



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE
YSTRAD MYNACH ON WEDNESDAY 25TH NOVEMBER 2009 AT 9.00 AM**

PRESENT:

Councillor S. Jenkins - Chairman

Councillors:

M. Davies, Mrs. P. Griffiths, M.H. Newman, Mrs. B.M. Toomer

Together with:

K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer - Consultancy), N. Liversuch (Principal Planner, Countryside and Landscape Services), R. Davies (European Officer), G. Gordon (Senior Assistant Solicitor), S. Trew (Senior Horticultural Officer), R. Keep (Outdoor Education Manager), H.C. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

Mr. R.J. Domett - Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miss L. Ackerman, D.M. Gray and M.G. Parker and Officers D. Nutt, P. Jayne and D. Price.

1. MINUTES - 23RD JUNE 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2009 were approved as a correct record.

REPORT OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following items

2. Maintenance Update

Canal Channel - the new weed cutting/channel clearance regime was introduced this year. Clearance was undertaken on 27th April, 27th July and 10th November 2009. During each visit all weed present within the canal channel was cut and removed, together with any accumulated litter and other debris present. Photographs showing some of the material removed from the canal in July were appended to the report.

It was hoped that the continued removal of weed will be reflected in a reduction in the amount of

silt/plant matter accumulating within the canal channel and thus reduce the frequency of dredging. This will be the subject of further monitoring and assessment.

Members noted that the incidents of complaints relating to the general condition of the canal channel have fallen significantly since the increase in frequency of channel clearance.

Grass Maintenance - A new grass-cutting regime, developed in accordance with the recommendations contained within the LTC Landscape Architects Report, was introduced this year. The first cut of this season was undertaken on 6th April with subsequent cuts undertaken on 27th April, 20th May, 24th June, 20th July, 7th August, 11th September and 19th October 2009. Members were pleased to note that all feedback received on the new regime to date has been positive.

3. 2009/2010 Works Programme

Maintenance Term Service Contract - the two year contract has been awarded to Alan Griffiths (Contractors) Limited and commenced on 19th October 2009.

Towpath - it is planned to re-surface sections of towpath within the sub-urban areas with a tarmac finish. The sections of towpath identified in this respect are from Moriah Hill to Gelli Avenue, Navigation Road to Penrhiw Bridge, Darran Bridge to Green Meadow Bridge and from Temperance Hill to Darran Road. Some areas of ponding have been identified within the rural areas, which will be addressed by localised repairs. The appendix to the report identified the extent of the proposed re-surfacing works.

Access Enhancement - it is planned to undertake improvement works to the access points at Thistle Way, Navigation Road, Moriah Bridge, The Prince of Wales Pub, Darran Road, Green Meadow Bridge and Halls Road. The scope of works at all locations will include to varying degrees the installation of vehicle and motorcycle barriers and areas of block paving. Where the location requires it, litter and dog fouling bins will also be installed. The appendix to the report identified the extent of the proposed re-surfacing works.

Water Control - it is planned to install a number of additional control measures within the canal channel in the form of depth gauges and the creation of locations suitable for installation of stank boards. The depth gauges will assist in monitoring the depth along the whole length of the canal. The installation of stank boards at key locations will allow the easy compartmentalisation of the canal to deal with future flooding and leak issues.

Advanced Design - advanced design works for relining schemes at Pontywaun Viaduct and the section of canal downstream of the viaduct, down to Pontywaun Bridge, are planned in order to have scheme cost surety and allow future funding bids.

4. Funding

Capital - the capital 2009/2010 budget was set at £125,000.0. The projects identified above will result in the full expenditure of this budget.

Revenue - the revenue 2009/2010 budget was set at £149,430.00. 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. Expenditure to date is in line with that anticipated at this time period.

External Funding - The Countryside and Landscape Group secured external funding from Welsh European Funding Office in the sum of £50,000.00 for access enhancement. Elements of the works identified above have been funded from this source.

5. General Issues

Vandalism - There have been several instances of vandalism directed at recently completed works, one area that in particular appears to have suffered more than others is the entrance feature at Manor Road. Sections of knee rail, which are integral to the success of the vehicle and motorcycle barriers, have been removed and damaged. This will be issued to and repaired by the term service contractor in due course. The appendix to the report identified the areas of damage.

Boats - All boats have been removed from the canal by their owners, no explanation for this course of action has been received to date and it is not clear if there is any intention on the part of the said owners to at some later date apply for licences to put their boats back on the canal. A query was raised as to whether moorings will be provided and it was reported that there are no proposals to add such a feature nor has there been any finance allocated for this purpose.

Reference was made to the potential of the use of the canal for educational purposes and it was noted that Ynys Hywel use the facility at present. Any further proposals to develop the canal (i.e. angling stages) would require a significant financial commitment.

Mr. Dommatt reported that the Education Officer is working with children at Fourteen Locks to encourage their use of the Canal and that he would ask if he could give a presentation to the Group on the initiatives that are being progressed.

