



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL – CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT DUFFRYN HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
MONDAY, 4TH JUNE 2007 AT 10.30 AM**

PRESENT:

Councillor E.K. Griffiths - Chairman

Councillors:

Miss. L. Ackerman, D.M. Gray, E.K. Griffiths, K. James, S. Jenkins, Mrs. B.M. Toomer,
D.T. Wiltshire.

Mr. R.J. Dommett - Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust
Mr. V. Huskings - Groundwork
LCT Landscape Architecture Limited, Usk - Ms. M. Hawksworth and Ms. V. Villeneuve

Together with:

D. Whetter (Senior Engineer), N. Liversuch (Principal Planner, Countryside and Landscape Services), N. Daniels (Landscape Architect), L. Evans (Highway Infrastructure Manager), R. Morgan (Principal Planner), R. Davies (European Officer), K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer Consultancy), D. Nutt (Tourism Officer), G. Gordon (Senior Assistant Solicitor), J. Ridgewell (Parks Business Development Manager), H. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.H. Newman, M.G. Parker, P. Jayne (Manager - Countryside and Landscape Services) and R. Keep (Outdoor Education Manager).

1. PRIVITISATION OF CANAL NETWORK

The Chairman made reference to an article which had appeared in a Regeneration and Renewal Magazine which reports that ' Britain's canals could be sold off under plans being considered by the public body in charge of the UKs waterways network'. It refers to a strategic review of British Waterways to be conducted later in the year and noted that the review will explore possible changes to the agency's institutional framework and financial structure to establish whether an alternative model would be appropriate to take forward the management of canals and rivers.

Concerns were expressed that privatisation is one of the options that will be explored as part of the review and as Cabinet Member for Transportation and Planning Councillor Griffiths indicated that he would recommend to Council that a letter be sent to all relevant bodies requesting that they oppose any such proposals. This approach was supported by all present.

2. MINUTES - 16TH JANUARY 2007

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2007 were approved as a correct record.

MATTER ARISING

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

It was noted 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.

4. PRESENTATION - CRUMLIN ARM LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES PLAN PRESENTATION OF FINAL REPORT

Ms. Hawksworth and Ms. Villeneuve (LCT Landscape Architecture Limited, Usk) attended the meeting and with the assistance of a slide presentation highlighted the details contained within the final report. It was pointed out that the subject of the study is the Crumlin Arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, between Forest Drive, Cwmcarn and Harry Roberts Bridge, Pontymister and the plan is to cover a 10 year period from 2007 - 2017.

It was noted that the Crumlin Arm Landscape Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan seeks to: -

- Develop and detail a strategic programme of landscape enhancements for appropriate sites along the Canal and
- Develop a detailed landscape management plan to enhance the existing planting and features along the Canal.

Ms. Hawksworth highlighted the key objectives of the study (survey the existing canal corridor, appraise the opportunities for landscape and management improvements, formulate costed proposals for landscape enhancement and management and maintenance operations and prepare design guidelines to guide future proposals) and referred to the on site surveys which were carried out on the land within the county borough ownership, private land immediately adjacent to the canal and land within the wider visual envelope which impacts upon the corridor. Reference was made to the various elements which had been taken into consideration (landscape and visual quality, ecology, engineering overview of canal condition, existing trees and woodland) and to the extensive consultation undertaken with the canal users prior to the report being finalised.

It was reported that the study found that the canal corridor has many strengths. It is a valuable landscape and recreational resource within the Ebbw Valley, containing sections of distinct rural and suburban landscape character. It acts as an important wildlife corridor and supports an array of habitat types. The canal towpath is heavily used as a footpath link and leisure resource and is valued for its peace, tranquility and wildlife. However, the study also identified weaknesses. The water level in the canal is variable and the canal structure is in need of localised repair. The significant quantity of litter along the corridor and a lack of consistent management have led to a perception of neglect.

Non native invasive plant species are rapidly colonising the canal banks and watercourse and there is a lack of integration with the wider landscape (including, views, footpath links and visitor locations).

