



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL – CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT DYFFRYN HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER 2006 AT 10.30 AM**

PRESENT:

Councillor E.K. Griffiths - Chairman

Councillors:

D.M. Gray, K. James, S. Jenkins, Mrs. B.M. Toomer, D.T. Wiltshire

Together with:

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

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miss L. Ackerman, M.H. Newman, M.G. Parker and K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer Consultancy).

1. MINUTES - 25TH APRIL 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2006 were approved as a correct record.

Matter Arising

2. Canal Works Current Status (minute no. 9)

With regards to the Manor Road slipway, it was noted that HTV News had produced a video diary of the construction works which had been broadcast as part of a Lottery award programme.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports: -

3. BEST KEPT GARDEN COMPETITION - CANAL GARDEN CATEGORY

It was confirmed that a canal garden category had been included in the competition and a sponsor secured for the associated prize but unfortunately it had not attracted any entries. Mr. J. Ridgewell indicated that the lack of interest had been disappointing particularly as it was instigated following a suggestion by the local community. He pointed out however that the category will be retained for 2007 and, in acknowledging the need for significant localised publicity along the canal corridor in order to encourage public support and participation, he welcomed the support offered by the Islwyn Canal Association in promoting the category.

Reference was made to the condition of the environment along the canal (litter/grass cutting/maintenance issues) which it was felt may have resulted in the lack of entries and it was noted that this will be addressed as part of the landscape enhancement strategy.

4. LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

Mr. N. Liversuch reported that the commission to develop and cost detail landscape enhancement proposals for appropriate sites along the Canal and develop a detailed landscape management plan to enhance the existing planting and features, has been awarded to LCT Landscape Architecture Limited, Usk. He confirmed that the Officers have met with the Consultants to discuss the commission and it is intended that the whole length of the canal will be assessed and consultation will be undertaken with those using the facility. Mr. R. Dommett requested that the Consultants also liaise with British Waterways and Mr. Liversuch indicated that the necessary arrangements would be made.

It was noted that the commission will enhance information set out in the Corridor Study and support information required for the second stage Lottery funding bid.

Members were pleased to note that there will be management plan for the canal and felt that it would be useful to make its users aware of what actions are being taken and during what period works are expected in specific areas. They also noted proposals for landscape enhancements at appropriate locations along the Canal and the development of a detailed landscape management plan to enhance the existing planting and features along its length. In noting the proposals for landscape enhancements, Members requested that consideration also be given to planting suitable species of shrubs. Mr. Liversuch indicated that the Consultants would be examining all areas that could be enhanced and will recommend plants suitable for the specific locations identified.

Reference was made to the overhanging trees on the canal bank which are causing a nuisance to both walkers and those using the National Cycle route. It was requested that they be examined and, where appropriate, action be taken on those trees which are causing problems. Mr. Liversuch indicated that the trees would be examined as part of the study and that its recommendations would be available for consideration in the new year. It was agreed that if available, the study be presented to the next meeting for consideration.

In noting the preparation of a management plan, concerns were then expressed at the need to undertake routine maintenance works in the interim (litter collection, debris in canal channel, grass cutting). Mr. Ridgewell confirmed that in the short term, certain maintenance works will be required and that he would be meeting with Mr. Whetter and Mr. Liversuch in order to programme such works. The concerns expressed with regard to litter, debris and grass cutting were noted by those Officers and would be taken into consideration at that time but it was pointed out that with regards to the latter, certain areas will be brought back to ornamental maintenance standards but others, for ecology reasons, may be allowed to grow to their natural state.

Mr. Whetter referred to the maintenance budget and pointed out that works able to be undertaken may not meet the communities expectations. Although he anticipated that the findings of the study would assist in determining those areas which require more frequent attention.

5. GROUNDWORK'S CANAL LANDSCAPE PROJECT

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. However, Pontywaun Spiritual Church has raised objections to the proposed landscape works with regard to disputed land ownership and reduction of car parking provision in the vicinity of the Church. Officers are seeking to resolve the Church's concerns in order that the proposed landscape works and associated infrastructure improvements may progress.

