



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 22ND OCTOBER 2015 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT:

Councillor N. George – Chair
Mr R.J. Dommatt – Vice-Chair

Councillors:

Mrs K.R. Baker, 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:

A. Bolter (Group Manager – Strategy, Funding and Support), W. Birrell (Senior Engineer),
P. Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L. Ackerman, together with K. Kinsey
(Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 18TH JUNE 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2015 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

At the last Canal Group meeting, a local resident made a presentation regarding biodiversity
concerns surrounding the Canal and the impact of towpath grass-cutting on wildlife in the
area. A Member advised that this matter had also been raised at a recent meeting of the

Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Regeneration Partnership and that local authorities were looking to introduce a consistent approach to grass-cutting measures in the future.

Discussion took place on this matter and it was confirmed that a trial to reduce grass-cutting measures had been implemented along a semi-rural section of the Canal between Manor Way and the Harry Roberts Bridge, which appears to be working well.

There were no other matters arising.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

5. MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Will Birrell (Senior Engineer) presented an update on matters relating to the Canal.

Canal Channel – Weed cutting/channel maintenance was started in September 2015 but unfortunately the cutting boat suffered a breakdown and consequently only the section upstream of Gelli Avenue was completed. The boat is due to return later in October 2015 to finish the cutting works.

Officers from the Council's Countryside department, under the direction of the Senior Ecologist and Invasive Plant Species Officer, have been removing areas of invasive flora from the canal channel and have treated all areas of known knotweed along the canal corridor.

Grass Maintenance – The final cut of the season is programmed for the end of October 2015. During this cutting exercise, all grass will be cut down to the water's edge and any tree saplings cut and removed.

6. 2015/2016 WORKS PROGRAMME

Towpath – no works are planned for this year.

Access Enhancement – no works are planned for this year.

Water Control – At previous Canal Group meetings, Members had been advised that National Resources Wales are looking into re-routing the Cwm Byr Stream back along its original course. Discussion took place in respect of this matter.

Mr Dommett informed Members of a forthcoming meeting between Council Officers and Welsh Water to discuss remedial works to the Manor Road feeder channel. Once this work has been carried out to the underground chamber, it is hoped that the feeder channel will be able to assist in delivering extra water for use at Fourteen Locks in Rogerstone.

Discussion also took place regarding volunteer canal workers and Mr Dommett outlined the organisations and agencies who assist in supplying these volunteers.

Dredging – consideration is being given to dredging the section of canal downstream of Green Meadow Bridge early in the New Year.

Tree Maintenance – a tree survey over the full length of the canal is to be undertaken prior to Christmas 2015, with a view for any identified works to be undertaken early in the New Year.

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) will be tendered in November 2015. It is hoped that permission can be secured to undertake works to the aqueduct, and to this end a planning application will submitted shortly. The works are now programmed to start in January 2016. This start date has been delayed to allow the capital funding to be used as match funding, should Officers be successful in securing external funding.

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

7. 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.

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.

8. BOATS

There were no updates in this respect.

9. CANAL MAINTENANCE

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

The Senior Engineer was thanked for his report.

10. CANOE LICENCES

Antony Bolter (Group Manager - Strategy Funding and Support) informed Members that there is currently no licensing system in place within the county borough in respect of the use of canoes on the Canal, and suggested that this was a matter that the Canal Group might wish to consider for introduction.

Discussion took place on this matter and Officers confirmed that a canoe licensing system had been introduced within a number of other local authorities and at minimal cost to these Councils. Members discussed the popularity of the Canal and its use by school groups and

other organisations, and Officers referred to the European Funding proposal to introduce a kayak facility within a section of the Canal.

The Group expressed a need to encourage the use of the Canal and suggested that more information be gathered as to how other local authorities administer canoe licences. Discussion also took place on insurance implications in respect of the use of the Canal by interested groups and the current regulation in place regarding ad-hoc users.

A Member raised a concern regarding possible damage to canal banks from canoes being placed into/dragged out of the water. Mr Dommatt explained that the Canal and River Trust had introduced rubber mats for landing canoes in some areas of the UK and agreed that he would bring photographs of these to the next Canal Group meeting. He proposed that representatives from a local canoe group attend the next Canal Group meeting to give a presentation on their activities, and this was agreed by all Members present. Mr Dommatt also agreed to gather information from a number of local school groups who were known to be interested in using the Canal for boating activities.

