



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE
AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 25TH JULY 2022 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

N. George, P. Leonard, D.W.R. Preece, J. Simmonds, A. Whitcombe, K. Woodland,
C. Wright

Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces: Councillor C. Morgan

Together with:

S. Stook (Principal Engineer), J. Pitman (Senior Assistant Engineer), G. Lewis (Principal
Regeneration Projects Officer), B. Smith (Regeneration Projects Officer), R. Barrett
(Committee Services Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer)

Representing Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust: Mr R. Dommett
(Regeneration Consultant), Reverend J. Collier (Chair of MBACT)

Also present:

Mr R. Wysom (Islwyn Canal Association)

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

All present were reminded that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Andrew Whitcombe be appointed as Chair of the Canal Group for the ensuing year. By a show of hands (and in noting there were 7 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor A. Whitcombe be appointed as Chair of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group.

2. TO APPOINT A VICE-CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Mr Richard Dommett (MBACT) be appointed as Vice Chair of the Canal Group for the ensuing year. By a show of hands (and in noting there were 7 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Mr R. Dommett be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Owen and A. Leonard, together with C. Adams (Highway Engineering Group Manager) and A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager)

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT – MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Councillor A. Whitcombe (Chair) gave a warm welcome to new Councillors, representatives and Officers in attendance, namely Councillors Kristian Woodland and Ceri Wright, Reverend John Collier (MBACT) and Sarah Stook (Principal Engineer). He also thanked former councillors Ross Whiting (Risca West) and Mike Davies (Crumlin) for their long service and commitment to the Canal Group.

The Chair expressed his thanks to Mr Kevin Kinsey (Engineering) who had played an integral role in the Canal Group for many years as its lead Officer. It noted that Mr Kinsey had recently left the Authority for a new opportunity, and the Chair and other Members wished him all the very best in his future career.

The Chair also thanked Mr Bernard Illman (MBACT) who had previously attended many meetings of the Canal Group as an MBACT representative, and wished him well for the future.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C. Morgan declared a personal in Agenda Items 6 and 7 as a member of the Inland Waterways Association (as a private boat owner) and remained in the meeting during consideration of the items.

5. MINUTES – 27TH FEBRUARY 2020

It was moved and seconded that subject to a correction at Item 6, Paragraph 4 of the minutes (to reference the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and not the Islwyn Canal Association), the minutes of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group held on 27th February 2020 be approved as a correct record. By a show of hands (and in noting there were 4 For, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to a correction at Item 6, Paragraph 4 of the minutes (to reference the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and not the Islwyn Canal Association) the minutes of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal - Crumlin Arm Working Group held on 27th February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. UPDATE ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE CANAL

Sarah Stook (Principal Engineer) 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 Miss Stook responded to queries from the Group in turn.

Maintenance Update

Canal Channel - Weed cutting/channel maintenance for 2022 is planned for September/October following ecology checks by the CCBC Principal Ecologist.

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 2022. The amended cutting regime has been maintained throughout the Canal.

2022/2023 Works Programme

Towpath - Patch repairs are required to the asphalt surface within the towpath section that forms part of the adopted highway on Temperance Hill, and these have been raised with the Highways Department.

Access Enhancement - All lockable access barriers (7 in total) have been reviewed for integrity and new locking mechanisms have been installed. This was a consequence of some of the existing ones being damaged and/or missing.

Water Control - The culverted section linking the Deeps with Temperance Hill (Darren Road) was cleansed in May 2022 and later CCTV surveyed in June 2022. The survey footage indicated that there is an approximate length of 30m with an associated chamber mid-way that has settled considerably. The settlement has resulted in the loss of around 70% of the pipe's cross-sectional area. A funding bid is being submitted to cover the cost of repairs.

A contractor has also been commissioned to install a trash screen at the inlet pipe which is due for completion within the coming weeks.

Miss Stook emphasised that ensuring the integrity of the canal channel together with the maintenance of the culverts and water levels is the priority of the council. However, there will be a review of the Canal's priorities based upon recent inspections and discussions and the programme for the next phases of relining may potentially be altered subject to funding.