It was agreed that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, local ward member and appropriate Officers meet with representatives of the Church in order to progress the matter.

6. LOTTERY - LIVING LANDMARKS APPLICATION

Members were pleased to note that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's Living Links project had successfully negotiated the Stage One assessment of the Lottery's approval process.

Reference was made to the timetable for the project programme as detailed in the report and Mr. Whetter pointed out that extensive information would be required to enable the second stage bid to be submitted (31st May 2007). He pointed out that the Lottery has specifically advised that passing the initial assessment is not a guarantee of ultimate success and that there is still competition for the available funding. 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.

It was noted that in order to commence preparation of the stage two application, external Consultants will be appointed. A formal legal agreement is being arranged between the various parties in order to satisfy Big Lottery requirements and safeguard the potential liability on Torfaen County Borough Council as recipient of the Lottery grant.

The Chairman referred to the report which had been submitted to Cabinet on 4th July 2006 when the full details of the submission, the intended works costs in each of the Partners areas and the intended works for the canal which falls within the county borough area were reported. He confirmed that the bid does not include for any removal of obstruction to navigation on the Council owned stretch of the Canal or for any works proposed for the development of a tourist facility at Adams Quarry.

7. MONMOUTHSHIRE BRECON AND ABERGAVENNY CANALS TRUST COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

In noting that the Lottery's key themes and funding awards give preference to an improved opportunity for success to projects that generate community involvement, improvement, well-being and cohesion, it was confirmed that both community involvement, consultation and support will be key areas in the development of the stage two application.

Mr. R. Dommert indicated that the Monmouthshire Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust, as a member of the Regional Canal Partnership, intend to hold a series of public meetings in Torfaen County Borough, Newport City and Caerphilly County Borough to increase community awareness of and support for the Living Links project.

Initial public meetings have been held in Crickhowell and Rogerstone and further meetings are proposed in the Cwmbran area and in Risca. Subsequent meetings will be arranged as the project develops and subject to continued Lottery approval.

Mr. Dommert pointed out that these meetings provide an ideal opportunity to explain the aims and aspirations of the Living Links project to the community and to highlight the fact that the project is not primarily aimed at restoration of the canal but that restoration will be a by-product of using the canal and its associated infrastructure to link communities.

It was confirmed that the consultation meeting to be held in Rogerstone on 19th September 2006 will have an exhibition detailing the environmental action plan and the role of the Cross Cut Volunteers and an update will be given on progress with the lottery application and the proposed works for the whole of the canal should the application be successful.

The Chairman requested that a copy of the application form be circulated to all Members of the Working Party in order that they are fully aware of the extent of the project submitted.

8. CRUMLIN ARM INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Members were pleased to note that the Planning Division's Countryside Services Section is working in association with the Islwyn Canal Association to progress publication of an information booklet or leaflet as available funding allows. The Islwyn Canal Association who are researching and collating background information and suitable photographs (whilst Countryside Services are investigating layout design and associated production costs) has recently identified funding to allow development work on the publication commence.

9. CAPITAL WORKS FOR 2006/2007

Mr. Whetter confirmed that the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee had approved a report on the Engineering Division Capital Expenditure Programme for 2006/2007 and as such, it was agreed to set aside this year's allocation as the county boroughs contribution towards the a Lottery award pending notification of the bid's approval to proceed.

He pointed out that as a consequence of the recent approval of the Big Lottery funding bid, continuation of major capital improvements on the Canal would potentially be delayed until late Spring/Summer 2008.

10. CANAL WORKS CURRENT STATUS

It was noted that works to reconstruct the Silver Street culvert's upstream and downstream parapets and associated retaining walls were completed during July 2006, 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 and that works to provide a slipway at Manor Road and enhance the adjacent land were completed on 26th May 2006.

