

Public Document Pack

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Tuesday, 6 March 2018 at 7.00 pm

AGENDA

- 1 **Apologies**
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 2 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions relating to items on the Agenda of the public and replies thereto.
- 3 **Minutes** (*Pages 3 - 12*)
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 3 October 2017.
- 4 **Matters Arising**
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 5 **Chairman's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.
- 6 **AI update from the Chairman**
To receive an update from the Chairman regarding recent communication with Aggregate Industries.
- 7 **Progress report** (*Pages 13 - 22*)
To receive a report from the Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager (DCC) informing Members of the work that has taken place to date.
- 8 **Impact on the canal of recent planning applications**
To discuss the impact on the canal of recent planning applications and to agree on a collective response if appropriate.
- 9 **Sustrans membership**
To consider the future membership of the Sustrans group on the Committee.
- 10 **Any other business**
To consider any other relevant business.
- 11 **Identification of items for the next meeting**
To identify any issues for discussion at the next meeting.

12 **Date of next meeting**

To agree the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 2nd October 2018 at 7.00pm in the Exe Room, Phoenix House.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday 26 February 2018

Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so, as directed by the Chairman. Any filming must be done as unobtrusively as possible from a single fixed position without the use of any additional lighting; focusing only on those actively participating in the meeting and having regard also to the wishes of any member of the public present who may not wish to be filmed. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairman or the Member Services Officer in attendance so that all those present may be made aware that is happening.

Members of the public may also use other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to discussion. Lift access to the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions.

An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, or if you would like a copy of the Agenda in another format (for example in large print) please contact Sarah Lees on:

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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 3 October 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C A Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr K Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr L Neville	Burlescombe Parish Council
Cllr K D Wilson	Tiverton Town Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Hireboats and Moorings
Mr P Brind	The Tiverton Canal Company
Mr R Hodgson	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr D Howells	Community Patrol Boat
Mr R Jones	Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim	Inland Waterways Association
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Unit Sea Cadet Corps
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling Club
Mr T White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal

Officers:

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, DCC
Mr A Jarrett	Director of Finance, Assets and Resources, MDDC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr R F Radford be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2017/18.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs C A Collis and seconded by Cllr Mrs S Griggs)

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr C R Slade be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2017/18.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs C A Collis and seconded by Mr P Brind)

3 APOLOGIES

The following members of the Committee had sent their apologies for the meeting:

- Cllr Roger Croad (Devon County Council)
- Cllr David Cutts (Sampford Peverell Parish Council)

- Cllr Chris Daw (Mid Devon District Council)
- Miss Jean Hall (Inland Waterways Association. Miss Hall was substituted by Mrs J Pilgrim)
- Mr Jeremy Ison (Devon Wildlife Trust)
- Mrs Ros Mills (Devon County Council)
- Cllr Miss Clarissa Slade (Mid Devon District Council)

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Dave Gillings stated that he was a barge owner on the canal and addressed his first question to Devon County Council officers. He stated that the revitalisation of the Canal in 2005, when motor boats had been allowed on, must have been very fulfilling, now 12 years on, how does the County Council view the canal? Is it a beautiful asset or a country park with a large pond? The Canal Manager responded by saying that in some ways it was both. There needed to be balance of focus and attention. Resources were limited and had to be directed so that all users of the canal were accommodated, this included boat owners, users of the horse drawn barge, anglers etc.

Mr Gillings further stated that he found it difficult to proceed from his mooring and had trouble getting to the lift bridge. The reason for this was due to reed ingression. Last year there had been a 37% increase in their licence fee. Could the Canal Manager assure him that the same increase had been passed on to other users of the canal? The Canal Manager stated that it wasn't just narrow boat owners who had to pay for a licence, Kayakers, anglers, the horse drawn barge all had to pay a fee. Potential increases were reviewed every few years not annually. They had always been keen to pitch the fee at a level below that of other waterways nearby so that boats preferred to remain on the Grand Western Canal.