Ms. Hawksworth explained that in order to maximise these strengths and address the weaknesses a 12 point list of strategic aims and objectives for the canal corridor has been developed as follows: -

1. Retain and strengthen the existing character of the canal within each character area.
2. Reinforce the linear canal feature within wider the landscape context.
3. Upgrade the standard of managed areas.
4. Define pedestrian, vehicular and shared use areas.
5. Rationalise street furniture and signage.
6. Provide historical reference.
7. Improve the corridors integration with adjacent areas.
8. Encourage biodiversity.
9. Improve the quality of the canal water.
10. Repair and improve the canal structure.
11. Create identifiable nodal points/areas.
12. Maximise the benefit of long distance views.

It was reported that a masterplan has been developed to enable the implementation of a series of actions to realise the list of aims and objectives over a number of stages. The masterplan identifies locations and prescribes the specific requirements for each location based on its universal, rural or suburban characteristics. Actions are varied and include the implementation of new works along with necessary repairs and urgent management actions.

Many of the masterplan prescriptions are 'small' scale and localised but several locations provide opportunity for larger scale enhancements. These are identified as 'Primary Enhancement Sites' and larger scale sketch scheme proposals have been prepared for these sites. The operations and sketch schemes recommended by the masterplan have been costed and prioritised to inform an achievable plan of action.

Reference was then made to the three stages of implementation and details of the specific schemes within those stages were outlined. A 10 year management and maintenance plan has also been prepared for the masterplan area. This sets out recommended maintenance and management operations. Scale plans identify the locations for action and the accompanying tables set out the recommended frequency of operations and approximate costs.

Members were then given the opportunity to raise on issues that had been highlighted over and above those already discussed during the course of the presentation. Ms. Hawksworth and Ms. Villeneuve responded to a number of questions raised in relation to seating, the additional car park spaces in the vicinity of the Forest Drive, the different surfaces proposed, the allotment site and the Crumlin Arm Interpretative Plan which had had previously been approved. With regards to the latter it was noted that the proposals for signing have been taken into account within the plan.

The Chairman thanked both Ms. Hawksworth and Ms. Villeneuve for their informative presentation and for responding to the queries raised by Members during the course of the presentation. He indicated that he would wish to see an item in Newsline and an exhibition in the locality in order that residents are able to see the proposals for the whole length of the canal.

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 proposals 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 planting 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 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.

Discussion then ensued on the recommendations contained within the report which were supported and endorsed and members were advised that following the initial discussions on 23rd April 2007 the preliminary recommendations of the Crumlin Arm Landscape Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan have been utilised in the identification of appropriate landscape proposals for inclusion in the second stage submission for Big Lottery funding. A number of the Plan's draft recommendations for specific locations that offer potential for landscape enhancement projects have been included in the Lottery bid.

RECOMMENDED to Council that: -

- (i) Council notes and endorses the content of the Crumlin Arm Landscape Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan;
- (ii) Council supports the inclusion of appropriate proposals for landscape enhancement works as set out in the Crumlin Arm Landscape Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan within the Council's Stage 2 submission to the Big Lottery Living Landmarks fund;
- (iii) Subject to Big Lottery's decision on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's Living Links project submission officers explore alternate funding options to implement, over an appropriate period of time, the landscape enhancement works set out in the Crumlin Arm Landscape Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan;
- (iv) Council supports the Crumlin Arm Landscape Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan proposals for enhancement of the existing landscape along the canal corridor and the recommended grassland and vegetation maintenance regime outlined in the Plan be initiated from summer 2007 onwards.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

5. Big Lottery - Living Landmarks Stage 2 Submission

It was reported that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's "Living Links" Stage 2 project submission to the Big Lottery's Living Landmarks fund was required by 31st May 2007. Following Consultants advice, a review had been undertaken of the project with particular focus on what improvements could be delivered along the canal corridor without exceeding the maximum funding cap of £33m. The project review was progressed on the premise that the funding, if secured, would help to deliver the long-term goals and not compromise future restoration of navigation.

Mr. Whetter referred to the review of the county borough priority proposals for inclusion in Stage 3 Lottery application as detailed in paragraph 9 of the report and referred specifically to the details contained within appendix B which highlighted the location, estimated cost and anticipated delivery date for the list of priority projects derived from the review. A full list of proposed engineering and landscape works included Big Lottery Stage 2 submission were also appended to the report.

