



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
FRIDAY 21ST JUNE 2013 AT 10.00AM**

PRESENT:

Mr. R.J. Dommett - Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs. K.R. Baker, Mrs. P. Griffiths, K. James, K. Lloyd, D.W.R Preece

Together with:

K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer - Consultancy), R. Davies (Funding Officer), R. Keep (Outdoor Education Manager), H. C. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

G. Jones (Torfaen CBC, Team Leader Strategic Regeneration)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms. L. Ackerman, N. George, D.M. Gray, G. Johnston, Ms. P. Leonard, A. Lewis, Mrs. R. Passmore and D. Rees and Mr. Bernarn Illman, Chairman Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

2. MINUTES - 8TH FEBRUARY 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th February 2013 were approved as a correct record.

3. PRESENTATION - CWMBRAN'S FUTURE REGENERATION PLANS AND THE HLF WATERWORKS CANAL RESTORATION PROJECT

Gareth Jones, Torfaen County Borough Council, Team Leader Strategic Regeneration Manager, gave a presentation on the regeneration plans for the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal in Torfaen.

With the aid of a slide presentation, he detailed the plans for restoration works and for reconnecting and reopening the canal from Brecon to Newport. He provided an overview of the strategic context of the canal regeneration, and outlined the focus and objectives of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Regeneration Partnership, who are working in partnership with many other authorities and agencies, and continue to seek funding opportunities. The presentation highlighted that canal regeneration would be a major community asset and impact positively on economic regeneration and social and environmental factors.

As part of the regeneration for the Town Centre, plans were shown for the Cwmbrian Canalside Quarter, which would create a vibrant and distinctive town centre canal quarter and enable a mixed-use development scheme such as waterside living, leisure activities, commercial and cultural uses. He also referred to the Crindau Basin proposals and restoration works, which will incorporate the creation of an inland/sea marina mooring basin and a 400m canal arm, quayside, marina infrastructure and tidal cill.

The presentation also included and highlighted the work of volunteers on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and the various skills that are unlocked within such volunteers work. Members were pleased to note that the skills gained by volunteers can be used for future employment, and the project works with agencies such as Torfaen Training to secure employment for volunteers. The Working Group were shown photographs of volunteers working at Ty Coch Lock and Drapers Lock, and of the successful Heritage Lottery Fund PR Launch in May 2012. The appeal for volunteer recruitment was outlined, along with successful works at the Ty Coch Picnic site and the skills training carried out by the volunteers.

The project also has a separate Canal Volunteer Group, which aims to help improve the environment via avenues such as collecting rubbish from the canal and its towpath, layering of hedges and the cutting back of brush.

Members were particularly interested in an article that has appeared in the press titled 'linking the past with the future, one canal section at a time' and during the course of the debate reference was made to the history associated with the canal and the importance of maintaining its industrial heritage. It was noted that a local Industrial Rambling Group are planning to seek out and prepare documentary evidence for the Crumlin Arm. It was noted that such leaflets have been prepared for other parts of the Canal and agreed to invite representatives of the Group to the next meeting. In the meantime they be invited to contact Mr. Dommett and Mr. Jones in order that they can be given advice as to how it can be taken forward and who they could contact for the relevant information.

Members thanked Mr. Jones for his informative presentation and for responding to the queries raised during the course of the debate. They were advised that Torfaen CBC is jointly delivering the projects with the Canal Trust, training organisations, Cwmbrian Regeneration Project, Canal Watch, Local Anglers Association, Community Councils and The Archeological Society. They were pleased to note the number of organisations that are involved with the project on a national, local and community level.

REPORT OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following items.

4. MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Canal Channel - the weed cutting/channel clearance regime for the coming year will continue at the reduced frequency of two visits. Clearance will be undertaken in August and October 2013

Grass Maintenance - the first cut of this season was undertaken in early April 2013, subsequent cuts will follow a 4-week cycle for the remainder of the year up to October. The new grass-cutting regime has now been adopted with the strip of grass that extends from the edge of the towpath down to the canal waters edge which will now be cut on each visit.

Works have been ongoing through March and April to implement the repair of a leak found within the liner at Pontygraig Bridge. The repair involved the replacement of 20m of liner, the construction of a concrete invert to the canal channel and the placement of recycled plastic cover boarding facing the bridge abutment walls. The total cost of £60k represents a substantial slice from the budget, which had not been anticipated.

5. 2013/2014 WORKS PROGRAMME

Towpath - no maintenance works are planned for this year.

Access Enhancement - no works are planned for this year.

Water Control - no further water control measures are planned for this year.

Dredging - no dredging is planned for this year.

Tree Maintenance - subject to finance being available a tree survey over the full length of the canal is to be commissioned during this financial year to allow tree maintenance works to be undertaken through the Winter period 2013/2014.

External Funding - there are no external funding sources available at present. Opportunities which may arise will continue to be explored.

Channel Leak Repair - design works are ongoing to develop a re-lining scheme at the Pontywaun section, although, due to funding restriction this will now be limited to a 70m section centred around the Pontywaun overflow. The option being developed will consist of a composite construction formed from reinforced concrete walls and a synthetic liner. It is anticipated that the work will commence towards the end of July 2013.

6. FUNDING

Capital - a capital budget of £250k has been allocated for the 2013/2014 financial year, this funding will be used to progress the channel leak repair at Pontywaun.

Revenue - the 2013/2014 budget is now £125k - the budget carry over from 2011/12 and 2012/13, which had accrued to a sum of £214k, has been reallocated to working balances and lost.

Expenditure under this heading is allocated to cover the cost of grass and channel maintenance, tree maintenance, general cleansing, towpath repair, management cost, emergency response and the repair of the leak at Pontywaun. In this respect, recent expenditure to repair a leak at Pontygiag Bridge has taken a substantial slice from this budget, amounting to some £60k in total.