Mr Gillings continued by stating that despite the increase in licence fee boat owners did not receive any services for it. The existing mooring had been provided by businesses and mooring spots were decreasing in number because of reed ingression. The Canal Manager responded by stating that he had not been asked to supply or install any more wooden landing stages since the existing ones were built. Concern was expressed by the Committee that in order for the views of boat owners to be heard they needed to have a representative. It was **AGREED** that Mrs Pat Brind from Mid Devon Moorings should be the conduit through which the concerns of boaters should be channelled. The Canal Manager also informed the Committee that there was a scheduled programme of works to address the reed ingression as exemplified by works in recent years near Ebear Bridge and forthcoming works this year near Ayshford Bridge.

5 MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 7 March 2017, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 22 – final sentence under 'Future programme of works' should read 'The interpretation panel on the bridge was also replaced' and not 'The interpretation panel on the barge was also replaced'.

- Minute 25 – the second sentence should have read ‘...in certain stretches of the canal the water was not visible’ instead of ‘...certain stretches of the canal were now invisible...’

6 MATTERS ARISING

The following matters were raised regarding the minutes of the previous meeting:

- a) Cllr Les Neville informed the Committee that there had not yet been an official opening of the Fossend project due to some dangerous overhanging trees and an unstable industrial arch feature in a stone tower which the Parish Council were seeking advice on as to how to progress. He stated that Aggregate Industries had offered an interpretation board but up till now nothing had been forthcoming. An official opening would happen once these elements had been resolved.
- b) Cllr C R Slade informed the Committee that, in relation the dog bins on the canal, following a query from a local resident he had been told that Mid Devon District Council were still emptying them. The Director of Finance, Assets and Resources also confirmed that MDDC would continue to collect waste from these existing bins. The question was raised as to whether there was enough signage along the canal reminding dog owners of the need to bag dog waste. It was confirmed that every notice board had a reminder and advice to dog owners but ultimately it was their responsibility.
- c) Regarding the Anaerobic Digester at Crown Hill, it was confirmed that a liaison group had been established with the owners of the site, officers from the planning authority, other interested parties and the Chairman of the JAC invited to attend. This had been due to meet every three months, however, the next meeting was already overdue. The Canal Manager expressed some concern about how well screened the boundary had been with the Canal tow path. As a result the Ranger Service was looking at laying a hedge to thicken it and obscure the view. This meant potentially spending quite a lot of money. He requested that the Chairman ask the liaison group whether the landowners could make a contribution towards the cost of thickening the hedge and further requested that he emphasise to the landowner that cutting the hedge short did not help.
- d) At the previous meeting further information had been promised from the Head of Planning and Regeneration regarding the location of digestate at Tidcombe Fen. The Director of Finance, Assets and Resources stated that he would follow this up and report back to the Committee as soon as possible.

Note: Mr Peter Saupe declared a personal interest as he worked at the Anaerobic Digester Crown Hill site as a sub contractor.

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make other than to state he would be updating the Committee on correspondence relating to the Fenacre Water System later on in the meeting.

8 COMMUNITY PATROL BOAT

Background information relating to the reasoning for setting up the Community Patrol Boat was provided by Phil Brind. This had included persistent instances of dangerous cycling and irresponsible dog owners. Mr Dion Howells, who in his professional life was a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), had developed a keen interest in setting up the Community Patrol Boat to initially operate in his spare time. He had visited several councils to gain information and advice about the best way to do this as well as contacting many Tiverton businesses for support. Many businesses had felt that this would provide a genuine public service. The Tiverton Canal Company had been happy to sponsor one of their old day boats. Following this Mr Howells had managed to secure some additional funding. A separate committee had now been formed to oversee the management of the patrol boat with the Canal Manager and Cllr K D Wilson forming a part of its membership. Positive feedback had been received from users of the Canal regarding this new initiative. This was an independent community led project with many other Canal users nationally watching to see whether this initiative could be replicated elsewhere.

