

MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL – CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP – 12TH SEPTEMBER 2006

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Best Kept Garden Competition

1. At Members request this new category was introduced into the Council's 2006 Best Kept Garden Competition and a sponsor secured for the associated prize.
2. Unfortunately this category of the competition did not attract any entries despite interest in all other categories being as high as previous years. The lack of interest in this category of the competition is disappointing particularly since the local community the suggestion for a Canal Garden category was instigated.
3. However, Leisure Services are content to retain the Canal Garden category in the competition for 2007 and acknowledge the need for significant localised publicity along the canal corridor in order to encourage public support and participation.

2.2 Landscape Enhancement Strategy

1. On 19th July 2006 four consultants returned submissions in response to the Countryside Services Section brief requirement for services to provide landscape and ecological development and enhancement. The commission requires the consultant to:-
 - Develop and cost detail landscape enhancement proposals for appropriate sites along the Canal.
 - Develop a detailed landscape management plan to enhance the existing planting and features along the Canal.
2. Following assessment of submissions the commission for the Canal's "Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan" was awarded to LTC Landscape Architecture Ltd. Of Usk in the sum of £22,970.
3. The 15 week commission will funded jointly via the Engineering Division's Canal budget and a contribution of £8,500 from Planning Division's Countryside Services budget.
4. The output from the commission will enhance information set out in the Corridor Study and support information required for the second stage Lottery funding bid.

2.3 Groundwork's Canal Landscape Project

1. Members will recall that Groundwork's Crosskeys and Pontywaun Environmental Regeneration Programme includes a project alongside the Canal at Halls Road Crossing.

2. 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.

2.4 Lottery - Living Landmarks Application

1. On 4th August 2006 the Big Lottery's Living Landmarks programme advised that that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's (MBCRP) £32,841,650 "Living Links" project had successfully negotiated the Stage One assessment of the Lottery's approval process.
2. The MBCRP project is one of 23 nationwide projects to be allowed to progress to Stage Two assessment.
3. Big Lottery has advised that the project programme will be:-
 - MBCRP to confirm acceptance of the Lottery's grant conditions and submit a completed Next Stage Plan to Big Lottery by 29th September 2006.
 - Big Lottery to confirm the value of the Project Development Grant to be provided to the "Living Links" project for development of Stage Two application.
 - October 2006 (date to be confirmed) project start up meeting with Big Lottery's Senior Grants Officer and Project Monitor.
 - 31st May 2007 final date for submission of Stage Two detailed application to Big Lottery.
 - June to August 2007 Big Lottery undertake assessment and prioritisation of Stage Two submissions.
 - September 2007 Big Lottery's programme committee decide to fund or reject projects.
 - October 2007 award of Big Lottery Living Landmark grant commences.
4. Big Lottery has specifically advised that passing the Stage One assessment is not a guarantee of ultimate success and that the competition for available funding remains very strong. Accordingly the preparation for the detailed Stage Two application and the Lottery understanding the project's wider benefits are critical to longer-term success.
5. In order to commence preparation of the Stage Two application submissions have been sought by MBCRP from two external consultants. The consultant's fee proposals to address a detailed wide-ranging brief are to be submitted by 13th September 2006. Following assessment of the bids it is anticipated that Torfaen County Borough Council will appoint the successful consultant on behalf of the MBCRP by the end of September.
6. A formal legal agreement is required between the various parties to the "Living Links" project in order to satisfy Big Lottery requirements and safeguard the potential liability on Torfaen County Borough Council as recipient of the Lottery grant. The Legal Departments of each local authority have been requested to prepare and agree a draft agreement for consideration by Members of Newport City Council, Torfaen and Caerphilly County Borough Councils' and Newport City Council's Cabinet.

2.5 Monmouthshire Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust (MBACT) Community Consultation

1. Big Lottery's key themes and funding awards give preference to and improved opportunity for success to projects that generate community involvement, improvement, well-being and cohesion.
2. Accordingly community involvement, consultation and support will be key area in the development of the Stage Two application for the "Living Links" project. The MBACT, 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.
3. The MBACT have facilitated initial public meetings on the "Living Links" project at Crickhowell during May and Rogerstone during July. Further meetings are proposed in the Cwmbran area during September and in Risca in November 2006. Subsequent meetings will be arranged as the project develops and subject to continued Big Lottery approval.
4. These meetings offer an ideal opportunity to explain the aims and aspirations of the "Living Links" project to the community. The MBACT are well placed to advise the community that the primary objective of the "Living Links" project is to link the communities throughout the regional canal network. MBACT seek to highlight that "Living Links" 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.

2.6 Crumlin Arm Interpretive Plan

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

2.7 Capital Works For 2006/2007

1. Members will recall that on 25th April 2006 the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee approved a report on the Engineering Division Capital Expenditure Programme for 2006/2007. That report highlighted that the Authority had joined with partners to submit a Big Lottery - Living Landmarks and proposed to set aside this year's allocation as the CCBC contribution towards the a Lottery award pending notification of the bid's approval to proceed.
2. As a result of "Living Links" project being approved by Big Lottery to progress to the Stage Two application it remains the intention to continue to set-aside the annual capital allocation of £250,000 as match funding to the potentially successful Lottery grant to which the Authority required to commit 25%.
3. Members will appreciate that as a consequence of the recent approval of the Big Lottery funding bid to progress, continuation of major capital improvements on the Canal will potentially be delayed until late Spring/Summer 2008.

2.8 Canal Works Current Status

1. The works to reconstruct the Silver Street culvert's upstream and downstream parapets and associated retaining walls were completed during July 2006 at a cost of approximately £70,000.
2. The 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.
3. The works to provide a slipway at Manor Road and enhance the adjacent land were completed on 26th May 2006 at a cost of approximately £60,000. The works were completed in readiness for the joint MBACT and ICA Canal Awareness Day that was held on 29th May.
4. 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.
5. In mid summer Environment Agency concerns 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.
6. A leak from the Canal has developed in the vicinity of Manor Road and Severn Close. Investigation works via geophysical survey have been undertaken and the findings of that investigation are currently being assessed to determine the most appropriate remedial work. Officers will continue to monitor the leak until this situation is resolved.

2.9 Meeting with Hanson's Future of Risca Quarry

1. A response remains to be received from Hanson's on their aspirations for the future use of Risca Quarry following the meeting in February 2006.
2. Hanson's officers have recently 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.

2.10 Licensing and Control

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