



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE,
YSTRAD MYNACH ON 28TH NOVEMBER 2008 AT 10.00AM**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Miss L. Ackerman, D.M. Gray, S. Jenkins, M.H. Newman, M.G. Parker, D.W.R Preece

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

Together with:

D. Rees (Senior Engineer), K. Kinsey (Senior Engineer Consultancy), N. Liversuch (Principal Planner, Countryside and Landscape Services), V. Tomlin (Senior Planning Officer), S. Trew (Senior Horticultural Officer), G. Gordon (Senior Assistant Solicitor), H.C. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Davies, Mrs. P. Griffiths, K. James, D. Rees and Mrs. B.M. Toomer, R. Davies (European Officer), R. Keep (Outdoor Education Manager) and D. Price (Principle Parks and Open Spaces Officer)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor S. Jenkins was appointed to the Chair, Mr. R. Dommett was appointed as Vice Chair.

2. MINUTES - 28TH FEBRUARY 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th February 2008 were approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF WORKING GROUP

The terms of reference of the Group which had been approved on 20th September 2005 were noted.

4. CYCLIC MAINTENANCE/OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Members received a report on the activities on the canal and specific reference was made to proposals to continue National cycle route 47 from Medart Street along the canal bank at Pontywaun and a query was raised as to whether, in view of maintenance works required to the bridge, this would be possible. Mr. Rees confirmed that works are to be undertaken under the bridge and indicated that any proposal to use that area as part of the cycle route would be given due consideration when such an application is received. A query was also raised as to whether cycle racks would be provided as part of the cycle route proposal and it was noted that this would be taken into account at that time.

With regards to concerns expressed in relation to the vegetation along the canal, Mr. Liversuch referred to a number of legislative issues that had to be taken into account and to the agreed grass cutting and tree management regime produced as part of the Management and Enhancement Opportunities Plan, which would be revisited if required. This is supported by a programme of channel maintenance works including dredging, weed clearance and removal of litter from the canal channel and adjoining embankments and towpath. It was noted that in line with the recommendations within the Corridor Study it had been agreed that certain areas of the embankment would not be cut to enable them to revert to a more ecologically friendly and natural environment.

With regards to vegetation growth within the canal channel and its effect on the integrity of the canal and its water flow, it was noted that the Warden does regularly patrol the towpath and is able to highlight areas within the canal channel which require attention. It was noted that the weed clearance programme would continue and those areas which could not be cleaned due to the relining works will be addressed once those works have been completed.

5. BRITISH WATERWAYS MAINTENANCE PLAN

Mr. Rees referred to the document produced by British Waterways in relation to the inspection regimes for canals and to the use of its framework in formulating such a regime for the canal in line with a recognised inspection process.

Mrs. Tomlin reported that the Canal is identified as a site of importance for nature conservation in the emerging deposit local development plan and, as such, it is essential that a maintenance plan is in place. Mr. Liversuch referred to discussions at previous meetings on the maintenance regime of the canal and it was agreed that this should be reviewed and further discussed at the next meeting if required.

It was noted that at present when the Warden walks the canal he does prepare a report which identifies the defects and the action to be taken. The Engineers also regularly inspect the integrity of the canal.

6. CANAL ISSUES AT PONTYWAUN

Reference was made to a letter which had been received regarding proposals to block the road bridge in Pontywaun, where Twyncarn Road crosses the canal past the entrance to Halls Road over the railway onto High Street, Crosskeys, and to concerns that, as this is

the only access to the canal section at Pontywaun, necessary maintenance would not be able to be undertaken.

Mr. Kinsey referred to the works that have been undertaken in that area to strengthen and protect the integrity of the bridge and confirmed that there will still be access to the canal to enable future maintenance works to be undertaken as and when required.

Reference was made to the grade 2 listed Nant Carn aqueduct and it was noted that it will remain drained while Officers explore sources of funding to enable the historic structure to be repaired and restored.

7. INTERPRETIVE WORKS

Mr. Liversuch referred to the role of the Islwyn Canal Association in progressing the interpretive works and was pleased to announce that the proposals within the Crumlin Arm Interpretation Strategy have been adopted for the whole of the canal network and as such, there will be continuity in the format of signage, interpretation and artwork along the whole length of the canal.

The Welsh Assembly Government grant has enabled the strategy to be progressed. Mr. Liversuch referred to the different forms of interpretation, upgraded benches with interpretive backrests, bespoke sculptural fencing, the diamond interpretation signs to provide coverage at key locations (between Cwmcarn and Harry Roberts Bridge, Pontymister) and the interpretive signs which will cover the entire length of canal within the County Borough. Photographs of the foregoing and details of the proposed leaflet which showed an overview of the canal and identified features along its length were circulated for information.

Members wished to place on record their appreciation to all those involved in the preparation and implementation of the strategy and particular reference was made to the quality and descriptiveness of the proposed leaflet. It was accepted that there is a need to promote the canal to raise awareness of the facility and what it can offer and suggested that an item should be prepared for inclusion in Newslines.

8. CAPITAL SCHEMES - MANOR ROAD, TEMPERANCE HILL, PONTYWAUN

Photographs showing ongoing works at Temperance Hill were circulated and Mr. Kinsey highlighted the longstanding problem with leaks from the canal in that area and the requirement to drain that section of the canal to enable the investigations to be undertaken and facilitate the required works. It was reported that investigations have shown anomalies in the existing liner along the canal and as such, any accumulated silt and remnants of the clay liner will be excavated and a geogrid reinforced sub-base layer and a synthetic and puddle clay liner will be installed.

