

MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL – CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES, TREDOMEN
ON TUESDAY, 25TH APRIL 2006 AT 10.30 A.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor E.K. Griffiths - Chairman

Councillors:

D.M. Gray, S. Jenkins, M.H. Newman, M.G. Parker.

Together with:

D. Whetter (Senior Engineer), J. Ridgewell (Parks Business Development Manager), R. Morgan (Principal Planner), R. Davies (European Officer), G. Gordon (Senior Assistant Solicitor), H. C. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer).

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K. James, Mrs. B.M. Toomer, D.T. Wiltshire, K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer Consultancy) and Mr. N. Liversuch (Principal Planner, Countryside & Landscape Services)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S. Jenkins declared an interest as a member of the Islwyn Canal Association.

2. MINUTES - 31ST JANUARY 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2006 were approved as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

3. CROSS CUT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF INLAND WATERWAYS

Mr. R. Dommatt gave a PowerPoint presentation on the cross cut sustainable development of inland waterways which helps partners in other countries to look at ways in which canals can be restored. He expressed the need for local volunteers to be involved in exchanges with other similar groups in order to share their skills, knowledge and experiences. He then referred specifically to the Strabane project, which is a project funded under the Interreg IIIB North West Europe Programme. He reported that earlier in the year there was a

workshop undertaken in Strabane, Ireland, which brought together partners from Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK to look at issues and solutions for bringing a length of old canal back into use.

Mr. Dommatt referred to the project to restore a four-mile section of canal and to the work being undertaken to detail historical information, memorabilia and artefacts relating to the canal and recording the memories of the community. He highlighted the role that the volunteers had undertaken during the period of the workshop in delivering this aim and noted that this aspect would be part of an ongoing process as the project develops.

He pointed out that in order to share skills, meet community members, record archive material and locations of interest along the canal, the workshop had been published through the local press and by poster and that it was intended that the residents would be advised of progress via regular newsletters.

Members were pleased to note that many residents had attended with both family records and family history memories which will be collated along with records belonging to the Marques of Abercarn and those recorded in local newspaper cuttings over the years.

Reference was made to the aim of the project in taking forward the economic, social and cultural regeneration of the Strabane and Lifford cross border communities and to the interest that has already been expressed by both the local community and businesses in that area. It was noted that the project is in its early stages and that the development of a Trust has been an important part in its development.

Mr. Dommatt the referred to a further project to be undertaken in Holland in May which will be hands-on as part of a vegetation control project and to proposals for a project to be undertaken in Cwmbran later in the year.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Dommatt for his informative presentation and for responding to specific questions raised by those present.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. BEST KEPT CANAL GARDEN COMPETITION

Members were pleased to note that the best kept garden competition will include a "canal garden" category for gardens that can be viewed from the canal's towpath and felt that should the property owners participate, it would enhance and compliment other proposals for the area.

Mr. Ridgewell confirmed that application forms are now available and sought the assistance of the Islwyn Canal Association in targeting those properties which would qualify for that category. It was also agreed that council departments (such as Tourism and Communications) be requested to promote the category via advertisements and leaflets to ensure its success.

Mr. Ridgewell also pointed out that as well as the local competition, there is also a national competition which includes a neighbourhood award and felt that the premises whose gardens run to the canal bank should be encouraged to enter.

5. LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

Mr. Whetter reported that the Countryside Services Section is preparing a detailed brief to address landscape and ecological development and enhancement which would be commissioned via external consultants. The commission will require the successful Consultant to develop and cost detail landscape enhancement proposals for appropriate sites along the Canal. The brief will also require the development of a detailed landscape management plan to enhance the existing planting and features along the Canal.

It was noted that landscape enhancement of the area in the immediate vicinity of Hall's Road, Crosskeys is included within the Crosskeys and Pontywaun Environmental Programme being administered by Groundwork Caerphilly. Submission is awaited of Groundwork's preliminary proposals for consultation. However, from initial discussions with Groundwork it is likely that poor visibility at the existing junction of the B4591 and Hall's Road may prejudice the extent of the enhancement that the landscape project can bring to the Canal. Groundwork has been requested by the Council's Highway Planning Officer to take account of the site's highway access restrictions whilst developing their concept proposals.