7. BOATS

The Islwyn Canal Association was recently granted a licence for the operation of a trip boat. The boat, the Islwyn Lily, will be moored at Whysoms Wharf and regular trips will commence in due course.

8. REPORT FROM MR. R DOMMETT, MONMOUTHSHIRE, BRECON AND ABERGAVENNY CANAL TRUST REGENERATION MANAGER

Mr. Dommett gave an overview on the following:-

Waterway National Renaissance Awards 2013 - the 200th anniversary celebrations project has been Awarded National Winner of the Community Section. The celebrations had started with the ringing of the bells along the length of the canal on 10th February 2012 and was followed with a number of events during the course of the year which had been well received by the community.

Heritage Lottery Fund Project 'Waterworks' - work is concentrating on Ty Coch Bottom Lock, Lower Brake and Shop Lock. De-watering of the two lock chambers and lock pounds was completed during March. Tree stumps and the face stone work have been removed from spillway weirs. Scaffolding has been erected, brick and stone courses have been clean and re-pointing is nearing completion in Lower Brake Lock. The top gate chamber has been cleared of materials including the old cill timbers.

A Heritage Lottery Fund Progress Inspection meeting took place in May. The assessors were happy with progress and advised that they preferred to see the mortar flush with the stone and brick work. Comments will be made on the new design of modular lock gate in preference to a traditional gate at their next visit.

An alternative safe site access and compound is being planned off Holly Bush Way, which would give a safe and sustainable access/maintenance facility at centre of project site including a Lock Gate workshop.

LANTRA Awards, providers of national accredited training qualification, have responded to review a range of heritage/environment training modules linked to environmental regeneration skills with the partnership and Torfaen Training.

The project will also be funding the Waterway Recovery Group Summer Camp (booked for August 2013).

General Maintenance of Restored Waterway - the Regeneration Partnership Steering and Officer Group have met and reviewed the importance of agreeing and putting into action a programme of maintenance over the restored section of waterway, including a way in which funds can be provided to finance the annual works undertaken by experienced community volunteers.

Newport Waste have offered a grant through the Landfill Community Fund of £50K towards carrying out works to the Top Gate area of Lock 20 Fourteen Locks, and a progress/planning meeting has taken place.

Funding - the Biffa Award Flagship (Landfill Community Fund) Grant scheme is open to application and the length of canal in the ownership of CCBC qualifies. Project value range from £150,000 to £500,000. A project must focus on either biodiversity restoration or improving cultural community facilities and can be incorporated in the repair works, which are planned at Pontywaun. The officers representing the MBC Regeneration Partnership have agreed that CCBC should be given the first opportunity to submit a project, with ideas and volunteers to complete the application being requested.

During discussion on funding, and particularly the Biffa Award Flagship (Landfill Community Fund) Grant, Mr. Dommett confirmed that the Crumlin Arm does qualify and a bid could be submitted. It was accepted that there is a funding opportunity and in that the only works carried out at present are maintenance works it was agreed that it is necessary to determine how the strategic direction of the canal should be taken forward. It was further agreed that Officers, in consultation with Members and other users, should determine whether a bid should be submitted and if acceptable a draft project prepared. The questionnaire previously circulated to relevant staff would be reissued for further comment.

Mr. Dommett was also pleased to announce that the bid to the Peoples Millions Fund (a partnership between Big Lottery and ITV where the public help to decide which local community project get up to £50,000 of lottery funding) has been successful in the first round and will move forward to the second round in September.

Welsh Waterways Conference - the conference considered the role of waterways in delivering Wales' priorities, and was very well attended by council officers, councillors, members of canal trusts and societies and other waterway interested groups. Topics covered included the impact waterway led regeneration has had on people, places and prosperity and the value of the waterways in health and well being of people who use the facility and those that plan to use it. Other topics included the waterways in the context of Europe as a whole, wild swimming and healthy walking, rivers, canals and reservoirs, and the Brecon Passport Scheme.

Events - the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust has provided its portable trip boat operated by volunteers to assist a schools Education 2 Day event at Goytre Wharf. Cwmbran's 'Big Event' was held on Saturday 8th June 2013 when the Trust were present with its sales, information and volunteer recruitment stand. In partnership with Torfaen CBC, the stand also had a demonstration on the use of stone and brick in the construction of arches and walls, and children were encouraged to participate. Torfaen Canal Group shared the Trusts stand to promote the work community that volunteers are achieving in Cwmbran. The Trust will be attending the 'Big Cheese' and other events.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Joint Steering Group is scheduled for 11th July 2013.

Crumlin Arm Water Supply - a professional engineer/Trust volunteer has undertaken a survey of watercourses entering the canal, with the support of Kevin Kinsey (Principal Engineer - Consultancy). The first results have found a supply of water from Newport Golf Course, which over time and lack of maintenance had silted up, blocking the flow to the canal. The silt has now been cleared with a moderate flow of water returning to the canal. Welsh Water are investigating how the flow of water to the canal from the Manor Road feeder has become contaminated and how it can be cleansed so the flow can be returned to the canal.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9. Monmouthshire and Brecon Regeneration Partnerships Project

Mr. Dommatt announced that the abstract summary of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Regeneration Partnerships Project to restore the un-navigable section of canal including the significance of the Heritage Skills Training Scheme for the communities unemployed/volunteers has been accepted for presentation at the 26th World Canal Conference in Toulouse, France in September 2013 and that he would be attending.

10. Visit to Waterworks Site

Mr. Dommatt invited the Group to visit the site.

The meeting closed at 11.45am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Friday 25th October 2013 at 10.00am.