Mr. Whetter indicated that following complaints from local residents, works have been undertaken to the Pontywaun overflow and spillway structures that allow water levels to be raised and to address Health and Safety Executive's concerns over ease of unauthorised access into the overflow structure. Concerns from the Environment Agency over fish distress arising from a lack of oxygen and resulting algae bloom were addressed by installing a temporary pumping system in the Constant Row area.

Specific reference was made to a leak from the Canal which has developed in the vicinity of Manor Road and Severn Close. Investigation works via geophysical survey have been undertaken and irregularities have been found along certain sections of the towpath in that area. Further investigation works will be undertaken to determine the most appropriate remedial work.

Concerns were expressed regarding the low water levels within the length of canal at Cwmcarn/Pontywaun and to the smells emanating from rotting vegetation in the canal base at that location. A query was raised as to the timescales to progress the problems being experienced at that location. Mr. Whetter pointed out that this section has been excavated and a clay lining has been revealed. He confirmed that works are include within the lottery bid to address leaks, restore aqueduct integrity and treat suspected voids below aqueduct and as this year's allocation is earmarked, any other works on the canal will be delayed until late Spring/ Summer 2008.

It was noted that significant amounts of money have already been spent at that location and at other locations along the length of the canal and whilst it was accepted that further works are required it was noted that in view of the success of the first stage of the lottery bid and the commitment of the capital budget, it will not be possible to carry out any further works in the near future.

Members referred to the perception of the public that works are being carried out on specific lengths of the canal when the finance should be use elsewhere in the community and was noted that budgets are allocated for specific areas of activity and cannot be transferred from one area to another. Mr. Whetter reminded those present of the limited maintenance budget and that in view of the commitment of the capital budget it is unlikely that any further major works will be carried out in the short term.

11. MEETING WITH HANSON'S FUTURE OF RISCA QUARRY

Mr. Whetter reported that Hanson's have been reminded of their committed to ask their Board to consider the company's 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.

12. LICENSING AND CONTROL

It was noted that despite several reminders since January 2006, and following his verbal undertaking to address this matter, the owner of the "Wendy E" craft remains to submit insurance or Boat Safety information. It was noted that the matter has been taken up by the Head of Legal Services who is instigating formal procedures to remove this craft from the Canal.

13. CORRESPONDENCE

Reference was made to correspondence received from the Director of Whysom's Wharf (a copy had been circulated to those present) which sought details of Insurance Companies which provide the level of liability required for business use of the canal and referred to the proposed development of the canal terminus at Pontywaun with canoe and boat hire. Mr. Wysom suggests that his application to operate six rowing boats from the company property situated at Darren Road were submitted and accepted months before the lottery funding proposals were formulated.

With regards to insurance provision, in noting that it has been agreed that license conditions for individual private boat use on the canal include a requirement to provide a minimum of £2m liability insurance and conditions for business boat use (including charitable organisations) on the canal include a requirement to provide a minimum of £5m liability insurance, it was agreed to invite Mr. Dayton Griffiths (Insurance & Risk Manager) to the next meeting to discuss the matter.

With regards to concerns over the inclusion of canoe and boat hire at Pontywaun within the lottery bid, it was pointed out that one of the topics the county borough wish to utilise potential lottery funding for is to "establish the feasibility of canal based activity programmes on the canal without removal of obstructions for example canoe/cycle hire facility at Pontywaun".

Mr. Whetter indicated that this potential work would be in the form of a study that will seek to establish the demand for and potential viability of such facilities on the Crumlin Arm of the canal. The proposal is consistent with recommendations set out in the February 2005 Canal Corridor Study which makes specific reference to the potential to increase use of the canal through canoeing and other unpowered craft. This ties in with the Council's Stage 1 restoration strategy of making greatest use of the asset that the Canal provides in its current form.

It was reiterated that the county borough were considering the potential of the establishment of such facilities well in advance of the letter from Mr. Wysom dated 15th November 2005 and some months after consultation on and publication of the Council's Canal Corridor Study.

13. DATE OF METING

It was noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for 16th January 2007.

The meeting closed at 11.45am.