



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 20TH OCTOBER 2016 AT 3.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

L. Ackerman, K. James, A. Lewis, K. Lloyd, D.W.R. Preece, 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)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs K.R. Baker and Mrs P. Griffiths, together with Mr B. Illman (Crumlin Arm Representative - Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust) and A. Bolter (Business Support and Funding Manager).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 16TH JUNE 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th June 2016 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) tabled an information sheet which outlined key dates and facts relating to the history of the Canal. Discussion took place on its contents and the history of the local area, and Members noted that a Canal Management Plan is currently being produced which will further elaborate on this timeline.

The Officer explained that his research into the Canal had uncovered a number of historical issues that continue into the present day, including low water levels, high levels of evaporation, and water supply problems to the Canal. It is anticipated that the relining works and other remedial actions will help to reduce such issues in future years. Discussion took place on these matters and the Officer explained that the natural flat topography of the Canal means that water levels rise very slowly when water is introduced to the Canal. As there are no locks along the Crumlin Arm, there is little opportunity for the water to be pushed along to fill the Canal.

Members were also presented with an update on matters relating to the Canal.

Canal Channel – The weed cutting/channel maintenance programme is underway and is being closely monitored given the accidental fish kill experience of last year. Ecologist colleagues and other interested parties have been involved in the co-ordination and supervision of the latest exercise. The Officer explained that the extracted weeds will be left to rest along the Canal bank over the weekend to allow invertebrates to return to the water, and will be collected by the Parks team during the next week.

Grass Maintenance - The final cut of the season has now been completed and included cutting down to the water's edge along the full length of the canal.

5. 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.

Dredging - no works are planned for the remainder of this year. In response to a Member's query, it was confirmed that dredging works to remove silt had been carried out along the Darran Road to Glynmeadow Bridge section. Reference was made to an abundance of water lilies along the Canal and it was confirmed that Ecology and Parks colleagues are currently examining how best to resolve this issue.

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. The Officer explained that reactive tree maintenance is ongoing along the Canal bank, with a problematic area being low-hanging tree branches along the Manor Road section. A Member queried whether there are any issues with tree disease along the Canal. The Officer explained that there are currently no such issues apparent but that any problems would be revealed once the tree survey is completed.

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.

Members were advised that during the relining works at Pontywaun, part of the original lock base was discovered behind a retaining wall. It was explained that there would be potential for this to be restored if appropriate funding can be secured.

The Group were also updated on the collaborative Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle project. It was explained that a decision on the ERDF funding has been deferred to the new year as Torfaen CBC (the partner leading the project) have been asked to provide more information in respect of their bid.

Channel Leak Repair - The second phase of relining works at Pontywaun is well underway but has experienced some delay due to unforeseen site conditions. Members were advised that the revised completion date is anticipated to be February 2017. A number of photographs were also tabled at the meeting, which showed the extensive works being undertaken and which will contribute to the regeneration of the local area once completed.

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

6. FUNDING

Capital - the capital budget allocation for 2016/17 was confirmed as £212k plus a £209k carry over from 2015/16, giving a total budget of £421k. This funding will be used to complete the channel leak repair at Pontywaun. Once these works have been completed, the third phase of works in the new financial year will commence, which will address leaks along the downstream side of the Canal.

Revenue - The budget for 2016/17 was confirmed as £100k and there is approximately £70k remaining. Expenditure using this budget will be focused on tree and channel maintenance.

7. BOATS

It is hoped that the Islwyn Lily will resume operations in 2017.

8. CANAL MAINTENANCE

No works are planned for the remainder of this year.

The Officer was thanked for his report.

9. UPDATE – WATERWORKS PROJECT VOLUNTEERS

Mr Richard Dommett (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust) presented a slideshow which updated Members on the partnership working being carried out in order to bring about the regeneration and restoration of the Canal. Key parties include an Officer Working Group, a Senior Representatives Steering Group, individual partners, and local communities and volunteers.

Members were reminded of the significance of the Canal within the industrial heritage of Wales, its landscape and communities. It contains nationally important structures and buildings, and in 2012 the Canal celebrated its bi-centenary year.

A key part of the Canal regeneration is the contribution of community volunteers as part of the Waterworks Heritage Lottery Project. The project is a partnership between Torfaen Council and the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Trust, and works with a number of

training organisations (including Coleg Gwent and Torfaen Training) to provide training in canal restoration and heritage skills, which will help sustain the Canal in the future.

Mr Dommett highlighted the many achievements and the contribution of the Waterworks volunteers, including the restoration of six locks and four listed structures, the development of new heritage metal lock gates, and the creation of community events and visitor experiences. Members were also informed of the positive outcomes achieved by the volunteers in terms of the qualifications they achieved and their prospects for future employment. Members were pleased to note the recognition that had been given to the volunteers via media coverage.

At the World Canals Conference held in Inverness in September 2016, which included an inaugural awards ceremony, the Waterworks Heritage Lottery Project was nominated as a finalist in two significant categories. Members were informed that the Waterworks Project was also the runner-up in the Education and Learning category at the 2016 Living Waterways Awards.

Mr Dommett also highlighted instances of successful Canal regeneration across Scotland (as showcased at the World Canals Conference) and the Group noted the work of Scottish Canals as an example of good working practice. Mr Dommett explained that he would bring some photographs of the new Canal structures in Scotland (which are enhancing restoration and visitor experience) to the next meeting of the Canal Group.

Mr Dommett summarised future opportunities relating to regeneration proposals for the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. These include continued volunteering works, continued accredited training expanding to work in partnership with Canal College, phased restoration on an unnavigable section of the Canal and extending navigation on the Canal, utilising the Canal as a tourist attraction, and future partnership working across the country and Europe.

Members were also informed that Mr Dommett had recently attended a successful Canalathon event held on the Canal Du Midi near Toulouse. Representatives from this area have previously visited Wales and participated in MBCAT's 2014 Canalathon event held in Brecon. Mr Dommett explained that arising from his recent visit to Toulouse, there is the possibility of the Canal Du Midi group establishing a twinning link with MBCAT's annual Canalathon event.

In closing, Members were shown a video which outlined the restoration works carried out by volunteers at Ty Coch in Cwmbran. It was agreed that a copy of the video and slideshow presentation would be circulated to the Canal Group following the meeting.

Members thanked Mr Dommett for the informative presentation.

10. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2017

The tentative meeting dates proposed within the agenda were agreed by Members and confirmed as follows:-

- Thursday 9th February 2017 at 10am - Penallta House Council Offices
- Thursday 22nd June 2016 at 10am - Penallta House Council Offices
- Thursday 19th October 2016 at 10am - Penallta House Council Offices.

The meeting closed at 3.50 p.m.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 9th February 2017 at 10.00 a.m.