Members were pleased to note that the review of the potential outputs of the Living Links project and ongoing liaison with the Big Lottery Project Monitoring Officer highlighted the need to include proposals within the bid that will empower communities to develop their social potential and local environment whilst providing benefit to the canal and the area through which it passes. As such, it is proposed that at least £1m (including match funding) of the overall Project budget be utilised to establish the "Living Links Community Project Fund". Agreement on the final detail of the scope, terms and conditions, project assessment regime and administration requirements of the proposed Community Project Fund is subject to ongoing discussion within the Regeneration Partnership.

Big Lottery have confirmed that their local Project Review visit for the Stage 2 submission is to take place over two days on 17th and 18th July 2007 during which the content of the application will be subject to detailed inspection and assessment. A decision is not anticipated until October/November 2007.

Discussion then ensued on the recommendations contained within the report which were supported and endorsed. As such it was

RECOMMENDED to Council that: -

- (i) Council notes the content of the report and acknowledges the need for the scope of the Big Lottery Stage 2 submission to be revised and curtailed due to estimated increased costs;
- (ii) Council supports the list of proposed engineering and landscape works detailed in Appendix B to the report as the Council's contribution to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's Living Links project and recommends that the proposals are submitted for consideration of award of Big Lottery Living Landmarks funding as part of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's Living Links project application;
- (iii) Council supports the principle of including the establishment of a Community Fund via the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's Living Links project should Big Lottery funding be awarded for implementation of the Living Links project;
- (iv) Subject to Big Lottery's decision on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership's Living Links project submission Officers explore alternate funding options to implement, over an appropriate period of time, the engineering works set out in the application to the Big Lottery.

6. Big Lottery - Living Landmarks Stage 2 - Additional Works at Manor Road and Severn Close, Risca

Members were advised that the Big Lottery Grants Officer was unable to provide a definitive response to the request that it consider the potential for the canal restoration work to be undertaken through the summer of 2007 and should the Stage 2 bid be approved at a later date the works costs be reimbursed retrospectively from the grant. He was also unable to provide a degree of certainty on availability of retrospective funding if the Stage 2 application is approved to implementation stage.

In view of Big Lottery's refusal to add to or clarify their past advice and acknowledging that the potential for repair works may be considered ineligible for award of Lottery grant the proposed works at Manor Road/Severn Close are to be included within the Stage 2 submission but will not be implemented in advance of Big Lottery's decision on the Stage 2 bid. Consequently with Big Lottery's decision on the Stage 3 bid not being made until October 2007 and canal works best undertaken in favourable weather conditions the canal repair works in the vicinity of Manor Road and Severn Close will be delayed until late Summer 2008. Tender documents for the works are currently being prepared in readiness should there be a change of circumstances.

Discussion then ensued on the recommendation contained within the report which was supported and endorsed. As such it was

RECOMMENDED to Council that it be acknowledged that implementation of the canal repair works in the vicinity of Manor Road and Severn Close, Risca is unable to proceed in advance of Big Lottery's decision on the Stage 2 funding application.

7. Big Lottery - Living Landmarks Stage 2 - Community Consultation

It was agreed that there is a need to progress consultation events that would update the community on the content of the Living Links final project submission and Lottery's timescales for consideration, assessment and approval of the bid and suggested that Newslines, local libraries, the college and local shops be used for this purpose. It was also proposed that the presentation should be made at a public meeting.

8. Groundwork's Canal Landscape Project

Members were pleased to note that the tender has been awarded to Blakedown Landscapes Limited and that the works are scheduled to commence on 4th June 2007 and should be completed within a 10 week period subject to seasonal requirements for planting, adverse weather and other unforeseen occurrences.

With regards to Pontywaun Spiritual Church representatives have been provided with the details of the Council's registered title to the land upon which the Church is constructed. The Council's Legal Services Department advise that the Church now need to progress this matter via Land Registry before returning to the Council and concluding this matter.

It was noted that the Islwyn Canal Association intend to hold a Canal Awareness Day in conjunction with the launch of the scheme and that there is an Eco Event to be held in Waunfawr Park on 4th August 2007. It was agreed that these events should also be used for consultation with the public.

