



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL – CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT DUFFRYN HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY 16TH JANUARY 2007 AT 10.30 AM**

PRESENT:

Councillor E.K. Griffiths - Chairman

Councillors:

D.M. Gray, E.K. Griffiths, 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. Davies (European Officer), K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer Consultancy), G. Gordon (Senior Assistant Solicitor), J. Ridgewell (Parks Business Development Manager), R. Keep (Outdoor Education 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 and M.G. Parker and Mr. R. Morgan (Principal Planner).

1. MINUTES - 12TH SEPTEMBER 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th September 2006 were approved as a correct record.

Matter Arising

2. Meeting with Hanson's Regarding the Future of Risca Quarry (minute no. 11)

Mr. D. Whetter reported that no response has yet been received from Hanson's in relation to 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 its control.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PONTYWAUN SPIRITUAL CHURCH/GROUNDWORK CAERPHILLY ON 25TH OCTOBER 2006

Members were pleased to note that following discussions with representatives of Pontywaun Spiritual Church and Groundwork, Caerphilly in relation to the proposed canal landscape project, a revised plan is to be developed which will be the subject of further consultation. It was also noted that in the event that there is a statutory declaration made to the Land Registry Office, there would be no counter claims for the footprint that the church currently occupies plus an additional distance of up to 1.5 metres to the northern elevation of the church.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports

4. LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

Mr. N. Liversuch reported that Officers met with the Consultant, LTC Landscape Architecture Ltd., before Christmas and anticipated that the draft study will be presented later in the month with the Company finalising the report during February. The conclusions of the Study and its proposals will be presented to the next meeting of the Working Group. It was noted that the output from the study will support information required for the second stage Lottery funding bid.

Mr. N. Liversuch then referred to the brief of the consultants in preparing the Canal's "Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan" which will seek 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 along the Canal.

Members were pleased to note that during the three-day Public Perception Survey, informal interviews had been taken with approximately 250 people who use canal towpath, Members and other canal interest groups.

At this point Councillor E.K. Griffiths, Chairman, announced that he had secured the support of the Spalding Bulb Company to launch a Public Appeal to win support to plant blossom trees, bushes and scrubs along the canal embankment from Pontywaun, Risca to the boundary at Rogerstone. In noting that the Council had already engaged landscaping consultants to upgrade the walkway along the tow path in order to enhance the whole walkway for locals and visitors, he was pleased to inform the Working Group that some of the private landowners, Mr. Terry Howells, Mr. Weetch and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Evans have granted permission for entry and planting.

He indicated that it is planned to hold an official launch later in the year and it was hoped to invite all local organisations to make a small donation to support the programme and to involve school pupils with the development on the occasion of the public launch and the planning of bulbs in the autumn. Talks are planned with the Church Authorities to display the names of all those who make a donation within the Church.

As the scheme advances all householders/property owners along the canal embankment will be invited to join in the planting with a variety of shrubs including Hydrangea, Berry Hedge for birds, Mock Orange, Rhododendron, Royal Purple Continas Coggygrea, Coggygrig Bushes, Mile a Minute Climber, Lilac Trees, Laburocyths, Ornamental Cherry Forsythia, Camellia Bushes and Azalea Bushes with the aim to create colour spring, summer and winter over the coming years. Planting will be undertaken in the appropriate season during the course of the

year.

5. GROUNDWORK'S CANAL LANDSCAPE PROJECT

Mr. D. Whetter reported that as a result of discussions with representatives of Pontywaun Spiritual Church and Groundwork, Caerphilly a revised proposal is currently progressing through an inter-Departmental review within the Council. The Church's agreement to final proposal will be sought following this review and drafting of any final amendments and the associated application for planning consent submitted.

It was pointed out that the original car parking provision has been revised to address the main concern of the Church regarding the number of off-street parking places to be provided. Groundwork have allocated additional funding to the revised proposals so that additional Council owned land immediately south of the Church can be included within the project to provide two "grasscrete" surfaced off-street parking areas.

It was also noted that the Crosskeys and Pontywaun Environmental Regeneration Programme's Draft Arts and Signage Strategy prepared by Groundwork makes reference to the Canal. Groundwork have been requested to ensure that the proposals of the Environmental Regeneration Programme take account of the Interpretation Strategy previously approved for the Crumlin Arm and that both documents proposals complement each other.

6. CWMCARN FLANNEL FACTORY - MEMORIAL

It was noted that Countryside Services Officers have been working in association with the Cwmcarn Residents and Community Association to bring forward proposals for a memorial to the 1875 tragedy associated with the Canal feeder reservoir that resulted in loss of 12 lives. Artists have consulted with local residents to produce an approved design and agreements are currently being drawn up for fabrication and installation of the monument by 31st March 2007.

