



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 25TH FEBRUARY 2016 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

K. James, Mrs P. Griffiths, J. Simmonds

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

Together with:

K. Kinsey (Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Ackerman, Mrs K.R. Baker and D.W.R. Preece, together with A. Bolter (Group Manager - Strategy, Funding and Support).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 22ND OCTOBER 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October 2015 were approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Kevin Kinsey (Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager) presented an update on matters relating to the Canal.

Canal Channel - Weed cutting/channel maintenance undertaken in October resulted in a fish kill incident which was featured in the local press. This was thoroughly investigated and while there was some evidence of a small loss of fish. It is believed that there was an element of exaggeration in the reporting and that this was very isolated in nature (along a stretch of 50-60 metres of the Canal). Officers explained that there was a large concentration of fish amongst a dense patch of weed, which had become trapped during the extraction of these weeds from the Canal. The Group were given assurances that steps to prevent this happening again will be put into place.

Grass Maintenance - The first cut of the season is programmed for March 2016. This will include the amended regime for the Manor Road section, which had been discussed and agreed at a previous meeting of the Canal Group. Arising from biodiversity concerns raised at that meeting by local residents, the section of grass nearest the towpath in this area will 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. This will allow for wildlife to thrive within sections of long grass.

The Chair explained that he had recently been approached by local residents in the Manor Road area to enquire as to whether they would be permitted to clear bramble and litter from the far side of the Canal bank. Officers confirmed that they would check land ownership records to determine responsibility for this area (as it varies across sections of the water edge) and would advise the Chair accordingly.

5. 2015/2016 WORKS PROGRAMME

Towpath - no works are planned for this year.

Access Enhancement - no works are planned for this year.

Water Control - no works are planned for the remainder of this financial year.

Discussion took place regarding ongoing remedial works to the Manor Road feeder channel. The Council are currently liaising with Welsh Water on technical aspects relating to the operation of the underground chamber. Officers confirmed that they would contact Welsh Water as soon as possible to seek a resolution on this matter. It is hoped that once this work is completed, the feeder channel will assist in delivering extra water for use at Fourteen Locks in Rogerstone. Officers explained that water levels across the Canal were currently lower than normal in order to mitigate flooding situations arising from recent heavy rainfall.

Dredging - a contract is out to tender to undertake dredging along the section of Canal downstream of Green Meadow Bridge during March/April 2016. Officers explained that there are plans to remove silt along this section along of the Canal, which will be of great benefit as this will be the first time that comprehensive works have been carried out in this area. Once this work has been carried out, the accumulation of future silt levels will be monitored.

Mr Richard Dommert explained that Canal Trust volunteers had recently carried out dredging works along some areas of the Canal using specialist rake equipment and suggested that this equipment might be of benefit for dredging works along the Crumlin Arm of the Canal. Officers outlined the process by which they currently carry out dredging works, which include the reduction of water levels and the removal of fish from the Canal in association with local angling clubs, prior to the commencement of the dredging exercise.

Officers confirmed that the silt dredged from the Canal is tested to see if it can be recycled and is then processed by a contractor who works in conjunction with a local recycling company to dispose of the silt.

Tree Maintenance - A tree survey over the full length of the Canal has been delayed due to resource issues within the Engineering Projects Group and will be undertaken as soon as resources allow.

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. It is understood that this is progressing well, and in this respect the use of the Canal capital funding as match funding is being considered.

Channel Leak Repair - the second phase of works to complete the relining up to the downstream end of the aqueduct (and possibly the aqueduct itself) is out to tender with a return date of 17th February 2016. It is hoped that CCBC can secure permission to undertake works to the aqueduct and to this end a planning application has been submitted, which it is hoped will be granted once a number of matters relating to this application are resolved.

The works are now programmed to start in March 2016 and the start has been delayed to allow the capital funding to be used as match funding should CCBC be successful in securing external funding. It is anticipated that these works will be of 12 weeks duration, which will be carried out in the Spring in order to restore water levels to their normal level ahead of the summer period. Members welcomed the news of these works and of the positive impact it will have in relations to plans for other regeneration and tourism schemes in the area.

Emergency Works – there have been no defects requiring emergency action identified during this period.

6. 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. The intention is to reline the Pontywaun section of the Canal (from the overflow down to the bridge) and Officers are also looking to repaint the aqueduct in Pontywaun during these works.

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 a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 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. The Group were advised that this revised budget will still allow for improvements such as dredging and Canal maintenance.

7. BOATS

It is hoped that the Islwyn Lily will return to the water by mid-June 2016.

8. CANAL MAINTENANCE

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

The Officer was thanked for his report.

9. BIG LOTTERY “CREATE YOUR SPACE” PROGRAMME – FUNDING APPLICATION

Mr Dommatt outlined details of the Big Lottery Fund “Create Your Space” funding initiative to the Canal Group. This initiative enables communities to improve their local natural environment and the awarding body is looking for projects that will conserve, create or improve outdoor spaces within a specific community. Applications will be accepted from organisations across Wales but the project must benefit communities from amongst a list of named local authorities (of which Caerphilly is included). There are a number of funding stages, totalling £8.8 million, with full awards of between £500,000 to £2million on offer for up to eight projects across Wales.

Discussion took place regarding a number of local projects and regeneration opportunities in the Canal area that might be eligible for such funding and Mr Dommatt offered to submit a stage one application via the Canal Trust on behalf of the Group. Officers and Members agreed to make further enquiries in the first instance as to the status of local projects and the feasibility of the funding and liaise with Mr Dommatt accordingly before this matter is further progressed.

Mr Dommatt was thanked for his update.

The meeting closed at 10.34 am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 16th June 2016 at 10.00 am.