Mr Howells stated that the patrol boat had been up as far as Westleigh and that this took about five and a half hours to navigate. He had noticed people sleeping rough, dog walkers neglecting to pick up dog waste, cyclists not getting off their bike when going under bridges and being on their phones. He kept a log of what he saw every time he took the boat out. At the moment he was only able to get out one day a week due to other commitments, however, it was hoped to be able to train somebody else to assist in the future. He would be able to act in the role as an angling club bailiff within the next couple of weeks and this was viewed by the Committee as a valuable step forward.

Further discussion took place regarding:

- Mr Howells had taken a group of sea cadets out on the boat which they had thoroughly enjoyed.
- It would be nice to extend the patrol of the boat beyond Westleigh.

9 TERMS OF REFERENCE / MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

Member considered the Terms of Understanding * and Membership of the Committee.

It was noted that there had been some difficulty in finding a representative from Sustrans (or the cycling community as a whole) to attend each meeting. It was therefore suggested that the Clerk write to them one more time stating that if no representative was forthcoming they would be removed from the membership.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Understanding and the Membership of the Committee be agreed subject to the following amendments:

- Mid Devon District Council – ‘Head of Housing and Property Services’ be replaced with ‘Director of Finance, Assets and Resources’ since there had been a change in the management structure of the Council within the previous six months.

- A representative from the Community Patrol Boat be added as a voting member on the Committee.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

10 **PROGRESS REPORT AND FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORKS**

Consideration was given to a report * of the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager.

Arising thereon:

Tilting weir

A recent heavy rainfall event showed that further fine tuning of the settings was needed to programme the weir to release more water, as on that occasion a ranger had to manually open a sluice to keep levels from rising too high.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The likelihood of the weir opening up accidentally either due to abuse or malfunction. There were concerns that should this happen the Canal would drain very fast. The Canal Manager confirmed that the engineers were confident the weir could not open accidentally. There had been no record of this happening. As regards abuse, vandals would need to know how the system worked and this was a technical piece of equipment. The system worked by measuring the distance from a sensor to the water level of the canal. There were actually three sensors and an email would be sent if there was a fault.
- Stopboards had now been delivered which could be inserted into steel grooves and screwed down.
- Water levels would have to drop by 20cm to trigger the existing low level warning system.
- The supplier confirmed that no regular maintenance was necessary for the tilting weir just visual inspection. The Rangers would just have to keep an eye on the batteries.
- The weir was potentially a fish trap and if a lot of water was released a large number of fish could be lost. However, it was not possible to secure meshing since this would potentially collect a great deal of debris.
- The Canal Manager would be investigating the possibility of installing camera's to both monitor the effectiveness of the system and to detect vandalism.

Canal basin wall-moving project

The following update was provided:

- Good progress was being made.
- The soft Breccia stone wall had been successfully dismantled without the stones being broken.
- No archaeology had been found and no underground services had been affected.

- All was proceeding as planned although the road closure was not popular, however, this had been the only way South West Highways had been able to complete the works safely.
- There had been considerable costs involved with opening up the road at weekends.
- The project had taken up a lot of the Canal Managers time.
- All the parapet fences and hand rails would have the same finish.
- One car parking space would be lost at the entrance as a result of the new arrangements.
- The Conservation Officer at MDDC had insisted that two trial walls be built off site prior to commencement of the project since the wall was historically important.
- The project would be completed within an 8-9 week programme.

Discussion took place regarding:

- How well the project was progressing and the impressive standard of work by the contractors.
- There had been many near accidents with the previous arrangements.
- There was some confusion regarding the signage within the locality and whether the canal itself remained open and not just businesses within and alongside it.
- Pedestrian access had been maintained.
- The potential for a crossing could be explored by the Highway and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) once the works were completed especially in the light of there being a children's play area in the future.

Other walls around the Canal Basin

- An application for DCC corporate funding would be made to address the issue of damage caused by trees planted decades ago along the southern boundary of the Canal Basin car park.
- There was a gradually worsening problem with the wall between the garden of the Moorings and the road. Spray from cars was slowly eroding the soft stone and undermining the wall along the bottom 40cm. Corporate funding had been secured to address the issue and works would be undertaken while the existing road closure was in place.

