



## **MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON  
THURSDAY 18TH JUNE 2015 AT 10.00 AM**

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PRESENT

Mr R.J. Dommett – Vice-Chair - Presiding

Councillors:

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

Together with:

A. Bolter (Group Manager – Strategy, Funding and Support), K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer - Consultancy), C. Bradley (Funding Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

Mr B. Illman (Crumlin Arm Representative, Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust)

Also present:

Mr M. West (Local Resident)

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms L. Ackerman, Mrs K.R. Baker, N. George, Ms P. Leonard, K. Lloyd and Mrs R. Passmore, together with Councillor T.J. Williams (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

In the absence of the Chair, Mr R.J. Dommett presided as Chair for this meeting.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### **3. MINUTES – 26TH FEBRUARY 2015**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th February 2015 were approved as a correct record.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

A Member raised a query regarding the possible re-routing of the Cwm Byr Stream referenced in the meeting of 26th February 2015. The planned re-routing had arisen from a member of the public altering the original course in recent years, which had subsequently led to a rise in erosion and silting issues. Officers confirmed that works had now been carried out by National Resources Wales to re-direct the stream into the most recent and deepest of the existing courses. Officers confirmed that there was uncertainty as to whether the stream would eventually be re-routed back along its original course but that the situation would be monitored to gauge the re-effectiveness of the remedial redirection of the stream.

At the last Canal Group meeting, discussion took place on the history of the Harry Roberts Bridge, and several Members of the Group agreed that they would try to find out more information regarding the matter. Mr Illman advised the Group that following a number of avenues of enquiry, local residents had confirmed that Harry Roberts was believed to be a local boatman. However, more extensive searches through local newspaper archives had proven fruitless. Officers confirmed that they had also looked into the matter and enquiries revealed that in addition to being a boatman, Harry Roberts was also a landowner of nearby cottages. Mr Dommatt added that he had examined historical railway plans and they indicated that there were indeed a number of landowners within this area back in the day.

Mr West, a local resident who was viewing proceedings from the public gallery, asked to volunteer some information and advised the Group that he believed it was the “Henry” Roberts Bridge, and not the “Harry” Roberts Bridge. Members confirmed that they would continue to investigate other avenues in an attempt to find out more about the history of this bridge.

#### **5. PRESENTATION - BIODIVERSITY ISSUES**

Mr Michael West, a local resident from Risca, was invited to the table and welcomed to the meeting. Following a request made to Councillor Nigel George, the Chair of the Canal Group, it had been agreed that Mr West could attend the meeting to address the Canal Group in relation to biodiversity concerns surrounding the Canal.

Mr West explained to the Group that he had concerns about the impact of towpath grass-cutting on wildlife in the area. Members were shown a slideshow which contained photographs of adult ducks and ducklings, together with grass snakes, kingfishers and other wildlife along the Canal. The photographs also compared free-growing foliage with some towpath sections of grass that had been cut back. These photographs had been taken along the section of the Canal around Pontymister and the Pontygraig Bridge.

Mr West explained that it was important for wildlife to have some long grass alongside the Canal in order to thrive, and that the grass-cutting measures could have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of wildlife in the area. He appealed to the Group to find a way forward and consider maintaining a balance between current grass-cutting measures and the long term biodiversity of the Canal. He suggested that a trial could be undertaken to allow a section of the Canal to remain free-growing in order to afford local wildlife some shelter.

Discussion of the issues raised by Mr West ensued, with Mr Illman explaining that the Canal and River Trust had also addressed this matter several times. The Trust have produced a document containing recommended grass-cutting measures and Mr Illman offered to send this document to Mr West. Mr Illman also added that the Canal and River Trust were looking for a volunteer to monitor the wellbeing of wildlife in the local area and indicated that he would further discuss this matter with Mr West following the meeting.

Members explained that grass-cutting measures had been implemented following numerous complaints from local residents about being unable to detect the towpath edge of the Canal.

However, in view of Mr West's comments, they indicated that the possibility of a trial period to incorporate a reduction in grass-cutting along a section of the Canal (from Manor Way downwards) would be examined.

