



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 25TH JULY 2019 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

M. Davies, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, G. Johnston, Mrs A. Leonard, B. Owen, D.W.R. Preece, J. Simmonds, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, R. Whiting

Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services - Councillor N. George

Together with:

Mr R. Dommatt (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust), K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Andrew Whitcombe be appointed as Chair of the Canal Group and Mr Richard Dommatt (MBACT) be appointed as Vice Chair for the ensuing year. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ms P. Leonard and Mr B. Illman (Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust)

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES – 28TH FEBRUARY 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th February 2019 were approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

5. UPDATE ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE CANAL

Kevin Kinsey (Acting Engineering Projects Group Manager) presented the report, which detailed the current and planned maintenance and any capital works planned for the forthcoming year. The report set out details of current funding availability and outlined any current operational issues regarding the usage and the condition of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm.

Members were updated on the range of subjects relating to the Canal as set out in the report and Mr Kinsey responded to queries from the Group in turn.

Section 5.1 - Maintenance Update

Canal Channel - Weed cutting/channel maintenance for 2019 is not planned as yet. This will be considered later in the year in consultation with all relevant stake holders.

Grass Maintenance - The first cut of the season was undertaken in March and then on a 3 to 4 weekly cycle up until the final cut planned for September/October. The amended cutting regime was implemented in March and to date no adverse comments have been received. In response to a Member's query, Mr Kinsey confirmed that this amended regime has now been extended across the length of the Canal and allows for a strip of foliage to grow to the water's edge to provide cover for wildlife.

Section 5.2 – 2019/2020 Works Programme

Towpath - There are no planned towpath works for 2019.

A Member referred to littering around the Mount Pleasant Terrace/Halls Road Terrace area of Pontywaun near to the Canal bridge. Mr Kinsey confirmed that he would ask Officers to look into maintenance around this area.

Access Enhancement - There are no planned access maintenance works for 2019.

Water Control - Mr Kinsey explained that the Engineering Division had intended to carry out cleansing across all culverted sections of the canal, together with the installation of stop boards and depth gauges at key locations along the Canal. However, these proposals had not been progressed due to resource and funding issues.

A query was received regarding water control and Mr Kinsey explained that the only feed under the control of the Council is a gate valve at the Manor Road emergency feed in Risca. This is a large intake structure located above the playing fields, which draws down water from the Canal in increments. The intention had been to clear out the culverts and install stop boards during 2019 to isolate the loss of water upstream and downstream but unfortunately has proven too cost-prohibitive to carry out at this present time.

A Member referred to a section of the Canal at Navigation Road in Risca that had dried out and then refilled with water several months ago. Officers explained that this is a natural process along this section of the Canal, with water levels being constantly subject to change, and are unrelated to the works being carried out at other sections of the Canal.

Dredging - Dredging of the Green Meadows Bridge to the Drill Halls Channel is now on hold due to funding issues. If funding allows, this will be carried out in December 2019.

Tree Maintenance - The extensive tree maintenance works necessitated by the discovery of Ash Dieback over the full length of the canal are now complete. There are no further phases of maintenance planned, only that in reaction to tree falls.

External Funding - Officers within CCBC's Regeneration and Planning Division as part of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle bid have successfully secured funding to the value of £678,571.00. All works associated with this funding are to be completed by December 2020. Officers are currently looking at priorities in this respect.

Channel Leak Repair - the third phase of works is being designed at present and will be tendered in the autumn. The length of Canal to be addressed in this phase will extend from the downstream terminus of Phase 1 down to the Pontywaun overbridge. Phase 4 works planned for the upper section of the deeps are to be combined with Phase 3 and issued as one contract.

There is currently an issue with water loss at the Pontywaun aqueduct and Officers are reviewing options to deal with this, and as such it is planned to implement remedial works at the same time as the Phase 3 works.

Emergency Works - Mr Kinsey explained that further to the ongoing water loss issue, which included reports of fish being in distress along one section of the Canal, a clay bund was installed in early July to alleviate the problem. The bund was positioned slightly upstream of the secondary intake to allow the feed to be turned on and bring water levels back up to normal level.

The Canal Group were advised that moving forward, the Engineering Division will be working with PhD students from Cardiff University on a project to develop new remedial processes such as grouting along the Canal, in order to mitigate future water loss.

Discussion took place regarding the leak and Mr Kinsey provided a description of the aqueduct composition. He explained that the lower half is built of masonry and the top half is brickwork, and that it is the brickwork that is leaking due to limitations on how deep the pointing can be inserted. This is why a project is being undertaken in conjunction with Cardiff University to examine waterproof grouting as a potential solution.

Section 5.3 – Funding

Capital - A capital budget allocation for 2019/20 is £212k plus the £361k carry over from 2018/19, giving a total budget of £573k. This funding will be used to complete the Phase 3 channel lining works at Pontywaun/Phase lining the Deeps, and match funding for the Adventure Triangle funding mentioned above.

Revenue - The budget for 2019/20 is £54.5k and current spend commitments should see this spent in full. Funding for 2019/20 forms part of the MTFP infrastructure savings for 2019/20

Section 5.4 – Boats

Members were advised that there was no news to report in respect of the Islwyn Lily and no recent contact had been received from the Islwyn Canal Association (ICA).

In conclusion, it was noted that a full programme of works for the coming year has been

identified with funding in place to achieve these objectives.

A Member referred to the section of the Canal between Abercarn and Newbridge that is used by anglers, and asked if this stretch is included in the engineering works outlined by the Principal Engineer. Mr Kinsey explained that the engineering works referenced in his report are focused on the navigable stretches of the Canal between Pontywaun and Risca. The Member queried the composition of the Canal Group and the relevance of the engineering and regeneration works to those wards on the periphery of the Canal, and asked if there was a need for Councillors from these particular wards to continue to attend the meetings of the Canal Group.

Arising from debate on this matter, the Chair suggested that it might be beneficial to examine the Canal Group's Terms of Reference in this regard. He confirmed that he would make some enquiries on the matter and that an update would be brought to the next meeting of the Canal Group.

The Canal Group noted the details of the update from Mr Kinsey.

6. UPDATE FROM MR RICHARD DOMMETT - MBACT

Mr Dommett (MBACT) also provided a verbal update on recent MBACT developments and matters relating to the Canal.

The Canal Group were advised of a new initiative being used by Torfaen Council to tackle an infestation of water fern (*azolla filliculoides*) across the Llantarnam stretch of the Canal. Water fern is one of the UK's most invasive plant species and can be problematic if left in a canal network due to its rapid growth. This tiny fern can cover a large area of a canal in a matter of weeks, and reduces light and oxygen levels within the water, which will kill fish and other wildlife.

To combat this problem, Torfaen Council are planning to release an army of weevils into the Canal in the coming weeks. These 2mm-long beetles originate from North and South America and feed solely on the azolla water fern plant, and therefore are regarded as the greenest and most sustainable way to tackle the problem as they do not cause any harm to humans, other animals or plant life.

Mr Dommett also advised the Canal Group that developments associated with the Adventure Triangle funding are beginning to emerge, such as the building of a new towpath along the Newport stretch of the Canal.

The Canal Group noted the verbal update from Mr Dommett.

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 5.40 p.m.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group will be held on Thursday 7th November 2019.