The Canal Group were advised that the Council have been made aware of silt accumulation across three areas of the Canal (upstream and downstream at Green Meadow Bridge and an area at Medart Place known as the Dragon's Teeth). Enquiries have been made with the Team around removing this silt accumulation and installing sections of reinforced concrete channel and associated silt traps at these locations, in order to enable Canal usage and to

alleviate the influx of silt and congestion of water. However the build-up of silt is a natural ongoing occurrence and it is recognised that an ongoing revenue maintenance commitment needs to be in place.

Dredging – In view of the issues relating to silt accumulation, any potential dredging programmed for 2022 will be localised due to the works associated with the installation of concrete channel sections and associated silt traps at the aforementioned locations. It is also proposed to clear some of the high spots of silt within the canal invert north of Green Meadow Bridge for approximately 500m (Phase 5), which will be subject to available revenue budget and also ecological approval.

Tree Maintenance - Due to the ash dieback within Wales, an extensive tree survey and the subsequent development of maintenance regime has been commissioned and is due for commencement end of July/August 2022. This is likely to take a considerable amount of budget but is required for the continued safety of the canal and users. Reactive works to tree falls will also be ongoing.

External Funding - Officers within CCBC's Infrastructure Division have submitted a £100k funding bid to attend to the settlement failure in Darren Road culvert, however there is no update available at present on the bid outcome.

Officers within CCBC's Regeneration and Planning Division have been working on the bid for funding related to the Levelling Up Cwmcarn Tourist Legacy Project Proposal, but on this occasion however, there has been very little opportunity to bid for funding for the Canal. The Council will explore potential available funding streams to attend to the installation of reinforced concrete channel sections and associated silt traps.

Channel Leak Repair – Members were advised that the Canal bank suffered a breach following Storm Dennis, which was isolated and repaired under reactive emergency works. The breach occurred in the section that was later named Phase 5 (from Green Meadow Bridge approximately 500m north). Phase 5 relining will also now be a priority for CCBC to prevent future breaches of the canal.

An option has now been determined to attend to the leaking aqueduct, which consists of slow grouting through the face of the structure at suitable centres. However, Listed Building Consent is required for these works, which has not progressed as yet due to the pandemic together with operational and budget demands.

Emergency Works - The breach within the section north of Green Meadow Bridge was repaired under reactive emergency works and has presented no further issues to date.

Funding

Capital - The capital budget allocation for 2022/23 is £200k, and Officers are reviewing how allocation remains as it is partly required to cover residual costs outstanding on the recently completed realigning contract works for Phases 3 and 4 across Pontywaun down to the Deeps.

Revenue - The budget allocation for 2022/23 was £100k and Officers are reviewing the remaining available budget. It was noted that the revenue fund is used to make isolated repairs/refurbishment to miscellaneous elements of the Canal that are picked up as a result of inspections or reports of dilapidation. The most recent works carried out are the replacement of fencing (approximately 30m in length) at Constant Row and the upgrade of the stepped access linking the towpath with Medart Street. There are also some patch repairs required to the asphalt surface within the towpath section that forms part of the

adopted highway on Temperance Hill. Reactive works to tree falls and grass cutting regimes are also ongoing.

Boats

Due to recent communications from Cabinet Members and potential business proposals, CCBC's Licensing Department has been commissioned to prepare a new fee setting regime that covers minor craft such as canoes/kayaks/paddleboards and small rowing boats. This work is ongoing and when available will be presented to Scrutiny Committee and the Canal Group for comment and endorsement.

It was explained that as discussed earlier in the update and subject to the Canal Group's approval, CCBC's Engineering Projects Group would be amenable to commencing design works associated with the installation of silt traps to facilitate the relaunch of the trip boat moored at Whysom's Wharf. This may be undertaken in conjunction with the Waterways Recovery Group. However, as previously noted, this work depends on available funding as repairs to the Darren Road culvert and the integrity of the Canal are the priority.

In conclusion, the Canal Group were advised that a full programme of works for the coming year is being developed, subject to available funding from the capital and revenue budgets, together with the potential external funding to achieve these objectives. It was also noted that the Caerphilly 5-year Canal Management Plan will soon be reviewed and updated as the priorities change.

