



MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL - CRUMLIN ARM WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
THURSDAY 26TH FEBRUARY 2015 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT

Mr R.J. Dommett – Vice-Chair

Councillors:

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

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

Together with:

C. Bradley (Funding Officer), K. Kinsey (Principal Engineer - Consultancy), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N. George, D.M. Gray, Mrs P. Griffiths, G. Johnston, Ms P. Leonard, K. Lloyd, Mrs R. Passmore and D. Rees.

In the absence of Councillor 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 – 25TH NOVEMBER 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th November 2014 were approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Kevin Kinsey, Principal Engineer, presented an update on matters relating to the Canal.

Canal Channel – Members were advised that weed cutting/channel clearance works were completed on the Manor Road section just before Christmas. Further weed cutting is programmed for the Navigation Road to Darran Road section before the end of March, which has to be done by hand due to access issues. The removal of all debris and undergrowth from the aqueduct section is also programmed to be undertaken by the end of March.

Officers provided further details of the level of weed cutting and channel clearance works planned for these sections of the Canal and confirmed that these works would not impact on surrounding protected structures.

Grass Maintenance – Grass cutting has been undertaken and is programmed to re-start in March 2015, and will continue on a 4-weekly cycle up to October 2015.

5. 2014/2015 WORKS PROGRAMME

Towpath – works were completed before Christmas to raise a short length of canal bank to the rear of Brynhyfryd Terrace. These works were undertaken to address a long-standing problem with overtopping during periods of heavy rainfall.

Access Enhancement – no works are planned for this year.

Water Control – National Resources Wales are looking into re-routing the Cwm Byr Stream back along its original course. It is hoped that if this is done successfully then the issue of excessive erosion and consequential silt generation will lessen and possibly stop.

Discussion took place between Members and Officers regarding the various feeder streams located within the area and the feasibility of investigating these water sources further. Officers also confirmed that they were looking into the possibility of developing a hydro scheme in the Cwmcarn area.

Dredging – it is still planned to dredge the section of canal between Green Meadow Bridge and Darran Road Bridge in order to restore a navigable route through this section. However, the disposal of the wet silt is a major issue as wet material cannot be taken to landfill.

The Engineering Projects Group is currently exploring a number of alternative options relating to the disposal of silt, and Mr Dommett provided the name of a contact in the Canal and River Trust who might be able to advise in respect of licensing concerns surrounding this matter.

Tree Maintenance – CCBC are in the process of securing quotations for a tree survey over the full length of the canal. Any identified works will be undertaken in Autumn 2015.

In response to a Member's query, Officers explained that a shortage of resources had resulted in a delay to the original planned survey date, but that the surveys would now commence shortly. It was anticipated that any identified works would be undertaken as per scheduled in Autumn 2015. Reference was made to the presence of larch disease in the county borough and Officers confirmed that there was currently no indication to suggest that it was affecting trees along the canal bank.

External Funding – there are no external funding sources available at present.

Channel Leak Repair – the second phase of works to complete the relining up to the downstream end of the aqueduct will be tendered in March and is programmed to commence after the Easter holidays in April 2015 (budget permitting).

Members were informed that the Head of Engineering Services sought the endorsement of the Canal Group in relation to these relining works. This was unanimously agreed by those Members present.

Emergency Works – during the stormy conditions experienced in January, a section of timber fencing adjacent to the section of towpath between Gelli Avenue and Thistle Way suffered damage, to the extent that the full length has to be replaced. This work is currently ongoing.

6. FUNDING

Capital – a capital budget allocation for 2014/15 has been fully committed. It is indicated that the budget allocation for 2015/16 will be £212,000, and this funding will be used to complete the channel leak repair at Pontywaun.

Revenue – the 2014/2015 budget allocation was £126,500, and at the time of writing, approximately £45,000 remained unspent.

Expenditure using the remaining budget is allocated to cover recent emergency works, further channel maintenance as identified and disposal of channel-dredged silt.

7. BOATS

There were no updates in this respect.

8. CANAL MAINTENANCE

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

The Principal Engineer was thanked for his report.

9. CRUMLIN ARM ACTION PLAN 2015 – FINAL DRAFT VERSION

Christina Bradley, Funding Officer, presented the final draft version of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Action Plan to the Group, which had originated from a cross-departmental meeting relating to the Canal and had previously been presented to the Canal Group in draft form. The document consisted of a number of proposed actions relating to the Canal and the final draft version was appended to the agenda papers.