Officers queried whether a compromise could be reached in that the section of grass nearest the towpath be cut back for members of the public to detect the Canal edge but then the remainder of the strip behind this section remain free-growing. The Principal Engineer confirmed that this was very similar to the approach recommended by the Canal and River Trust but that the Council had implemented the procedure to cut the grass to the water's edge and it would be for Members of the Canal Group to confirm how they wished to proceed on this matter. Officers raised a concern that long-growing grass at the water's end could encourage rodents to run across the towpath to foliage on the other side.

A Member expressed concern at the possible impact that this proposal could have on the safety of users of the towpath, which was also very popular with cyclists. Mr West stated that he appreciated this consideration in regards to the busier areas of the Canal but that perhaps the Group could look at applying a grass-cutting reduction to a quieter section in the Pontymister area of the Canal.

Members of the Group made reference to the disappearance of wildlife along sections of the Canal within other areas of South Wales and reiterated the importance of protecting wildlife in the area and maintaining an ecological balance along the Canal.

Mr West also raised a query regarding the Ty Sign culvert along Manor Road and asked if this water could be utilised for use within the Canal. The Principal Engineer confirmed that this culvert was the property of Welsh Water and that a representative from the Canal and River Trust was currently in discussions with Welsh Water as to its future use.

Having regard to the biodiversity issues raised by Mr West, it was moved and seconded that a trial to reduce grass-cutting measures along a section of the Canal between Manor Way and the Harry/Henry Roberts Bridge be implemented. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed. It was also agreed that the Principal Engineer would make reference to the Canal and River Trust guidance as to the most beneficial method of grass-cutting within this trial section and that the Group be kept informed of progress on this matter.

Mr West was thanked for his representations and he expressed his thanks to the Group in turn. Mr West, along with a friend who had been seated in the public gallery, then left the meeting at this point.

## **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** – Weed cutting/channel clearance is to be programmed for late summer due to issues experienced last year with nesting birds.

**Grass Maintenance** – Grass cutting has been re-started with the first cut in March 2015 and will continue on a 4-weekly cycle up to October 2015. The Principal Engineering advised that Mr West's comments would be taken into account with regards to future grass-cutting measures.

## 7. 2015/2016 WORKS PROGRAMME

**Towpath** – works were completed before Christmas to raise a short length of canal bank to the rear of Brynhyfryd Terrace. These works were undertaken to address a long-standing problem with overtopping during periods of heavy rainfall. The works appear to have resolved the issue, and no further complaints have been received post-construction.

**Access Enhancement** – no works are planned for this year.

Discussion took place between Members and Officers regarding a railway bridge in this area of Pontywaun and the future use of the surrounding area.

**Water Control** – National Resources Wales are looking into re-routing the Cwm Byr Stream back along its original course. Apart from the discussion that took place earlier in the meeting, there is no further update to report in respect of this matter.

Mr Dommatt made reference to planned works being undertaken to a dam at Fourteen Locks in September 2015 and made a request for water from the Canal to be provided to this section. The Principal Engineer confirmed that it was likely that relining works would be undertaken along the Crumlin Arm of the Canal in August 2015 but that he would discuss the matter with Mr Dommatt nearer the time.

**Dredging** – a short section of canal channel between Green Meadow Bridge and Darran Road Bridge was dredged in March 2015 to restore a navigable route through this section. Due to issues with the disposal of the wet silt, the dredged material was placed against the far bank within the Canal channel.

Officers confirmed that the Islwyn Lily tour boat was subsequently able to navigate through this section, albeit the Canal being slightly shallow in parts.

**Tree Maintenance** – CCBC are currently in the process of securing quotations for a tree survey over the full length of the canal. Any identified works will be undertaken in Autumn 2015.

A Member had queried at a previous meeting whether this tree survey will include a section of the Canal adjacent to the Newbridge Roundabout. Officers confirmed that they had made enquiries into this matter and it appeared that the Council are not responsible for tree maintenance within this section of the Canal. Discussion also took place regarding the connection of piping within that section of the Canal and Officers agreed that they would make enquiries in respect of this matter.

**External Funding** – Officers within CCBC's Economic Development Section are currently working with neighbouring authorities to compile bids in attempt to secure funding for further improvements at key areas along the Canal. This was discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

**Channel Leak Repair** – the second phase of works to complete the relining up to the downstream end of the aqueduct will be tendered in July 2015 and is programmed to commence towards the end of August 2015/possibly early September 2015 to mitigate the impact on water levels and users of the Canal.