Miss Stook also provided an update on matters across the Canal that had come to light since the preparation of the report. In relation to the long-standing issue around tampering of the Manor Road feed, Miss Stook has been in contact with Welsh Water who are carrying out an investigation regarding the illegal connection to the surface water drainage system. The Council have agreed and allocated a portion of the revenue budget to allow for replanting works across the completed phases of the Canal, prior to fish stocks being replenished by the Angling Club, and work is ongoing between the Club and the CCBC Ecology Team in this regard. In relation to the interim desilting works, it is intended to carry these out at the same time as the repairs to the Darren Road culvert. The Canal Group were also advised that repairs have been undertaken to a vandalized bench downstream of Manor Road and a replacement will be added to the revenue list.

Miss Stook drew the Canal Group's attention to recent towpath works near Halls Road terrace. It was explained that the golden-coloured surface had been replaced with tarmac during the contractor works and that the original surface is not available for replacement. Further works to the towpath are also anticipated due to a request from the Pontywaun Spiritualist Church who wish to carry out works in the area to install waste drainage. Therefore, the Canal Group were asked whether they would prefer the surface to be replaced with a coloured asphalt or a regular black asphalt once the works are completed. Later in the meeting, a Member highlighted that a coloured surface could easily fade and suggested that black surfacing might have more longevity.

The Chair thanked Miss Stook for her detailed report and it was noted that a request had been received from Mr Richard Wysom (Islwyn Canal Association) to speak on this agenda item. Mr Wysom was welcomed to the meeting and was invited to address the Canal Group.

Mr Wysom introduced himself as the Chairman of the Islwyn Canal Association and expressed his thanks to the Principal Engineer and Committee Services Officer for all their recent advice and assistance in facilitating his speaking request.

Mr Wysom explained that he operates a tea-room business (known as Whysom's Wharf) alongside the Darren area of the Canal, which includes a tour boat known as the Islwyn Lily. However, he explained that the boat has been landlocked since 2016 due to significant silting issues and he therefore asked the Canal Group when these issues were likely to be resolved so that the Islwyn Lily can resume navigation. Mr Wysom also referred to tourism signage along the Canal and expressed disappointment that these signs do not make any reference to Whysom's Wharf, despite his involvement in various funding avenues for the Canal.

Miss Stook responded to Mr Wysom's representation and explained that in terms of the tour boat, moving forward the Council will be exploring opportunities to acquire funding to put suitable structures in place to address silting issues. Miss Stook explained that the Council is intending to carry out some interim silt clearance but emphasised that any long-term solution will depend on achieving suitable funding and taking into account Canal priorities such as the fixing of the culvert. She also explained that if any structures are put in place to address silting issues, then these will also require a budget for annual monitoring to take place.

Mr Wysom confirmed with Miss Stook that the silting issues affecting the operation of the Islwyn Lily were of particular concern at Green Meadow and Dragon's Teeth. He added that the silting issues at Dragon's Teeth were compounded by logs and building debris being dumped along the Canal bank. Miss Stook thanked Mr Wysom for bringing this to her attention and confirmed that she would ask the Engineering Team to look into this issue. Miss Stook also confirmed that it is intended to commence vegetation clearance to the Darren section of the Canal at the end of August 2022, once the bird-nesting season has finished, and it is hoped that desilting in these areas can be carried out at the same time by the same contractor.

Questions were then invited from the Canal Group on the contents of the Officer's report. A Member referred to the installation of new locking mechanisms to barriers across the Canal and explained that he had received some complaints around disabled access whereby wheelchair and scooter users were unable to use the towpath. The Member asked if consideration could be given to installing radar key locks at these locations and it was arranged that Miss Stook would contact the Member following the meeting to confirm the exact locations where these issues are being experienced. The Member also highlighted instances of where towpath barriers have been left unlocked by maintenance crews and has led to motorcyclists using the towpath. Miss Stook confirmed that she would also look into this issue.

