



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 9TH FEBRUARY 2017 AT 10.00 A.M.**

PRESENT:

Mr R.J. Dommett - Vice-Chair (Presiding)

Councillors:

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

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

Together with:

K. Kinsey (Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager), G. Cooper (Urban Renewal Projects Officer), R. Llewellyn (Senior Urban Renewal Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer), J. Tyler (Administrative Assistant)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N. George (Chair), Mrs P. Griffiths, G. Johnston, Mrs A. Leonard, Ms P. Leonard, D. Rees and J. Simmonds, together with Mr B. Illman (Crumlin Arm Representative - Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust).

In the absence of Councillor N. George, Mr R.J. Dommett presided as Chair for this meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES - 20TH OCTOBER 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th October 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) presented an update on matters relating to the Canal and responded to queries from the Group in turn.

Canal Channel - Weed cutting/channel maintenance was undertaken in October 2016 and was closely monitored by both Officers from Ecology and the Engineering Projects Group. The works passed without incident and the channel was successfully cleared, including the stretch at Temperance Hill/Navigation Road.

Grass Maintenance - The first cut of the season is programmed for March 2017. The exact timing will depend on how mild the winter has been and the type of spring experienced across the county borough. The cutting will progress to the agreed regime to take into account biodiversity considerations, and will include the amended cutting patterns along the Manor Road section.

5. 2017/2018 WORKS PROGRAMME

Towpath - there are no resurfacing works planned for this year, but it is intended to carry out some cleansing works along paved areas of the towpath at Risca.

Access Enhancement - no works are planned for this year.

Water Control - no works are planned for the remainder of this financial year.

In response to a query from the Group, it was confirmed that remedial works to the Manor Road feeder channel and Welsh Water's chamber have been completed. The Council have yet to complete the works to their chamber but these will be programmed for later in the year.

Mr Richard Dommatt (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust - MBACT) also drew the Group's attention to the EU Water Framework Directive and outlined a long-standing water control issue along the Brecon to Newport stretch of the Canal. Discussions are currently ongoing between Natural Resources Wales, the Canal and River Trust and MBACT regarding the matter.

Dredging - no works are planned for the remainder of this year (other than reactive works). In referring to a query from the Group regarding dredging works at the Darren, Mr Kinsey confirmed that these works had been completed during March/April 2016 and that boats should be able to navigate along this section of the Canal.

Tree Maintenance - A tree survey over the full length of the Canal has been commissioned and is due to commence shortly, together with tree maintenance which is programmed for February 2017 and includes low-lying branches that currently obstruct passage along the Canal channel.

External Funding - Officers within the Regeneration and Planning Division are currently working with neighbouring authorities to compile bids in an 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.

Glenn Cooper (Urban Renewal Projects Officer) also provided an update on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle, which is a collaborative project between Caerphilly and Torfaen Councils. As part of the funding bid, the project seeks to add facilities at Cwmcarn Forest Drive and strengthen links between the two sections of Canal. If the application is successful, it is expected that £1.2m of external funding will be made available for the project. The bid deadline is June 2017, with a decision expected around

August/September.

In response to a query from the Group, it was explained that the business plan aims to expand upon existing facilities across the county borough. The plan is currently at the concept stage and further updates will be provided to the Group in due course. A Member suggested that the project could incorporate enhanced cycle track links and it was confirmed that consideration is being given to this proposal. Good progress has been made with the project overall and it is hoped that a successful outcome will be achieved in the near future.

Channel Leak Repair - The second phase of relining works at Pontywaun is well underway but some delays have been experienced due to unforeseen site conditions which has added possibly 8 to 10 weeks to the overall contract period, giving a revised completion date of the end of March 2017. A third phase is planned if the budget will allow, which will address issues directly downstream of the first phase relining undertaken last year.

Mr Kinsey tabled several photographs which gave an overview of the works being carried out. In addition to the repair works, Officers have also taken the opportunity to incorporate enhancement works along the channel, including the construction of a plinth along the channel base, the introduction of a water bar, and aquaduct refurbishment to brickwork and masonry along the downstream section of the Canal.

The Group were pleased to note the progress that had been made to date and expressed an interest in visiting the Canal in the near future to view the works in progress. It was agreed that the necessary arrangements would be made following the meeting.

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. Anticipated funding for 2017/18 currently stands at £212k which will be used to progress Phase 3 of the channel leak repair works at Pontywaun.

Revenue - The budget for 2016/17 was confirmed as £100k, of which £61k has been spent to date, with the balance identified for both the tree survey and maintenance works. The anticipated budget for 2017/18 currently stands at £100k.

7. BOATS

It is hoped that the Islwyn Lily will resume operations in 2017 (as dredging works were completed during 2016), although no further update has been received. Mr Dommett confirmed that he would make enquiries with the Islwyn Canal Association as to their future plans for the boat and report back to the Group accordingly.

8. CANAL MAINTENANCE

No works are programmed for the remainder of this year.

The Officer was thanked for his report and discussion took place regarding the use of the Canal, including expressions of interest received from local scouting and sea cadet groups. Mr Kinsey confirmed that in this respect, consideration is being given to the provision of canoe docking strips along some sections of the Canal.

It was suggested that once the relining works are completed, an open weekend could be arranged in conjunction with the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust to promote the use of the Canal. Reference was also made to Inland Waterway Association's National Trail Boat Festival and a query was received as to the feasibility of Caerphilly Council hosting the event in the near future. It was confirmed that discussion would take place with the relevant Council departments following the meeting to see whether it would be possible to hold such events (given the continued need for funding considerations across the Authority).

9. SCOTTISH WATERWAYS - A STORY OF IMAGINATIVE ENGINEERING AND INSPIRED ART

Mr Richard Dommert (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust) delivered a presentation which outlined the work of Scottish Waterways in Falkirk as an example of successful Canal regeneration opportunities.

Members were shown a slideshow of photographs associated with this work, including the Kelpies (two 30-metre high horse-head sculptures), which stand next to a new extension to the Forth and Clyde Canal and form part of The Helix land transformation project. These are the largest equine structures in the world and pay tribute to the horse-powered heritage of Scotland.

Mr Dommert outlined the conception and construction of the Kelpies and the associated challenges in improving access to the Forth and Clyde Canal. These projects arose from the success of the nearby Falkirk Wheel (the world's first and only rotating boat lift). It was explained that since their completion three years ago, the Kelpies have become one of the most successful visitor attractions across Scotland. The Group were pleased to note the finished result as shown in one of the photographs, which displayed a well-attended event on the Canal whilst the Kelpies stand guard in the background.

The Group were advised that MBACT are currently in discussions with Torfaen Council regarding future regeneration opportunities that can be linked to the Canal. Bids have been submitted for ERDF and Heritage Lottery funding to carry out the next stage of restoration works at Five Locks in Cwmbran.

It was noted that the Waterworks Heritage Lottery Project referenced at previous Canal Group meetings is coming to an end. Over 275 individuals have taken part in the volunteer-led project over the last three years, which has seen successful restoration works carried out at the Ty Coch section of the Canal in Cwmbran. It is intended to submit bids for Rural Development Programme funding in order to carry out additional restoration works leading down towards Cwmbran town centre.

Mr Dommert was thanked for his informative presentation. It was agreed that a copy of the slideshow would be circulated to the Canal Group following the meeting.

10. WALES - YEAR OF LEGENDS 2017

Mr Dommert referred to Visit Wales' Year of Legends 2017 campaign, which places an emphasis on visits to historical places of note and participation in 'legendary' activities. To support the promotion of this campaign, the Welsh Government is making funding available through the Regional Tourism Engagement Fund and Tourism Product Innovation Funds, with the aim of developing Year of Legends projects and activities across Wales.

Mr Dommert explained that MBACT will be applying for funds to run their annual Canalathon on a more international level. Representatives from MBACT's counterpart in Toulouse (the Canal Du Midi Group) previously visited Wales and it is hoped that a twinning link with MBACT's annual Canalathon event can be established, in order to bring economic benefits to

both regions. It was confirmed that Caerphilly Council are also considering whether any relevant events can be held across the county borough in order to coincide with the Year of Legends campaign.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Dommatt invited the Group to attend the ERIH (European Route of Industrial Heritage) winter meeting, to be held at The Pierhead in Cardiff Bay on Tuesday 14th February 2017. Mr Dommatt explained that at this event, he would be presenting a case study on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. It was agreed that the arrangements would be circulated to the Canal Group following the meeting.

The meeting closed at 11.11 a.m.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 22nd June 2017 at 10.00 a.m.