It was reported that the Manor Road section has been completely realigned and as part of the scheme 600m of towpath have been resurfaced and minor landscape improvements undertaken to the entrance to the slipway and areas of paver.

With regards to Pontywaun, ongoing works have uncovered a problem with an existing surface water culvert which runs below the canal at this location. Investigation works have determined that canal water is seeping through a weakness in the clay liner and entering the culvert. Various repair options have been considered and at present the most favourable appears to be the use of a proprietary structural lining system. Quotations for the work have been sought and it is anticipated that works will begin before Christmas.

Reference was made to the integrity of the whole length of the canal and the specific sections that require attention. Mr. Kinsey pointed out that the initial technical report looked at the whole length of the canal and gave 'weight risks' to the various sections. Those in risk category 5 appear in the middle sections of the canal (Manor Road/Navigation Road) and as such, are required to be addressed first.

9. **COMPETITION FOR CAPITAL FUNDING/FUTURE PRIORITIES**

Mr. Rees reported that whereas in the past a budget has been allocated for works to the canal, in future all major works will be funded corporately and as such, any projects will have to compete with other schemes to ensure the effective use of limited resources.

Concerns were expressed at the proposed changes and Mr. Rees referred to ongoing discussions to ensure sufficient funding is available to enable the length of the canal to be brought up to standard and would report further at the next meeting. Those present offered their support to Mr. Rees in seeking to retain sufficient funding to meet remaining liabilities and secure further improvements and asked that their concerns be raised at that time.

10. **AQUADAM**

Reference was made to the system which has been purchased to use in sections of the canal in cases of emergency and, after viewing a photograph of it in situ, Mr. Kinsey explained its gravitational operation. It was noted that the polyethylene aquadam is lightweight, easy to transport, can be reused, be deployed within 2/3 hours (depending on the width of the canal) and be used for many types of water containment.

11. **FUNDING SOURCES - CONVERGENCE FUNDING/AGGREGATE LEVY FUND ETC**

Mr. Rees referred to difficulties in identifying capital funding and reported that the Partnership are exploring other sources of funding (CADW, convergence fund, landfill tax fund, competitiveness fund) and that Torfaen County Borough Council are putting together a bid on behalf of the Partnership. The Steering Group will be meeting to consider the bid and its subsequent submission. It was noted that the application to the Aggregate Levy fund had not met the criteria and as such the bid had been unsuccessful.

12. **MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANALS REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP MBACT AND NCC COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AND NEW DEAL PARTNERSHIP SKILLS TRAINING SCHEME**

Mr. R.J. Dommett, Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust, reported that the present phase of the scheme is being funded from a Landfill Tax grant provided by 'Corus' through Arena Network Wales and that the participation of Community Volunteers and representatives from the Waterway Recovery Group and New Deal Trainees will be key to the success of the project. The scheme is being monitored by 'Entrust' The Environmental Trust Scheme Regulatory Body.

It was noted that the objective of the programme is to re-restore canal structures, stop water seepage, de-silt the canal and complete the off side cutting of vegetation and overhanging tree branches by March 2010 for the May IWA National Trail Boat Festival at Kimberly Park, Newport. Mr. Dommett highlighted the restoration through the Skills Training Works Programme that have taken place to date (rebuilding and pointing of chamber wall Waen Lock 3, reconstruction of top gate call Waen Lock 3, offside vegetation control below Dock Lock) and confirmed that the construction of one pedestrian gate and

two field gates which will be fitted to site compound security fencing in Kimberly Park has almost been completed. It was reported that City and Guilds have indicated that it may be possible to use existing training modules to provide skills for volunteers (Certificate of Competence Level 2) and that formal confirmation is awaited. However, in the meantime, a plan of regeneration projects which can be delivered by Community Volunteers or a mix of volunteers and Contractors is in the process of being prepared and would be presented to the next meeting.

Mr. Dommatt then referred to funding issues associated with the partnership schemes and specifically to the meeting which was held in Southampton on 20th November 2008 and to the issues that had been raised at that time. He confirmed that proposals to bring together the environmental boating and volunteer elements will be circulated by the end of December and that each partner had been requested to draw up local project proposals and budgets and forward them to British Waterways by the end of January 2009. A new project application will be drafted in February 2009 for submission early in March.

Members were pleased to note that the National Waterway Recovery Group would be undertaking a series a work camps (July 2009 for the reconstruction of Malpas footbridge and Bettws Slipway and in October 2009 the de silting of the canal channel and offside cutting at Tamplin Lock).

With regards to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Regeneration Partnership Scheme Mr. Dommatt reported that the draft priority list of vulnerable structures have been completed. Engineers from each authority are in the process of reviewing the list and the Planning Sub-Group have met and are examining possible sources of funding.

It was noted that the Cefn Flight of Fourteen Locks New Visitor Centre has been open for nearly nine months and has had 15,000 visitors to date. The next main events are an evening with the Salvation Army on 11th December and the Christmas Grotto on 13th, 14th, 20th and 21st December 2008.

13. **FREQUENCY OF FUTURE WORKING GROUP MEETINGS**

It was agreed that the Group should meet on a six monthly basis (special meetings would be arranged as and when required) and that prior to the next meeting a site meeting be arranged for the Group to walk the Canal.

The meeting closed at 11.50am