6. FUNDING UPDATE

It was reported that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Partnership has established a small group to review funding opportunities, but in particular the opportunities under the EU Convergence Programme. This Group met with officers from the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) in late September and received a very positive response to an outline proposal. However it was emphasised that this would be submitted as a reserve bid as the appropriate Convergence Priority was fully committed.

While still in development stage, the original proposal was to consider a project of approximately £6.0m which would make a considerable contribution to the overall objective to regenerate the Canal. This would be a partnership bid and presently includes the Councils of Caerphilly, Torfaen, Newport and possibly Monmouthshire, British Waterways and the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Trust. Torfaen has offered to act as Lead Body and will be the contact with WEFO.

At a second meeting of the Group, it was decided that there would be some opportunities to continue with this development, but it would now require Technical Officers involvement to consider the detail of the application. The ultimate bid will be subject to any spend/surpluses /returns from WEFO's approved list of projects, and although difficult to target a considered cost, officers feel a project in the region of £10m could be more appropriate, and under this Priority, returns an average grant rate of 60%.

The next stage is to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) outlining the detail and the Partnership's intention to proceed. With the positive reaction of WEFO, officers would hope to receive WEFO support to continue with the full Business Case Application. Officers are looking at match funding but Members were reminded that the action taken to date makes no commitment on the Council and that further reports would be presented in due course.

7. MONMOUTHSHIRE, BRECON AND ABERGAVENNY CANALS TRUST REGENERATION MANAGERS REPORT

Mr. Dommatt referred to the restoration and training projects to be completed by May 2010 for the Welsh Waterways Festival. He detailed a number of projects and initiatives either in the process of being undertaken or that have been completed (introduction to lime mortar and stone work skills training with Ty-Mawr Lime, preparation of risk assessments and method of work statements, provision of a toilet at Pentre Lane for work camp 25th - 30th October 2009, installation of boundary fence and clearance of undergrowth offside Drapers Lock, containment of water seepage from the canal between Pentre Lane and Drapers Lock, woodland management of offside bank at Pentre Lane to Ty Ffynnon, lock moorings at Tamplin Lock, restoration/repair of flood relief overspill Weir Ty Ffynnon Lock, lock moorings at Ty Ffynnon lock, repair of stonework (spillway channel Ty Ffynnon Lock), de-silting and weed from canal channel between Pentre Lane to Waen Lock, de-silting canal channel from Cefn Flight of Fourteen Locks to Harry Roberts Bridge, operational repairs to flood relief sluices Malpas aqueduct (M4), check pointing Gwasted Lock 1 main chamber, installation of back pumps - Malpas, Ty Ffynnon and Cefn Wharf Lock, clearance of canal channel of debris from Pentre Lane to Waen Lock and the removal of temporary dams) and gave an update on each.

Mr. Dommatt then made reference to restoration funding proposals to sustain the short and long term regeneration projects and confirmed that applications have been submitted to Entrust' Landfill Tax for silt removal, to the Wales Council for Volunteer Action (for skills training, raising levels of employment and reducing economic inactivity) and to the Intermediate Labour Market (to Engage economically inactive people and prepare them for employment through the use of transitional employment skills training programme, which builds confidence and work related skills to achieve sustainable employment).

With regards to the latter, Members were pleased to note that the Trust has progressed through the first phase and been given a passport number, which enables the Trust to apply for any grants, which become available from the WCVA.

Reference was also made to the application to Torfaen County Borough Council, Branching Out Fund for the regeneration of Tamplin and Drapers locks, training, hedge laying, weed and silt clearance and leak stopping and Mr. Dommatt indicated that the Trust have been requested to reapply with a decision anticipated on 2nd December 2009. MBACT Volunteers have made a start with the construction of the British Waterways Memorial Bench

With regards to the MBC Regeneration Partnership it was reported that the convergence/competitiveness fund is fully committed. As detailed earlier in the meeting, WEFO have put the MBC Regeneration Project on reserve list value 10 - 12 million. The partners now have to work on the detail required for the application.

Mr. Dommatt referred to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Waterway Woodland Management Plan and reported that the initial application submitted covered the area from 5 Lock to M4 subway. In order to progress to the next stage there will be an on site inspection of the canal woodland corridor. With regards to the Canal Watch project, initial contact has been made with local community police in Cwmbran and Malpas but there has been no progress date. An update would be given at the next meeting.

The Group thanked Mr. Dommatt for his informative presentation and for responding to questions and issues raised during the course of the debate and for distributing leaflets on the Canal festivals to be held during the course of 2010.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8. WATER CONTROL DEPTH GAUGES

Mr. Dommatt made reference to proposal for the installation of a number of water control depth gauges along the length of the canal to monitor its depth and suggested that both Torfaen and Newport may also be interested in progressing such an initiative.

The meeting closed at 11.00 am.