Ash Dieback

This was a serious problem nationally and had affected both young saplings and older trees along the canal. A consultant would be visiting the site the next day to assess the situation further. There was potentially some corporate funding available for felling diseased trees since the County Council had a duty of care on its land and along highways.

Ramp beside Ebear Bridge

A new ramp and hand rails had been installed which the Committee agreed was visually more pleasing and much safer than before.

Fenacre water transfer system

The following update was provided:

- The Canal Manager had asked the Chairman to follow up on progress with Aggregate Industries (AI) following a lack of communication.
- AI had commissioned a report from AMEC to ascertain future options regarding the water system, these options still needed to be checked for feasibility.
- The Chairman stated that they needed to continue to apply pressure to AI where they could to ensure progress was made but reiterated the fact that discussions were still needed regarding health and safety.
- Jacobs would be analysing the report on behalf of DCC since it was very technical in nature. Attention needed to be focussed on whether or not water could be stored in the quarry but again there were issues about health and safety and geostability. A further meeting with AI, AMEC and the Environment Agency would be needed once the report had been analysed.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- There were a lot of unknowns, especially during long periods of dry weather. Digging down into the quarry so low over a period of decades had reduced water supply to the canal and that was accepted by AI.
- As it currently stood if there was no significant rainfall in the summer months then it was an inevitable fact that the water levels would be very low by the autumn.
- There was much disappointment and frustration that another 6 months had gone by without much progress.
- The quarry had applied for renewal of mining permissions, several issues were holding this up including traffic flow around Burlescombe.
- Pressure to get some progress must be maintained although it was accepted that no leverage could be held over the Environment Agency.

Boat permits

The Canal Manager had met with Adam Pilgrim and Pat Brind after the last meeting to discuss a revised set of terms and conditions. He had been told by DCC that it would be possible for permits to be purchased on line, however, there had been a delay in getting this up and running. There had been broad agreement about a number of changes, however, further feedback was required from the County Solicitors. It was one of the Canal Managers priorities for the autumn to finish this piece of work.

Discussion took place with regard to the following:

- Boaters often use Tiverton Road car park and when questioned some had admitted to not having a permit.
- A change to the by-laws would be needed if boaters were required to just purchase a permit from a pay and display type machine as there was a requirement by law to hold the names and addresses of permit holders.
- New ticket machines would cost thousands of pounds and sufficient income to cover this would never be recouped.

- There was also a problem with canoes in that the BCU had indicated they have a right to go on any waterway.
- A suggestion for the revised terms and conditions to be approved by Adam Pilgrim, Pat Brind and the Canal Manager alone was not supported and it was **AGREED** that the revised wording be circulated to all Committee members and agreed by them as a whole.

Benches

A query was raised as to what happened to benches that through time had decayed and were no longer safe to be sat on? The Canal Manager explained that if they were able to trace who had originally paid and requested the bench then they would be contacted. However, if this was not possible and they were past their natural life they were removed but the plaques were always retained at the workshops.

Wetland bird survey

The Committee wished to pass on their thanks to Ray Jones for over 20 years of dedicated service in undertaking the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Wetland Bird Survey along the Canal once every month and also Andrew Cunningham who assisted him for much of this time. It requested that their thanks be conveyed to them through the Clerk.

It meant that a volunteer was now sought to undertake the survey once a month between the Tiverton and Greenway section of the Canal.

Canal Visitor Guide

It was agreed that the new Visitor Guide looked much more professional especially now that the darker photographs had been removed. A request was made however for anyone with good photographs of the Canal to submit them to the Canal Manager for the next publication.

Events

Praise was requested to be passed on to the team for the large number of events that had taken place since the last meeting. Those who attended had provided very positive feedback and as well as learning a great deal had had great fun.

Future Programme of Works

It was confirmed that the play project was due to go in once the wall project had been finished.

Weed management would also be on-going.

11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following items were raised under this item:

Fenacre Bridge – this was still being looked at by the County Solicitors. It was requested that the Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager be contacted to see if she could provide the Committee with an update.

Items for the next meeting – it was requested that this become a standing item on each agenda in the future.

