



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
FRIDAY 25TH OCTOBER 2013 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT:

Mr R.J. Dommett - Chair

Councillors:

N. George, Mrs P. Griffiths, K. James, A. Lewis, D.W.R Preece

Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering – Councillor T.J. Williams

Together with:

K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer - Consultancy), R. Davies (Funding Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ms L. Ackerman, Mrs K.R. Baker, D.M. Gray, G. Johnston, K. Lloyd, Mrs R. Passmore and D. Rees, together with Mr. Bernard Illman, Chair of Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 21ST JUNE 2013

Subject to the addition of Cabinet Member T.J. Williams in the list of attendees, the minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2013 were approved as a correct record.

With regards to matters arising, discussions ensued regarding possible strategic funding that could become available for the Canal. Councillor D.W.R. Preece confirmed that he had received no response as yet from the local Industrial Rambling Group but was hopeful that they would attend a future meeting of the Working Group. Kevin Kinsey, Principal Engineer, advised Members that Welsh Water are continuing investigations into the contamination of water into the Canal from the Manor Road feeder.

REPORT OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following items.

4. MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Kevin Kinsey presented an update on matters relating to the Canal, and informed Members that some of the information provided in the written copy of the report included in their papers was inaccurate, as the information detailed in the report referred to a point in time from earlier in the year. The correct information was provided verbally at the meeting.

Canal Channel – Members were advised that weed cutting and channel clearance works were suspended for the remainder of the year due to budget constraints, and it was hoped to reinstate the regime during 2014/15 with a continued frequency of two visits.

Grass Maintenance – Members were advised that the final cut of the season was taking place week commencing 21st October 2013 and that it would include removal and treatment of all saplings growing along the canal fringes on the towpath side of the channel.

Members were informed that the Engineering department were investigating the possibility of permitting the canal to be used by local diving clubs.

Members relayed complaints received from local anglers who were unable to access specific sections of the canal. Members were advised that maintenance crews had been experiencing difficulty with the grass cut, and were looking to complete specific sections as soon as possible. It was also confirmed that the grass was cut back on the grounds of public safety in order to identify the canal edge.

5. 2013/2014 WORKS PROGRAMME

Towpath – no maintenance works are planned for this year.

Access Enhancement – no works are planned for this year.

Water Control - no further water control measures are planned for this year.

Dredging - no dredging is planned for this year.

Tree Maintenance – due to budget constraints, the planned tree survey over the full length of the canal has been put on hold. All tree maintenance work is presently reactive in nature.

External Funding - there are no external funding sources available at present.

Channel Leak Repair – value engineering is currently being undertaken for the re-lining scheme at the Pontywaun section of the canal. This exercise is being undertaken to attempt to maximise the length of canal section that can be re-lined with the limited budget. It is hoped that the timing of these works will allow the use of the 2014/2015 budget so that the first two phases of work are effectively undertaken in one longer phase.

6. FUNDING

Capital - a capital budget of £250,000 has been allocated for the 2013/2014 financial year, which will be used to progress the channel leak repair at Pontywaun. Initial indications are

that this level of funding will be sustained during the financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16, although given the current economic climate there can be no guarantees in this respect.

Revenue - the 2013/2014 budget was initially set at £152,000 but has been further reduced to account for Medium Term Financial Plan savings of £30,000, and now stands at £123,000. The budget carry over from 2011/12 and 2012/13, which had accrued to a sum of £214,000, has been reallocated to working balances and lost.

Expenditure under this heading is allocated to cover the cost of grass and channel maintenance, tree maintenance, general cleansing, towpath repair, management cost, emergency response and the repair of the leak at Pontywaun. In this respect recent expenditure to repair a leak at Pontygriag Bridge has taken a substantial slice from this budget, amounting to some £80,000 in total.

All routine maintenance works programmed for the 2013/14 financial year have been reduced to those which are essential for public safety and to ensure the integrity of the canal.

7. BOATS

The Islwyn Canal Association was recently granted a licence for the operation of a trip boat. The boat, the Islwyn Lily, will be moored at Whysom's Wharf, Risca. It is unclear at this time when regular trips will commence, although the intention is to commence trips once the repairs have been completed.

The Chair confirmed that good progress is being made on the maintenance works to the boat, and was hopeful that these would be completed with a view to using the boat for a proposed delegation visit in May/June 2014.

Following the presentation of the Principal Engineer's report, Members were advised that a request has been made by one of the local Scout Groups to use the canal for canoeing. Members discussed this request and unanimously agreed that this request be taken forward for initial discussion with the interested parties.

Reference was made to the 2014 Canalathon, a multi-activity challenge involving over 200 participants, which will take place along the length of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal from Pontymoile, through Talybont to Brecon. The event will take place in September 2014 and a steering group has been established between the various Authorities involved in the event.

Members also discussed complaints regarding fish poaching from the Canal and it was advised that this was not within the remit of the Working Group.

8. REPORT FROM MR R. DOMMETT, MONMOUTHSHIRE, BRECON AND ABERGAVENNY CANAL TRUST REGENERATION MANAGER

Mr Dommett reported on his recent visit to the World Canal Conference in Toulouse in September 2013. The conference ran for 4 days and was extremely well-attended, with half the delegates from the USA and Canada, and the remainder from countries including China and Europe. The delegate presentations were very popular and heavily subscribed, with Mr Dommett's presentation at the conference focussing on the work of volunteers, the Waterworks project at Ty Coch, work at Fourteen Locks, and maintenance works by Caerphilly Council's Engineering department. The subsequent debate centred around the way that canals are managed, partnerships with authorities, privatisation of some sections of the canal, and the collaborative work of the authorities with a vision to one day fully restoring the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.

Mr Dommett also attended the conference with a view to instigating partnership and funding collaborations between European counterparts, and received interest from representatives from Northern Ireland, several members of the EU, and Serbia. Particular headway was made with a delegation from Toulouse, whose canal had been granted World Heritage Status. Arrangements have been made for the group to visit Wales on a study tour in May-June 2014, with Monmouthshire Council as the lead host authority. Mr Dommett outlined a draft itinerary, with visits to a number of local tourist attractions in South Wales, and with a possibility of the group visiting Whysom's Wharf if the tour was extended into 4 days.

Mr Dommett had also had contact with canal representatives from Serbia with a view to possibly repeating the itinerary for them. There was interest from the Netherlands, and also from Inland Waterways Europe, the organisers of the World Canal Conference. Mr Dommett also informed Members that a new partnership and organisation was being established to focus on smaller waterways. This would be based in Belgium and would assist smaller canals in becoming more involved with European funding.

Mr Dommett stated that the conference was well organised and had provided a firm basis for establishing a unitary authority for dealing with waterways. Overall it had been a success and had offered excellent value for money. Members extended their thanks and congratulations to the Chair for all his efforts during the conference.

Members asked a number of questions surrounding the conference and Mr Dommett confirmed that other delegates were experiencing similar problems with their canals, including low bridges and poor water quality. Robert Davies, Funding Officer for Business Development, confirmed that he would contact the Project Officer of the Community Enterprise project to see if funding was still available for bids from Community Enterprise organisations. Officers arranged to make initial enquiries regarding the possibility of Caerphilly Council assisting in promoting the proposed delegation visit.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The question of ownership in relation to Canal issues encountered by the Working Group was highlighted by Members and Officers, and the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering confirmed that he would discuss this with the Head of Engineering Services.

The meeting closed at 11.17 am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Friday 28th February 2014 at 10.00 am.