A Member referred to the work of the Waterways Recovery Group and their involvement across the Newport stretch of the Canal, and asked if Caerphilly Council could explore working with this Group in order to maximise volunteering, employment and regeneration opportunities across the local community, and also draw on the volume of experience available from the Waterways Recovery Group. Miss Stook confirmed that although this avenue could be explored, consideration would firstly need to be given to the procurement process and the contractors involved with the various aspects of the Canal work to ascertain what role/remit the Waterways Recovery Group could potentially have in the regeneration of the Canal.

A Member sought an update on the damaged steps to the rear of Carlton Terrace in Crosskeys which lead to the Canal bank, and it was confirmed that this would come under the remit of the Countryside Services department.

A Member referred to the drying up of the Darren Brook and the stream going down to Green Meadow, and asked whether this was related to nearby forestry works and whether this in

turn had contributed to silting issues, and he asked if Natural Resources Wales were investigating the cause. Miss Stook explained that although she had only recently taken up post, she had been made aware of an instance where a person was living rough in the nearby woods and had altered the direction of one of the watercourses, which is believed to have contributed to the silting issues. However, Miss Stook emphasised that silting is a natural issue and as the Council do not own the land, all they can do is commit to maintaining and addressing any silting issues that occur along the Canal.

Following discussion, the Canal Group noted the content of the report and thanked Miss Stook for her update.

6. UPDATE FROM MR RICHARD DOMMETT - MBACT

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

The Canal Group were advised that Mr Dommatt stepped down as MBACT Chair back in 2020 during a period of ill health and Reverend John Collier was appointed as the new Chair. It was noted that following his recovery, Mr Dommatt subsequently agreed to take on the role of Regeneration Consultant to MBACT.

Members were advised of projects in progress, with it noted that Torfaen Council have recently appointed a new Canal officer. Mr Dommatt and Reverend Collier are representing MBACT in a new Torfaen Canal Working Partnership, along with representatives from other bodies including Bridge 46, a constituted group whose members have been looking at possible options to improve facilities at Five Locks. They have also been very active in seeing the Canal open through the new development at Hanbury Village Wharf Development in South Sebastopol.

It was emphasised that Torfaen councillors are keen to see the canal regeneration programme move forward. The first stage is to restore the Canal from Five Locks to Mount Pleasant and the second stage is to complete restoration from Mount Pleasant to Cwmbran town centre, which will be a long-term project requiring a significant level of expenditure. It was explained that major funders wish to see a restoration programme for the entire Canal to ensure it is the intention of all relevant local authorities to regenerate their own sections of the Canal.

Mr Dommatt explained that MBACT have taken on the task of updating the Regeneration Programme (Living Links) which was published in 2007 as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund application. It was noted that MBACT also has the opportunity to resubmit the Ty Coch Waterway Park Project application to HLF which was put on hold at the time of the Covid-19 lockdown. The consultants who wrote the original Business Plan four years ago have been commissioned to update the original viability survey.

MBACT have also been advising Newport and Torfaen Councils on planning applications involving a towpath access bridge adjacent to lock 34 at Kimberly Park Newport, towing path surfacing and a programme to replace all the lock gates which were fitted during the first phase of restoration.

Reverend Collier was then invited to add to the update from Mr Dommatt, and he explained that he has arranged for Mr Wyn Mitchell (MBACT) to hold discussions around Canal matters with Newport and Rhondda Cynon Taf Councils. Reverend Collier explained that it is also his wish to restart the wider Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership Group (involving representatives from each of the local authority Canal Groups),

even if they only meet on a twice-annual basis, in order for Canal partners to share good practice and help support each other. The Canal Group were advised that MBACT are also looking to secure funding in order to purchase a refurbished reed cutting machine which can be loaned out to various councils in order to assist with maintenance across their stretches of the Canal.

A Member asked if meetings of the National Assembly Cross-Party Group on Waterways are still taking place. Mr Dommett explained that this particular Group ceased to operate when the Regeneration Manager for British Waterways retired. He emphasised that the priority is to resurrect the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership Group, and then if the Partnership Group were subsequently minded to develop a focus group similar in nature to the National Assembly Group, then this is something that could be explored further down the line.

The Canal Group thanked Mr Dommett and Reverend Collier for their presentation and noted the details of the update.

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 5.58 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2023, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR