

It was reported that the Pontymister Angling Club has sought the consent of the Council for the Angling Club to undertake maintenance and minor improvement works along the Canal (removal of pondweed from specific locations along the canal, provision of permanent concrete fishing pegs that would provide safer fishing positions, limited restocking of fish in the Crosskeys area via Angling Club funds and replanting the canal bank to the recently renovated length of the Canal).

In noting the Angling Club's suggestions, it was pointed out that the bank-side planting and restocking should be guided by the recommendations made in the Phase 1 ecological study that formed part of the Corridor Study and highlighted invasive species, rare plant species and fish stocking should be carefully controlled with a strong presumption against further introductions of carp. It was agreed that Officers meet with representatives of the Pontymister Angling Club to examine their suggested improvements in greater detail.

9. MEETING WITH HANSON'S - FUTURE OF RISCA QUARRY

It was noted that a meeting to discuss the Council's and Hanson's aspirations for the future use of Risca Quarry has been arranged for 7th February 2006. Details will be presented to the next meeting.

10. LICENSING AND CONTROL

Mr. Whetter confirmed that the decisions taken at the last meeting that future licence conditions for individual private boat use on the canal include a requirement to provide a minimum of £2m liability insurance and for business (including charitable organisations) a requirement to provide a minimum of £5m liability insurance had been ratified by Council. It had also been agreed that a boat safety scheme certificate be presented. A letter has been sent to the various parties to advise them of the requirement. They had also been advised that if they are able to provide a boat safety scheme certificate and a certificate of insurance there would be no requirement for them to remove their craft from the canal. It was noted that several boat owners have provided the necessary documents.

With regards to the ongoing drafting of licensing conditions, Mr. Whetter confirmed that he anticipated the details being presented to the next meeting for consideration.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 25th April 2006 at 10.30am.

The meeting closed at 12.30 p.m.