



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 16TH JUNE 2016 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

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

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

Together with:

A. Bolter (Business Support and Funding Manager), K. Kinsey (Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

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

Also present:

Mr M. West and Mr G. Reed (Local Residents)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Councillor N. George was unanimously appointed Chair of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group for the ensuing year.

In his absence, Mr R. Dommatt (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust) was unanimously appointed Vice-Chair of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group for the ensuing year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs K.R. Baker and K. Lloyd, together with Mr R.J. Dommatt (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES – 25TH FEBRUARY 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th February 2016 were approved as a correct record.

5. PRESENTATION – UPDATE ON BIODIVERSITY ISSUES/GRASS CUTTING TRIAL

Mr Michael West, a local resident from Risca, was invited to the table and welcomed to the meeting. It was noted that Mr West had raised biodiversity concerns surrounding the Canal at a previous Canal Group meeting in June 2015, and Members had subsequently agreed that a trial to reduce grass-cutting measures along a section of the Canal between Manor Way and the Harry/Henry Roberts Bridge in Pontymister be implemented.

With the aid of a slideshow presentation, Mr West provided the Canal Group with an update since the implementation of these measures. He explained that it had been a mixed year for Canal wildlife, and referred to an accidental fish kill incident which had occurred in October 2015 during routine weed cutting maintenance activities.

Mr West explained that there had been some delay in introducing the agreed grass cutting measures but that these had now been successfully implemented. The Canal Group were shown a number of photographs of wildlife thriving along this area, together with examples of foliage and fauna (which acts as shelter and cover for local wildlife).

Mr West also outlined other issues encountered along the Canal, including a lack of waste bins and problems with littering. He explained that he had requested additional bins (which had since been installed) and highlighted the efforts of local volunteers involved in litter-picking activities around the Canal. Members were also advised of work carried out by local residents to preserve a mile marker along the Canal bank.

The Chair and Officers provided further information on the specifics of the fish kill incident. They explained that although weed cutting measures are generally very safe and effective, there was one occasion where the works created a 'corralling' effect amongst a patch of weeds. This unfortunately led to the fish being killed when the weeds were extracted from the Canal. It was explained that this had happened due to an isolated set of circumstances and assurances were given that steps had been put in place to prevent this happening again.

Mr West added that he and local volunteers would be happy to assist in removing fish from the Canal during future weed cutting exercises. He also drew Members' attention to fly tipping incidents within a woodland area in the vicinity of the Canal, and Officers confirmed that they would investigate the matter further.

The Canal Group thanked Mr West for the work he has carried out along the Canal bank and for his efforts in engaging local volunteers to enhance the Canal area. In turn, Mr West commented on a noticeable improvement to the Canal since the previous year, and expressed his thanks to the Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager for his efforts surrounding Canal maintenance, and to the Chair for facilitating open and regular communication with local residents on Canal matters.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. MAINTENANCE UPDATE

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

Canal Channel - Weed cutting/channel maintenance will be reviewed this year given the issue with the reported fish kill in October 2015. Council staff are currently examining alternative methods, with it likely that this exercise will be limited to one visit. Coordination will take place with Ecology colleagues with regards to timing and supervision.

Grass Maintenance - The first cut of the season was undertaken in March 2016. Unfortunately staff did not follow the amended cutting regime for the Manor Road section and cut this down to the water's edge. This has been the subject of several meetings since this incident, including a joint meeting between Officers and local residents to confirm and agree the extent of the cutting along the canal side of the towpath.

The agreed limits in this respect are a 1 metre strip immediately adjacent to the towpath, and the only deviation from this will be the immediate areas surrounding the slipway, bridges and seating areas. This process has now been implemented and Officers confirmed that no complaints have been received to date arising from the new grass cutting regime.

7. 2016/2017 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 remedial works to the Manor Road feeder channel, which has now been completed. It is hoped that the feeder channel will assist in delivering extra water to Fourteen Locks in Rogerstone. Officers explained that water levels across the Canal are still very low and that action is being undertaken in this respect.

Dredging - Dredging along the section of canal downstream of Green Meadow Bridge to Darran Road Bridge was successfully completed during April/May 2016, with approximately 650m³ of silt removed during this exercise.

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. A reactive approach is currently being taken towards any required maintenance.

External Funding - Officers within Economic Development 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) went out to tender, with a return date of 17th February 2016. Planning approval and subsequent approval from Cadw has now been received subject to a number of conditions. The contract has now been awarded and the contractor is Alun Griffiths. A pre-contract meeting will be held shortly and it is hoped that works will commence early in July 2016.