A Member asked for an update on the aqueduct works to be provided at the next meeting.

**Emergency Works** – over the recent Spring Bank Holiday period, a hole opened up within the towpath adjacent to the Pontywaun Overflow. It appears to be associated with the previous leak in this area and further seepage associated with the upper portion of the overflow structure. The resulting hole within the towpath was backfilled and will be subject to further close monitoring.

## 8. FUNDING

**Capital** – a capital budget allocation for 2014/15 was under-spent by £17,000 which has been carried forward to the 2015/16 budget. The budget allocation for 2015/16 has been confirmed as £212,000, plus the £17,000 carry over, giving a total budget of £229,000. This funding will be used to complete the channel leak repair at Pontywaun.

**Revenue** – The 2014/2015 budget allocation was £126,500. This was under-spent by £361.00, and the budget for 2015/16 is confirmed as £128,454. Expenditure using this budget will be focused on tree and channel maintenance.

For the financial year 2016/17 onwards, it is proposed to offer 20% of the revenue budget up as an Medium Term Financial Plan saving. The revised budget going forward would then be £100,000. This is only possible because of the recent capital funding received which has allowed improvements along a number of problematic sections of the Canal, and anticipated future capital funding.

## 9. BOATS

There were no updates in this respect.

## 10. CANAL MAINTENANCE

All future routine maintenance works will be undertaken by CCBC Network Contracting Services. Major works will be procured via tender.

The Principal Engineer was thanked for his report.

## 11. ACTION PLAN AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT UPDATES

Christina Bradley, Funding Officer, advised that the Crumlin Arm Canal Action Plan, which had been approved by the Group at its meeting on 28th February 2015, had subsequently been endorsed by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

Officers explained that a Sustainability Impact Assessment across the length of the Canal to Brecon has recently been completed and the final report from Peter Bretts Associates is expected imminently. An update on the content of this assessment will be provided at a future meeting. This assessment has been co-financed by a number of local authorities who are members of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Regeneration Partnership.

The outputs identified within the Sustainability Impact Assessment will provide the data and direction for future canal projects and help to apply for and hopefully secure appropriate funding where possible.

Members noted the details of the Action Plan and Sustainability Impact Assessment updates.

## 12. EUROPEAN FUNDING UPDATE

Antony Bolter and Christina Bradley presented an update in respect of the regional bid to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). They explained that this bid will be tourism-focused and centred across Wales, and that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal has been identified as a feasible project within the West Wales and the Valleys region. The bid is being led by Visit Wales, with the total funding amount available from ERDF yet to be confirmed. Officers confirmed that a meeting had recently been held with their Torfaen Council

counterparts to establish a tentative proposal in relation to the structure of potential funding bids.

Officers outlined a number of tourist locations within the county borough which could be utilised as part of the bid assessment criteria, and were very positive about this potential source of funding. The Canal Group discussed funding bid options and criteria relating to various pots of funding, together with future sources of funding.

Members were pleased to note the efforts of Officers and the progress made to date in regards to the ERDF bid.

### **13. UPDATE FROM MR RICHARD DOMMETT (MBACT) - DREDGING CONTACTS**

Mr Dommatt provided an update on dredging works in respect of the Canal and explained that Torfaen Council has invited tenders from three contractors to dredge the section of the Canal within Torfaen. Arrangements are being made for an ecologist to test the quality of silt arising from dredging procedures.

As silt dredged from the Crumlin Arm of the Canal has the potential to be recycled through a specialist firm (owing to its biological makeup), the outcome of silt testing in Torfaen will be of great interest to Caerphilly Officers and the Canal Group in respect of achieving a cost-efficient method of silt disposal.

Members thanked Mr Dommatt for his update.

### **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Group were informed that the Islwyn Canal Association (ICA) have recently formed a committee and is involved with the local 'Canal Boats at Pontywaun' event that is being held on 18th July 2015. Mr Dommatt advised the Canal Group that the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Trust have agreed to work in partnership with the ICA.

Members were reminded that the Cwmbran and Glenside Water Festival is being held on Saturday 20th June – Sunday 21st June 2015. Details of this event have already been circulated to the Group via email.

Members were also encouraged to participate in the annual Monmouthshire and Brecon Canalathon, which is being held on 6th September 2015.

The meeting closed at 11.25 am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 22nd October 2015 at 10.00 am.