Councillor K. James indicated that he has seen the memorial which is in the form of a bench and Mr. D. Whetter indicated that in view of future proposals for a turning head in that vicinity it will be necessary to identify its location.

7. LOTTERY - LIVING LANDMARKS APPLICATION

Mr. D. Whetter reported that further to receipt and price/quality assessment of tenders received from Capita Symonds and Kier Western/Powell Dobson in September 2006 and Big Lottery's subsequent approval of the project's Next Stage Plan and confirmation of funds in November, Torfaen County Borough Council appointed Kier Western/Powell Dobson to progress and prepare the Stage 2 Living Landmarks funding application.

Torfaen County Borough Council has taken responsibility for this appointment in their role as lead partner within the Big Lottery Living Links regional canal project and as the recipient and administrator of the £250,000 Big Lottery's Stage 2 Development Grant to be submitted by 31st May 2007. The drafting of the legal agreement between the regional Partners to satisfy Big Lottery requirements and safeguard the potential liability on Torfaen County Borough Council as recipient of the Lottery grant is ongoing.

Comments on the first draft of the proposed agreement were issued to Torfaen County Borough Council in October 2006 and receipt of the revised document is awaited so that Cabinet Members may consider its content.

8. BIG LOTTERY PROJECT - POTENTIAL ADDITIONAL WORKS AT SEVERN CLOSE, RISCA

Mr. D. Whetter reminded the Working Group that the extent of proposed Big Lottery funded works to be undertaken on the Council's length of Canal was originally identified in late 2005 in preparation of the Big Lottery Stage 1 January 2006 application. However, in September 2006 Members were advised that "sinkholes" with associated water leaks had developed in the bed of the Canal above residential properties at Severn Close, Risca. Although the effected 100 metre length was dewatered during the autumn, recent winter rain has exacerbated the difficulty of preventing rainfall and other flows from accessing the dewatered stretch and escaping through the sinkholes into the adjacent embankment to issue in the rear gardens of lower lying properties.

Mr. D. Whetter indicated that it is considered that works to address the matter should be implemented at the earliest available opportunity and as such, in order to clarify the most appropriate way forward, the Council has requested that Big Lottery consider the potential for the Council to undertake the necessary canal repairs through the spring and summer of 2007 and should the Stage 2 bid be approved at a later date the works costs be reimbursed retrospectively from the Living Links award. The views of the Big Lottery on this proposed funding mechanism remain to be received.

Subject to the response it is intended that Engineering Division will notify and seek the approval from Capital Strategy Group to prioritise the canal repairs at Severn Close as urgent maintenance works, effectively drawing upon the previously "banked" £250,000 contribution towards a successful Lottery Grant award.

Members noted and endorsed the actions taken to date.

9. LIVING LANDMARKS APPLICATION - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Mr. D. Whetter referred to the success of the community consultation event held in Risca on 9th November 2006 by the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership and referred to the presentation at the event and the notes of the proceedings which were attached as an appendix to the report.

It was noted that the next consultation event on the progress of the Stage 2 Living Links submission is likely to take place in February 2007 as other focal lengths of canal throughout the region remain to have their initial meeting.

Mr. R. Dommett indicated that the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust would continue to facilitate the meetings.

10. CRUMLIN ARM INTERPRETIVE PLAN

It was noted that in association with the Islwyn Canal Association the Council's Countryside Services Section are developing, researching and writing the text for the Crumlin Arm information booklet. A graphic designer has been commissioned to prepare a draft layout for the publication and alternate funding sources continue to be sought for the future publication of the information booklet. Mr. Liversuch indicated that the first draft has been completed and anticipated that it would be finalised in the near future.

Members were requested that if they or their constituents have access to historic photographs of the Crumlin Arm or other associated literature and anecdotes they should contact Mr. David Penberthy (Senior Planning Officer) in order that they can be incorporated within any future information booklets produced.

11. CAPITAL WORKS FOR 2006/2007

Mr. D. Whetter confirmed that as a result of the “Living Links” project being approved by Big Lottery to progress to the Stage Two application, the £250,000 capital works allocation for 2006/07 continues to be set-aside as match funding to the potentially successful Lottery grant to which the Authority required to commit 25%. The 2007/08 capital works allocation is also currently proposed to be set-aside as match funding to a successful Lottery grant.

He pointed out that the Engineering Division is mindful of the ongoing situation at Severn Close, Risca and as such, the continued setting aside of the Canal’s capital allocation will be subject to reassessment should the Big Lottery not accept the proposal that short-term remedial works at Severn Close be eligible for retrospective award of funds.