Paul Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager) advised Members that the promotion of the Canal for the use of water activities would be a valuable contribution to the work of Visit Wales. He explained that the Welsh Government have launched a three-year campaign (incorporating a series of themed years) to promote Wales as the world's capital of adventure tourism, and that encouraging visitors to use the Canal would tie in extremely well with the theme "The Year of Adventure" in 2016.

Antony Bolter added that he would hold a discussion with Licensing Officers prior to the next Canal Group meeting to determine administrative requirements in respect of canoe licences.

Members noted the details of the Officers' update.

11. EUROPEAN UNION FUNDING PROPOSALS

Antony Bolter and Paul Hudson presented an update in respect of the regional bid to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). There are 9 projects across Wales that will potentially share up to £25m of ERDF funding and local authorities have developed a number of Pan-Wales tourist projects as a result. These include a joint venture between Caerphilly Council and Torfaen Council, who are in discussions to submit a joint funding bid of up to £3.5m.

Should this funding bid be successful, it will be used for a number of improvements to local tourism facilities in and around the Cwmcarn area (including the Cwmcarn Fforest Drive and Visitor Centre, Sirhowy Valley Country Park and Twmbarlwm), together with development of the Active Travel Plan. This will also mean improvements works to the area surrounding the Canal, incorporating a number of tourist facilities such as the development of a new cycle route, canoe storage and the installation of an access tunnel at the Navigation Road point of the Canal in Risca.

On a wider scale, the funding bid would introduce footpaths between Cwmbrian and Cwmcarn and lead to the creation of an "Adventure Triangle", resulting in one of the most significant ventures ever developed in the local area. Officers explained that the bid was currently awaiting approval from senior colleagues.

Members welcomed the news of the proposals and queried whether there had been any progress made regarding the proposed Zipwire facility within Risca Quarry. Officers explained that they were in discussion with the contractor and had spoken to Visit Wales in respect of funding, with the proposals awaiting pre-planning consultation. It was anticipated that the project would commence in January 2016.

A Member referred to a disused rail line in the locality of the entrance to Cwmcarn Forest Drive and asked whether could be developed into a cycle or hiking path as part of the Active Travel Plan. Officers confirmed that this was outside the remit of the Canal Group but that they would take this matter back to their colleagues within the Engineering Division.

Members noted the update in respect of European Union funding proposals.

12. APPLICATION FOR WATERWAY RECOVERY GROUP CANAL CAMP – SUMMER 2016

Mr Dommatt outlined details of the Waterway Recovery Group's working holiday initiative, "Canal Camps", which offers a unique opportunity to volunteer and learn new skills whilst exploring Britain's industrial heritage. Volunteers pay a small amount each week to cover meals and accommodation during the placement, and are supported by representatives from local canal trusts and partnerships. Places are now available for 2016, with the initiative located along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal for two weeks during the summer.

The initiative relies on the hospitality of local churches to accommodate the volunteers during their working holiday. However, there is often a charge levied by these churches for hosting the volunteers, which is met by the host canal trust/partnership. Mr Dommatt explained that volunteers have previously stayed at the Methodist Church in Risca, which is an ideal location due to its proximity to the Canal. He explained that there would be a cost of approximately £1000 for the Church to host the volunteers this year.

Mr Dommatt asked Members to consider whether the Council could provide the funds to cover this charge, so that he could put in an application on behalf of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership. The Group were also informed of the specialist skills that are brought to the initiative by its volunteers (which includes students studying for the Duke of Edinburgh Award) and the benefits of the initiative to both the volunteers and to the Canal.

The Canal Group noted the details of the initiative and confirmed that they would raise the matter with colleagues within the Engineering division and Countryside Services to see whether any provision could be made for this funding.

Mr Dommatt was thanked for his update.

13. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2016

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

- Thursday 25th February 2016 at 10am – Penallta House Council Offices
- Thursday 16th June 2016 at 10am – Penallta House Council Offices
- Thursday 20th October 2016 at 10am – Penallta House Council Offices.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that the Canal Group had not been informed of recent meeting arrangements for the National Assembly for Wales Cross-Party Waterways Group. Mr Dommatt relayed the apologies of the meeting organisers and explained that they had noted the contact details of the Canal Group in order for them to be notified of future meetings.

The meeting closed at 10.49 am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 25th February 2016 at 10.00 am.