



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
FRIDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2014 AT 9.00 AM**

PRESENT:

Mr R.J. Dommett - Chair
Councillor N. George - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

A. Lewis, K. Lloyd

Together with:

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

D. Humphreys (Pollution Technician, Welsh Water), B. Illman (Chairman Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust), W. Mitchell (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust Volunteer)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

In the absence of a quorum, it was agreed that the appointment of a Chair and Vice-Chair would be deferred to the next meeting. In the interim, Mr R. Dommett took the Chair for this meeting.

2. BEREAVEMENT

The Chair referred to the recent death of former Councillor Allan Pritchard and all present stood in silence as a mark of respect and extended their condolences to the bereaved family.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms L. Ackerman, Mrs K.R. Baker, D.M. Gray, Mrs P. Griffiths, K. James, G. Johnston, Ms P. Leonard, Mrs R. Passmore, D.W.R Preece and D. Rees, together with Councillor T.J. Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

5. **MINUTES – 25TH OCTOBER 2013**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group meeting held on 25th October 2013 (minute nos. 1 - 9, on page nos. 1 - 4) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. **MAINTENANCE UPDATE**

Kevin Kinsey, Principal Engineer presented an update on matters relating to the Canal.

Canal Channel – Members were advised that weed cutting and channel clearance would be reinstated for 2014/15 with a continued frequency of two visits.

Grass Maintenance – Members were advised that the first cut of the season would be undertaken during the week commencing 24th March 2014, and that it would include removal and treatment of all saplings growing along the canal fringes on the towpath side of the channel. Subsequent cuts would be on a monthly basis up until October 2014, at which time they would be suspended for the winter months.

7. **2014/2015 WORKS PROGRAMME**

Towpath – maintenance works are programmed to raise a short length of canal bank to the rear of Brynhyfryd Terrace. There is a long-standing problem with overtopping during periods of heavy rainfall and this year there have been two requests for the provision of sandbags.

Access Enhancement – no works are planned for this year.

Water Control – investigation works are programmed to determine the cause of the excessive quantities of silt that are being carried into the canal via the Cwm Byr stream. Recent monitoring suggests that these volumes have increased.

Dredging – dredging works are planned for the section of canal between Green Meadow Bridge and Darran Road Bridge in order to restore a navigable route through this section.

Tree Maintenance – budget permitting, it is planned to undertake a tree survey over the full length of the canal and undertake recommended maintenance work.

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

Channel Leak Repair – works to repair the leak within the Pontywaun section of canal started the first week of February and are programmed to continue into June. The timing of these works have allowed the use of the 2014/2015 budget so that the first two phases of work can be completed.

8. FUNDING

Capital – a Capital budget of £212,000 has been allocated for the 2014/2015 financial year and this funding 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 2015/16, although given the current economic climate there can be no guarantees in this respect.

Revenue – the 2013/2014 budget allocation was £124,000 and, at the time of writing, £3500 remained unspent. The remaining budget will be used to undertake a long standing repair to a damaged wall at Navigation Street, and form a ramp into the canal at this location to allow the weed cutting boat access to the canal channel. The 2014/2015 budget allocation is £126,500.

Expenditure under this heading is allocated to cover the cost of grass and channel maintenance, tree maintenance, general cleansing, towpath repair, management cost and emergency response.

9. BOATS

No update in this respect. Members were advised that there had been no further information received regarding the recent request from a local Scout Group to use the canal for canoeing.

10. TERM SERVICE CONTRACT

The current term service maintenance contract is due to end this month. Provision has been made to extend it by 6 months to allow procurement of a new contract.

Members thanked the Principal Engineer for his report and queried whether the Authority had a facility to publish news stories in relation to the Canal. It was advised that a slot had already been reserved in March's edition of Newslines regarding use of the canal towpaths by cyclists, which could possibly be utilised for this purpose.

Mr Dommatt referenced the work of the Cross Party Group on Waterways and encouraged all Members of the Working Group to attend.

11. USE OF THE CANAL TOWPATH BY CYCLISTS AND INTRODUCTION OF A CODE OF CONDUCT

Members were informed that there had historically been numerous complaints received from the public regarding the use of bicycles on the canal towpath. Members added that this was possibly owing to a rumoured 'covenant' that prohibited the use of the towpath by cyclists. The Principal Engineer informed Members that whilst research could not verify the existence of such a ruling, it was acknowledged that there were occasionally problems with users cycling down the towpath at great speeds and presenting a danger to pedestrians. This problem had already been addressed via the introduction of chicane and K barriers to slow down cyclists, but it was recognised that additional measures needed to be implemented.