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

8. FUNDING

Capital - a capital budget allocation for 2015/16 was under spent by £209,000 which has been carried forward to the 2016/17 budget. The budget allocation for 2016/17 has been confirmed as £212,000, plus the £209,000 carry over, giving a total budget of £421,000. This funding will be used to complete the channel leak repair at Pontywaun.

Revenue - the 2015/2016 budget allocation was £128,454 and was fully spent. The budget for 2016/17 is confirmed as £100,000, which has been reduced as part of Medium Term Financial Plan savings. Expenditure using this budget will be focused on tree and channel maintenance.

9. BOATS

It is hoped that the Islwyn Lily will return to the water this year as the dredging works have improved boat access along the Canal.

10. 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.

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

Mr Bernard Illman (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust) explained that unfortunately the bid submitted for the first round of this funding initiative had been unsuccessful. He explained that MBACT are currently exploring a number of other funding sources, including the Big Lottery-funded “People and Places” initiative, which funds capital and revenue projects that encourage co-ordinated community action.

Mr Illman highlighted the benefits of successful funding bids, including the recent restoration works carried out on the Lower Brake Lock at the Ty Coch section of the Canal in Cwmbran, which had been funded by the Waterworks Heritage Lottery Project.

Members were also reminded of MBACT’s Annual Duck Race event, which is being held at Llangynidr, Crickhowell, on Monday 29th August 2016. MBACT representatives recently attended the Cwmbran Big Event to promote the Duck Race and the work of MBACT, and received lots of positive feedback regarding the works being carried out on the Canal.

12. PROPOSED WATERWAY PARK AT TY COCH, CWMBRAN

Mr Illman explained that as part of the Waterworks Heritage Lottery Project, there are plans for a waterway park linking to the Canal to be constructed at Ty Coch, Cwmbran. Funding has been received for this project and developments to date have been very positive.

Mr Illman was thanked for his updates.

13. EUROPEAN UNION FUNDING PROPOSALS – UPDATE

Antony Bolter (Business Support and Funding Manager) updated the Canal Group on progress in respect of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) capital infrastructure proposal.

Members were advised that Visit Wales is leading on a regional project proposal for ERDF funding, entitled “Tourism Attractor Destinations”. Three individual projects have been developed for the South Wales region which includes a proposal for the Canal, entitled ‘Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle’. The Canal has been identified as one of the regional priority destinations and during the past 18 months, Caerphilly CBC and Torfaen CBC have collaborated to develop a suitable project proposal, with Torfaen CBC acting as the lead partner. This proposal was considered and endorsed by Corporate Management Team on 26th November 2015 and reported to Cabinet on 20th January 2016. Since then, Visit Wales have announced that the overall amount of ERDF funding available for the Canal project has been reduced from £3.5m to £2.0m, resulting in a reduction from £1.75m to £1.0m for the Caerphilly elements.

An “in principle” ERDF approval has been awarded to Visit Wales for the umbrella regional operation. By working collaboratively with Visit Wales and Torfaen CBC, a project with total costs of approximately £5m overall has been developed for the Canal, with the Caerphilly Area project cost totalling circa £1.79m.

Caerphilly CBC and Torfaen CBC are now required to submit a detailed Business Plan for the collaborative “Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle” project by the end of July 2016. Discussions are currently ongoing with Visit Wales and Welsh Government regarding the request for award of Welsh Government Targeted Match Funding (TMF).

The “Adventure Triangle” proposal encompasses significant developments to the Canal and its surrounding environment, and a holistic view has been adopted to enhance the tourism on offer in this part of the county borough and within the wider region. While it remains a long term objective to restore the Canal’s Crumlin Arm to full navigation along its entire length, the associated costs would considerably exceed the funding available for this current proposal. A number of planned improvement works to the Canal have therefore been scaled down. A further update on the ERDF capital infrastructure proposal will be provided once a formal decision has been made regarding the award of funds in response to the ERDF and TMF applications.

It was noted that an update report in respect of the Canal Action Plan was currently being produced, which highlighted the progress made since May 2015 in respect of investment, maintenance and development of the Canal, and contained further details of progress against the ERDF capital infrastructure proposal. Once finalised, the report will be circulated to Members and published on the Council’s website.

The Officer was thanked for his update.

The meeting closed at 10.48 a.m.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 20th October 2016 at 3.00 p.m.