6. CRUMLIN ARM INTERPRETIVE PLAN

It was noted that the proposals set out in the Interpretive Plan, which were supported in principle by the Partnership, are now receiving detailed consideration by Officers of British Waterways, Torfaen County Borough Council and Newport County Council.

7. LOTTERY - LIVING LANDMARKS APPLICATION

It was noted that following the approval of the first stage of the project a "Project Review Visit" will take place on the 8th and 9th May 2006 (to meet key representatives from Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen Councils and British Waterways). It is this visit that will determine if the Project proceeds and is to be awarded a discretionary development grant by the Lottery to prepare the detailed second stage submission.

Mr. Whetter referred to the extensive information that will be required to enable the second stage bid to be submitted and pointed out that the Lottery has specifically advised that passing the initial assessment is not a guarantee of ultimate success and that the competition for available funding remains very strong. Accordingly the preparation for the project review visit and the Lottery assessors understanding of the project's wider benefits are critical to longer-term success.

Details of the Project Management Structure as detailed in the appendix to the report which set out a proposed management structure for the "Living Links" project and listed key tasks and those organisations that will take a lead role for specific areas of activity were noted.

8. CAPITAL WORKS FOR 2006/2007

Mr. Whetter reported that on 25th April 2006, the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee will be considering a report on the Engineering Division Capital Expenditure Programme for 2006/2007. The report notes that the Authority has joined with partners to submit a Lottery - Living Landmarks bid which if successful would result in a significant grant towards the completion of £2m of schemes with the Authority required to commit 25% and that the Capital Strategy Group had recommended the continuance of an annual capital allocation of £250,000.

He pointed out proposals to set aside this year's allocation as the county boroughs contribution towards the a lottery award pending notification of the bid success and noted that continuation of major capital improvements could potentially be delayed until late Spring/ Summer 2008 as a consequence of a successful lottery bid.

9. CANAL WORKS CURRENT STATUS

Details of the current status of works on the canal were noted and specific reference was made to ongoing works at the Silver Street culvert. It was confirmed that trial pits have been undertaken within the Canal aqueduct as it crosses above the Silver Street culvert to examine footing conditions of the canal walls. Further works to fully dredge, investigate and treat any voids that may be present between the canal aqueduct and the lower level culvert remain to be progressed.

With regards to the Manor Road slipway, it was noted that the contract, awarded to Jim Davies Construction, commenced on 11th April 2006 and is scheduled for completion during mid-May. The £57,800 contract is being jointly funded through the Canal's revenue budget and a contribution of £19,400 from the Islwyn Canal Association's Lottery award. The Association is funding the cost of the slipway works with associated access track and car parking enhancements being funded by the Canal budget.

It was noted that HTV news wish to produce a video diary of the ongoing construction works for future broadcast as part of a Lottery award programme and would be liaising with the Association to progress the proposal.

Reference was then made to the collapse of a boundary wall between the Canal and residential property at Twyncarn Road, Pontywaun and to ongoing investigations to establish "ownership" responsibility for the wall.

10. MEETING WITH HANSON'S FUTURE OF RISCA QUARRY

Mr. Whetter reported that the meeting to discuss the Council's and Hanson's aspirations for the future use of Risca Quarry took place on 7th February 2006 and that its Board is to consider its position regarding release of their landholding within the confines of the quarry in the context of the potential development aspirations for adjacent land under Hanson's control. To date, no response has been received.

11. LICENSING AND CONTROL

It was noted that three craft (Sea Quest, Rhayader and Jemina Morris) have now produced their boat safety certificates and approved insurance cover for £2 million. As a result, the owners of these craft have been granted consent to use the length of the Crumlin Arm in the Council's ownership for individual private boat use between 1st April and 30th September 2006 (both dates inclusive).

It was reported however that despite several reminders, the owner of the "Wendy E" craft remains to submit insurance or boat safety certificates and it was agreed that he be requested to produce the information or remove the craft from the canal within a period of twenty one days from the date of the notice.

12 CORRESPONDENCE

Reference was made to correspondence received from Pontywaun Boat Club indicating that it would like to take on the responsibility of promoting the Canal to visitors by use of the Jemima Morris and would be prepared to work in partnership with the Council on any promotion.

Following discussions on the detail of the request, it was felt that the responsibility for the promotion of the canal to visitors should be undertaken by the county borough and as such, the request not be acceded to.

13. DATE OF METING

It was noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for 12th September 2006.

The meeting closed at 11.45 a.m.