Following research on this issue, the Principal Engineer contacted Sustrans, who located a briefing note from the Inland Waterways Association regarding the use of towpaths for cycling. It was proposed that the Cycling Code contained within this document be adopted as a Code of Conduct throughout the Authority's network of towpaths, with the Code giving priority to pedestrians. It was proposed that an article be placed in Newslines and that information be displayed at Cwmcarn Visitor Centre and on signage placed at both ends of the Canal.

Members discussed the proposed Code of Conduct and raised a number of issues in relation to cycling etiquette and towpath rights of way. Members noted the proposed Code of Conduct and it was confirmed that it would be trialled on a short section of the Canal in the first instance.

12. WATER SUPPLY ISSUE AT MANOR ROAD, RISCA – PRESENTATION BY WELSH WATER

Wyn Mitchell, of the Monmouthshire Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust (MBACT) introduced the issue to Members. He explained that several years ago, Caerphilly Council identified that the water supply at Manor Road, Risca was polluted, and the water supply was subsequently turned off to prevent further contamination. This subsequently had a detrimental effect on water levels in the canal, and so MBACT approached Welsh Water earlier in the year with a view to resolving the issue. Mr Mitchell informed Members that Welsh Water had been very helpful, and invited Dan Humphreys, Welsh Water Pollution Technician, to explain the details of the investigatory works to the Committee.

With the aid of a slide presentation, Mr Humphreys detailed the investigation undertaken by Welsh Water to determine the cause of the pollution. Members were provided with an overview of Welsh Water and informed of their pollution reduction strategy, which included complying with pollution targets and liaising with bodies such as the Environment Agency.

Mr Humphreys outlined the Private Sewer Transfer (PST) legislation, which came into effect in October 2011 and resulted in a very large increase to Welsh Water's sewer ownership. He explained that due to the number of pollution investigations caused by incorrectly connected drains, Welsh Water have a dedicated number of misconnection teams to deal with this issue. Investigatory findings are then passed onto the Environmental Health department of the relevant local authority and National Resources Wales where required.

Mr Humphreys tabled a number of photographs that outlined the investigatory work involved in establishing pollution locations. He explained that following reports of pollution, the next step would be for a visual inspection and camera survey to take place, with staining in sewer pipes identifying individual properties and the possible cause of pollution. The Manor Road pollution investigation subsequently led the team up through the Ty Sign estate and identified two separate sewer systems that run very closely together. The team encountered many issues along the way, including blockages in the system, a lack of access to the system, and difficulty in prising up manholes without damaging surrounding areas.

The investigation was eventually successful and established that the pollution had been caused by misconnections to seven properties located towards the top of Ty Sign. Mr Humphreys confirmed that Welsh Water was now in the process of liaising with these householders with a view to rectifying the misconnected drains.

Discussion ensued regarding the report and Members queried the technical aspects of the investigation and the methods of financial assistance available to the affected homeowners. Members were pleased to note that the cause of the pollution had been identified, and thanked Mr Humphreys for his informative presentation.

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

Mr Dommatt referred 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. Members and Officers were invited to participate in the event, which will take place in September 2014.

Members were informed that this year's World Canal Conference would be held in Milan between 1st-4th September 2014. Mr Dommett confirmed that the specifics of his report were being finalised and that he would provide an update at the next meeting of the Working Group in June 2014. He also made reference to preparations for the the upcoming Welsh Waterways Rally at Five Locks in Cwmbran.

Mr Dommett was thanked for his report and Mr Illman confirmed that MBACT's Annual Duck Race at Llangynidr would be held the week after the Rally, with an update to follow on the MBACT blog. Mr Dommett also discussed the business arm of the Working Group and discussed the relocation of the MBACT office to new premises in Newport.

The Chair also asked those Members in attendance to encourage the other Members of the Working Group to attend the next meeting, in order to facilitate the election of the Chair and Vice-Chair.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair informed those Members present that Mr Bernard Illman would wish to formally attend the meetings in his capacity as a Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust representative. It was agreed that the necessary arrangements be made.

The meeting closed at 10.27 am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Friday 20th June 2014 at 10.00 am.