The Action Plan contained information on the background and geography of the Canal, together with its strategic context and asset value. It also contained information on CCBC's vision and objectives for the Canal, proposals, the estimated costs of works and an implementation plan of works

Officers explained that the Draft Action Plan had been put out for consultation and received a number of responses which were incorporated within the final version of the document. Members were advised that if they were minded to adopt the Action Plan, then it would link into a number of other plans to seek funding opportunities in partnership with other local authorities. Officers explained that a regional bid for restoration work was currently in the process of being developed by local authorities across South Wales, which could include the possibility of funding being made available to develop regeneration schemes relating to the Canal.

A number of promotional opportunities were also being investigated, which included the possibility of promoting the Canal within schools and organising a Canal-focused event for July 2015. A query was raised as to whether the grounds of Adam's Quarry could be used to host the event, and Officers explained that there were a number of health and safety considerations that would prevent its use for such an event.

Reference was made to the map of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal included within the Action Plan, which detailed a number of protected structures and obstructions along the Canal. Discussion and debate took place regarding a number of items on the map, including the positioning of the items on the map and the history of the protected structures. Members were particularly interested in the history of the Harry Roberts Bridge, and Mr Dommatt and Mr Illman of the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenney Canal Trust agreed that they would make enquiries regarding this matter and report their findings to the next meeting of the Canal Group.

During the course of the meeting, further discussion on the history of the Canal and the surrounding area took place. Mr Illman was extremely interested in the recollections of Members and asked if he could meet with them separately at a future convenient date in order to collate their memories of the Canal. The Group agreed that they were happy for such arrangements to be made. Mr Illman was also provided with the details of a local resident who might have an archive of information and photographs relating to the Canal.

Members unanimously endorsed the final draft version of the Action Plan and agreed that the document be released for general circulation. Members were pleased to note the work carried out in the composition of the Action Plan and thanked Officers for their efforts. It was agreed that regular updates on the progress of the Action Plan be reported to the Group.

10. UPDATE FROM MR RICHARD DOMMETT, MBACT

Mr Richard Dommatt updated the Group on the work of Network Inland Waterways Europe (NIWE), which is comprised of a number of waterway-related organisations from across Europe. The most recent meeting took place in London and was very productive, with representatives from a number of countries (including Sweden, Norway, Italy and Scotland) in attendance.

Arising from this meeting, MBACT developed a matrix which outlined the strategic direction of NIWE members, with a view to creating partnerships with like-minded European partners for future EU funding bids.

A copy of this matrix was tabled to the Canal Group, and it was explained that aspects of this document could be used to establish the way forward in relation to the regeneration of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. It was agreed for an electronic version of this document to be forwarded to the Canal Group.

Members' attention was directed to a number of funding bodies detailed within the matrix, which placed an emphasis on cross-national European funding. Officers explained that these could potentially be an alternative source of funding if the regional funding bid currently in development was unsuccessful. Further details of potential partnership opportunities and the processes involved were outlined to Members.

CCBC Officers and Mr Dommatt are currently drafting a number of reports in relation to alternative funding bids, which will be submitted to potential partners and WEFO. Members were advised that this would not affect the regional regeneration bid currently in development, and agreed for this work to be progressed, with an update to be brought to the next meeting of the Canal Group.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Kevin Kinsey, Principal Engineer, informed Members that Ty Sign Primary School had recently held a competition for pupils to develop artwork relating to the Code of Conduct which had been implemented on a section of the Canal towpath. A number of entries had been received, along with some entries relating to the disposal of litter, and the Council planned to make use of the winning artwork for each of these areas. Arrangements were being made for a presentation ceremony for the competition winners, and it was suggested that it could be hosted in the Mayor's Parlour, Penallta House in mid-March 2015. The Chair and Vice-Chair were invited to attend and the invitation was also extended to the rest of the Canal Group.

Members were informed that the Engineering Division are looking to produce a Canal Asset Management Plan, which would outline the processes by which the Canal is managed and maintained, and which could be referenced in the event of future queries and challenges. Once it is developed, this document will link in to the existing Crumlin Arm Action Plan.

Reference was made to several letters of complaint received from a Risca resident, which claimed that a number of signs had been spotted along the Canal towpath, and that these signs prohibited the use of the towpath by cyclists. Officers and Members confirmed that they had been unable to locate any such signs, and that cyclists were permitted to use the towpath as it was part of the National Cycle Network.

The meeting closed at 11.12 am.

The next meeting of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group is scheduled for Thursday 18th June 2015 at 10.00 am.