



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 22ND JUNE 2017 AT 10.00 A.M.**

PRESENT:

Mr R. Dommett – Vice Chair (Presiding)

Councillors:

N. George, A. Hussey, D.W.R. Preece, J. Simmonds, R. Whiting

Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion - Councillor S. Morgan

Together with:

K. Kinsey (Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager), A. Dallimore (Team Leader - Urban Renewal and Conservation), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer), J. Tyler (Administrative Assistant)

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

In his absence, Councillor Andrew Whitcombe was unanimously appointed Chair of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group for the ensuing year.

Mr Richard Dommett (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust) was unanimously appointed Vice-Chair of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group for the ensuing year.

In the absence of Councillor Whitcombe, Mr Dommett presided as Chair for this meeting.

2. WELCOME

Mr Dommett led the introductions and welcomed newly elected Members to their first meeting of the Canal Group. Members placed on record their appreciation to Councillor George for his hard work as Chair of the Canal Group over the last three years.

3. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Davies, L. Jeremiah, G. Johnston, Ms P. Leonard, B. Owen, Ms A. Passmore, C. Thomas and A. Whitcombe.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

5. **MINUTES - 9TH FEBRUARY 2017**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th February 2017 were approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. **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 - the need to undertake weed cutting/channel maintenance will be reviewed, and if identified as being required will be programmed for October 2017. This will again be closely monitored by both Officers from Ecology and the Engineering Projects Group in view of the accidental fish kill incident which occurred in October 2015.

Richard Dommett (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust - MBACT) highlighted the spread of water meal (a duckweed-like substance) across the Cwmbran section of the Canal, which has an aggressive growth rate, and which has been attributed to the emptying of aquarium waste into water systems.

Grass Maintenance - the first cut of the season was undertaken in March 2017 and passed without major incident. The cutting will progress to the agreed regime and will include the amended cutting patterns along the Manor Road section. It was explained that the Council staff carrying out this work have regard for biodiversity and wildlife considerations in the area and that a good balance is being achieved on this matter.

7. **2017/2018 WORKS PROGRAMME**

Towpath - General maintenance is due to be carried out in the near future. Mr Kinsey referred to paving slabs located in some towpath areas and explained that these have been programmed for treatment due to the emergence of weed growth between the slabs.

New Members were encouraged to visit the Canal and walk along the towpath to fully appreciate the size of this local attraction. It was suggested that it would be useful for a map of the Crumlin Arm section of the Canal to be included in future update reports to the Group, which could highlight the key points and sections along the Canal. Mr Dommett confirmed that he would develop a similar map for the whole of the Canal. Members were reminded that Officers are currently developing a Canal Management Plan which is anticipated for release at the end of the year.

Access Enhancement - General maintenance will be carried out.

Water Control - The Council have yet to complete the valve works to their chamber at Manor Road but this will be addressed in due course. No other works are planned for the remainder of this financial year.

Dredging - No works are planned for the remainder of this year, apart from spot dredging exercises when obstructions arise.

Tree Maintenance - A tree survey over the full length of the Canal has been completed. Elements of tree maintenance were undertaken in February/March 2017 which dealt with low lying branches that currently obstruct passage along the Canal channel. This was not completed due to nesting birds and will be resumed during the autumn as a primary focus.

External Funding - Allan Dallimore (Team Leader – Urban Renewal and Conservation) provided an update on this section of the report for the benefit of new Members. It was explained that CCBC's 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. 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 updated proposals and match funding requirements for the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle project are due to be considered by Cabinet on 19th July 2017. The Canal Triangle project will seek European and Welsh Government funding to allow the Council to work with Visit Wales and Torfaen Council, to implement a regionally significant, cross-border management project that builds on existing tourism facilities.

Caerphilly's proposals within the project continue to include the infrastructure improvements to the Crumlin Arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, but there is now a greater emphasis on improving the outdoor activities and overnight accommodation at Cwmcarn Visitor Centre with the aim of increasing visitor numbers. The route for the Canal Adventure Triangle will allow visitors to walk or cycle along the Canal from Cwmbran to 14 Locks, then down to Cwmcarn Visitor Centre and up over Mynadd Maen Mountain to Cwmbran.

These improvements would be complemented by the provision of high quality "glamping" units at Cwmcarn Visitor Centre, together with additional parking spaces, the introduction of family friendly cycling routes, and improved disabled access to facilities.

Within the regional project, the cost of Caerphilly's proposals are estimated at £2m, of which £1.3m is currently being sought through European and WG grant funding. A Member queried whether this funding will continue in view of the ongoing Brexit negotiations. Mr Dallimore explained that the European grant funding is guaranteed until 2022, although there is less confidence surrounding the WG funding elements. In addition, the Targeted Match Fund (TMF) Panel have also deferred their decision for the time being as Torfaen Council (the partner leading the project) have been asked to provide more information in respect of their bid, although there is confidence that this will come to fruition.

Members were pleased to note the progress that had been made in respect of the Canal Adventure Triangle, and discussion took place regarding the opportunities that this project could create for the Canal and surrounding areas and local tourism venues.

Arising from this discussion, Mr Kinsey provided an update on the feasibility of restoring the Canal to its full potential. He referred to the Canal Corridor study commissioned by CCBC in 2005, which recommended a three-stage approach to the Crumlin Arm of the Canal (safety enhancements, complete restoration to navigation, and full restoration of the Crumlin Arm and

Main Line of the Canal). He explained that to date there had been a focus on preserving the structure and integrity of the Canal, and that work is continuing on the first stage of this approach.

Members were advised that consideration has also been given to the restoration of navigation options. However, although it would be a fairly straightforward process to restore navigation across three areas of the Canal (involving remedial work to the banking and culvert in the region of £1m), there are two other areas that present major challenges to the Council. These are a break in the Manor Road section (which would involve reconstruction of the aquaduct at an estimated cost of £2m) and the Darran Road quarry section (which would involve installing a 200 metre stretch of Canal at extensive cost). The third stage of the approach (full restoration) is aspirational at this stage, and would involve the creation of facilities such as a marina and canal barge dock in the area.

Channel Leak Repair – Mr Kinsey continued with his update and explained that the second phase of works to the Cwmcarn/Pontywaun aquaduct (a Grade 2 listed structure) is well underway but has experienced further delays due to unforeseen site conditions which have added around 15 to 20 weeks to the overall contract period. This included the discovery of an old bridge buried within the aquaduct, as well as recent water leak issues, which needed to be addressed before works could continue. It is now estimated that the works will be completed and the Canal refilled with water at the end of June 2017. Members made reference to their site visit to the Canal in February 2017, during which they had viewed these ongoing works.

It was explained that consideration is being given towards introducing a winding circle to allow boats to turn at Pontywaun. Additionally, a lock structure was discovered at Pontywaun during the regeneration works, and Officers are examining whether it would be feasible to excavate it and restore it to a working level and height. As there are some sections of the Canal where water levels differ due to an uneven gradient, a lock would assist in distributing/pushing water across these sections of the Canal. Members were also advised of the difficulties in maintaining sufficient levels of water in the Canal during prolonged periods of hot dry weather and Mr Dommatt referred to similar water supply issues at 14 Locks in Rogerstone.

Emergency Works - There have been no defects requiring emergency action identified during this period.

8. FUNDING

Capital - A 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 was used to complete the Phase 2 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 of £100k was spent in full. The anticipated budget for 2017/18 currently stands at £105k.

9. BOATS

There was no update to report in this respect. Mr Dommatt added that he was awaiting confirmation from the Islwyn Canal Association (ICA) as to whether they intend to operate the Islwyn Lily in 2017. Mr Dommatt also advised the Group that the ICA had expressed an interest in arranging an event to celebrate the completion of the relining works and promote the use of the Canal, but that he had received no further news on this matter to date.

Mr Kinsey was thanked for his update, and in response to a Member's query, he confirmed that remedial and landscaping works to the car park at Pontywaun Spiritual Church on Halls Road (adjacent to the Canal) had been programmed for August 2017.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Discussion took place regarding the arrangements for the Canal Group meetings, with it noted that attendance is generally low as several Members are unable to attend a morning session due to work commitments. It was suggested that attendance could be improved upon by moving the start time of future meetings to an evening session.

Members unanimously agreed that a 5.00 p.m. start time be implemented on a trial basis (with effect from Thursday 19th October 2017) and that it be reviewed at a later date to see whether this results in an improvement in attendance.

The Canal Group were also reminded of the restoration works carried out by volunteers at Ty Coch in Cwmbran during 2016. A video showing these works is available on YouTube and it was agreed that the video link would be recirculated to the Canal Group following the meeting for the benefit of new Members.

Mr Dommett outlined developments across other areas of the Canal, including a major Heritage Lottery Fund application by MBACT to enable progression of the Five Locks project between Brecon and Cwmbran. MBACT are also seeking a grant for their Ty Coch Waterway Park initiative which would develop land adjacent to the Ty Coch restoration site to bring about a special visitor hub destination and provide employment, leisure and income opportunities. Further details were included in Mr Dommett's June 2017 update report produced for MBACT and he agreed to circulate a copy to the Canal Group Members as it includes useful information in respect of all ongoing MBACT bids and activities.

In closing, Members were encouraged to attend MBACT's Annual Duck Race event, which is being held at Llangynidr, Crickhowell, on Monday 28th August 2017.

The meeting closed at 11.16 a.m.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 19th October 2017 at 5.00 p.m.