9. 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. The bespoke seat has been fabricated and works instructed to prepare its plinth. It is expected that the installation of the monument will take place in early June 2007.

10. Crumlin Arm Interpretive Plan

It was noted that the receipt of the final proof of the leaflet developed by the Islwyn Canal Association and the Council's Countryside Services Section is awaited from the graphic designer prior to its printing. In association with Groundwork Caerphilly funding has been secured to produce and install up to six diamond interpretive panels at appropriate locations along the Canal. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the end of September 2007.

11. Capital Works For 2006/2007 and 2007/08

The Capital Works allocations for 2006/07 and 2007/08 have been set-aside as match funding to the potential Big Lottery grant to which the Authority is required to commit 25%.

12. Canal Works Current Status

It was noted that since March 2007 maintenance works have been progressed utilising specialised craft to remove weed and litter from overgrown lengths of the canal channel. Works have also been undertaken to remove silt and debris from the dewatered Nantcarn Aqueduct at Cwmcarn. The bed of the aqueduct has been protected on a temporary basis with inert material in an attempt to address residents concerns over odours emanating from the dewatered stretch of canal during summer of 2006.

Specialist ground investigation has been undertaken over a 600m length of canal towpath south of Manor Road to provide information for the ongoing design of the works required in that vicinity.

13. Licensing and Control - Use of the Canal by Whysom's Wharf Limited

Members were reminded of the application received from Mr. R. Wysom on behalf of Whysom's Wharf proposing to utilise the canal between Darren Road Bridge and Pontywaun for the operation of up to six unpowered craft as part of his tourism and leisure based business activities and advised that Officers have now met Mr. Wysom to discuss the detail of his proposal and the proposed methods of operation particularly with regard to potential concerns raised by the Directorate of the Environment's Corporate Safety Officer. Further to the meeting a revised proposal was received the content of which clarified the extent of the proposed use and provided greater detail on health and safety procedures.

It was noted that the revised proposal seeks consent for Whysom's Wharf's use of the Canal for the business operation of up to six rowing boats located between Darren Road Bridge and Pontywaun Slipway from the 1st April and 30th September (both dates inclusive) with the hours of operation being 9.30am until 30 minutes before dusk. Officers consider the proposed business use and the intended method of operations set out in Mr. Wysom's revised proposal are acceptable subject to Mr Wysom providing proof of the appropriate liability insurance cover and appropriate current boat safety certificates for the craft.

Discussion then ensued on the recommendations contained within the report which were supported and endorsed. As such it was

RECOMMENDED to Council that: -

- (i) Council acknowledges the proposed use of the Canal for business based activities;
- (ii) the Head of Legal Services be instructed to prepare a formal Agreement between the Council and Mr Wysom to allow Whysom's Wharf to operate up to six rowing boats on the Canal for business use between 1st April and 30th September (both dates inclusive);
- (iii) the Head of Legal Services include appropriate clauses within the Agreement that confirm that the Council is unable to guarantee continuity, quantity and quality of water within the Canal and that the Agreement incorporate a termination clause that the Council may initiate at any time with an appropriate period of notice.

14. Licensing and Control - Provision of Insurance

It was noted that the owner of the "Wendy E" craft has now provided a current boat safety certificate and insurance certificate confirming third party liability of £3 million and as such may remain on the Canal and be used for individual private boat use between 1st April and 30th September 2007.

15. Correspondence

There had been no correspondence received prior to the preparation of the agenda.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

16. Lining of Canal Bank

Reference was made to the nature of the lining placed on the banking in the Crosskeys area and it was confirmed that in order to prevent seepages, the material used is Geotexture. As part of the landscaping proposals, planting will be undertaken which should have the effect of making the surface less smooth in nature.

17. Grass Cutting Regime

Reference was made to the grass cutting regime and to the proposals to cut different swaths on the banking to the canal and the verge alongside the towpath. It was noted that at present specialised machinery is hired for this purpose and Mr. Ridgewell was requested to determine as to whether it would be more cost effective to purchase one and to report thereon to the next meeting.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting be arranged in consultation with the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 12 noon