12. CANAL WORKS CURRENT STATUS

It was noted that during December 2006 works were undertaken to replace the previously vandalised copingstones at four historic arch bridges along the Canal. The works implemented through the highway structures budget included measures to deter future potential acts of vandalism and theft. It was noted that an article has been included in Newslines detailing the extent of the vandalism and highlight the community heritage which has been destroyed.

Detailed discussions have been initiated between Engineering and Park Services Divisions in an attempt to identify and resolve health and safety related concerns in relation to routine maintenance operations and works along the Canal’s towpath and channel.

13. LICENSING AND CONTROL - LIABILITY INSURANCE

In referring to the queries raised by both the Director of Whysom’s Wharf and the Secretary to Pontywaun Boat Club in relation to the level of liability required for business use of the canal it was noted that the Insurance and Risk Manager has confirmed that an indemnity limit of £5m is available through an Insurance Broker and that the statutory minimum Indemnity provided by all Employers Liability policies is now £5m and Public Liability Indemnities whilst not being a statutory requirement are regularly placed at levels far in excess of £5m.

In noting that other users of the canal have provided £5m indemnity limits without any difficulty it was agreed to that there should be no change to the insurance provision required. As such the licence conditions for individual private boat use on the canal includes 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.

14. LICENSING AND CONTROL - PROVISION OF INSURANCE

It was noted that in November 2006 insurance renewal certificates were received for “Rhayader” and “Jemima Morris” with a maximum liability cover of £3m. Following consultation with the Insurance and Risk Manager the owner of the craft was notified of their approval for individual private boat use.

A cover note to 24th January 2007 and a boat safety certificate to February 2010 has been received from the owner of the “Wendy E” craft and unless a full insurance certificate is received prior to the expiry date of the cover note, as previously agreed, the vessel will be lifted, stored for seven days and subsequently disposed of.

15. CORRESPONDENCE

It was noted that correspondence received from Mr. R. Wysom dated 27th November 2006 in relation to matters discussed at the 12th September 2006 meeting of the Working Group has been responded to by the Chief Executive Officer on 21st December 2006.

It was then reported that correspondence has been received from Crosskeys and Pontywaun Residents Association and Mr. G. Thorne (Ornithologist) requesting representation on the Working Group. Members also reported that they have had similar requests from other Groups in the areas. It was agreed that any requests not be acceded to at this stage as their specific interest may be for certain parts of the Canal and the representatives appointed to the Group are currently dealing with issues relating to the whole of the canal.

Mr. R. Dommett, Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust, indicated that similar requests have also been made to the Trust who have also concluded that the Group should not be expanded at this stage.

It was noted that interested parties would be able to attend the meetings to listen to the deliberations (except when exempt information is being discussed) but not take any active part in the debate. The Chairman however indicated that on request they would also be permitted to address the Working Group on specific issues.

Reference was then made to the request of Mr. R. Wysom to operate six small rowing boats on the canal at the Darren bridge area which is adjacent to his property at Risca. It was agreed that in order that the application can be formally progressed, he be requested to provide details of the proposal and the relevant associated information.

Members then noted a letter received from Islwyn Canal Association offering their compliments on the quality of the remedial works carried out on the coping stones to the bridges along the canal and works to the shrubbery growing along the length of the canal.

The correspondence also made reference to several places along the canal which have become silted and choked with reed, particularly on the areas of Pontywaun to Darran Bridge, Temperance Hill and Manor Road and noted that the stream has once again blocked the canal at that point and a request had been made for information on proposals to undertaken further work in those areas.

Mr. D. Whetter referred to concerns raised in relation to the uneven surfaces which had been left in the base of the Canal and Mr. K. Kinsey indicated that apart from the area south of the 'dragons teeth' overflow, dredging will be undertaken and the problems associated with certain parts of the base of the Canal will be addressed at that time.

Reference was then made to the need to continue to undertake routine maintenance work on the length of the canal, to progress proposals for landscape enhancement at appropriate sites, to consider planting and features and to examine overhanging trees on the canal bank which are causing a nuisance to both walkers and cyclists.

It was noted that these issues will be addressed within the landscape enhancement strategy (which will assist in determining those areas which require more frequent attention) and be considered in detail by the Working Group in due course.

Mr. J. Ridgewell highlighted the current maintenance programme which is being used in the interim and reiterated that certain areas will be brought back to ornamental maintenance standards but others, for ecology reasons, may be allowed to grow to their natural state. The Chairman requested details of the programme and plans identifying which areas are currently maintained. Mr. J. Ridgewell also referred to ongoing discussions in an attempt to identify

and resolve health and safety related concerns in relation to routine maintenance operations and works along the Canal's towpath and channel.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for 24th April 2007, and agreed that if the Landscape Enhancement Strategy is available prior to that date, as special meeting be arranged.