Marketing of the Canal – Phil Brind informed the Committee that a large article would be appearing in Waterways World next month telling the story of the Canal. He also informed them that he was heavily involved in a project reaching out for funding to brand the Canal as it was the largest attraction in Mid Devon. Other districts were branded but Mid Devon was very much seen as a drive through. A Facebook page had been started entitled 'Mid Devon, What's On'. He stated that he was Chairman of the Mid Devon Attractions Group which was focussing on the branding. This would be especially important if the plans for Junction 27 went ahead as if they did not lead on the branding somebody else would. He strongly believed that in the long run there would be economic benefits to Tiverton.

It was suggested that the Attractions Group put in an application for locality budget funding through the DCC website and that they make sure all Mid Devon County Councillors were aware of this not just the ones on the JAC.

It was also suggested that contact be made with MDDC's Economic Development Officer and the Grants and Funding Officer who might be able to assist.

12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 6 March 2018 at 7pm in the Exe Room.

(The meeting ended at 9.32 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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Progress Report (October 2017 – February 2018 inclusive)

1. Wall-moving project

The project to move back the roadside wall near the car park entrance has been completed. The project was funded by Section 106 contributions from developers involved with the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension.

Visibility for drivers leaving the Canal Basin car park is now significantly improved, and the road crossing for pedestrians is also safer.



Given the changes to the layout of the car park entrance, the old landscape-orientated welcome sign needed to be changed for a new portrait-orientated one, which provided an opportunity to update the design.



Although there was understandable frustration on the part of local residents at the length of the road closure required to undertake the work safely, the finished job has attracted a great deal of positive

comment and approval from Canal visitors and from the MDDC Conservation Officer.

At present the final stage of the Road Safety Audit process is being undertaken, which may lead to some further adjustments or improvements.

2. Play area

The completion of the wall-moving project enabled work to commence on installing the new play area on the land above. Contractors began work in January and at the time of writing most of the equipment and all of the gates and fencing have been installed. Work on installing the matting, and remaining benches and bin will follow in late February / early March once ground conditions have improved.



An official opening, to be led by DCC Chairman, Cllr Ray Radford, has been organised for 1pm on Wednesday 11th April and all JAC members are invited to attend.

3. Canal Basin car park flower bed

The wall-moving project required the wall between Canal Hill and the public toilets to be repointed and for a number of the bushes in front of this wall to be cut down. In order to open up views of the newly repointed wall, provide a more welcoming 'gateway' to the Canal and widen the space available to vehicles entering and leaving the car park, a new wall has been built to retain a new flower bed.

The new wall and tarmacked strip below has enabled the parking bays on this side to be moved over by 50cm, creating more space at the entrance - especially for coaches which sometimes struggle when cars are parked on both sides. Other faded parking bay lines have been repainted at the same time.



The Canal Manager has discussed possible planting options with the MDDC amenity horticulture team, who have indicated that they may be able to plant and manage the bed as part of their wider role in Mid Devon for a modest fee.

4. Other works around the Canal Basin

A number of other improvements have been undertaken recently or are due for completion during March and April. One that has been completed is the fabrication and installation of new railings and retaining wall beside the gent's toilets. The wall and railings replaced a wooden wall that was rotting and match those on the other side of the building.



The grass beside the bins near the steps is often muddy in the winter and so the Canal Rangers have created a new path to provide better access to the bins. The two old green bins near the public toilets (one of which was vandalised) have been replaced with black ones to match those by the steps.

The orientation panel mounted to the rock at the base of the steps is out of date and the

other rock-mounted interpretation panel at the top of the steps is also very old and faded, and so replacement panels are being prepared. The designers undertaking the work also designed the Visitor Centre displays and so there will be consistency in the design styles.

The toilet bowl in the accessible toilet had been vandalised and has been replaced. Repeated problems with the flush mechanism have also been addressed by repositioning the cistern.

Whilst Canal Hill was closed for the wall moving works, Devon County Council took the opportunity to repair the boundary wall between the road and the garden of The Moorings. The wall was being undercut by spray and the pointing was crumbling. After ivy growth was removed, the wall was repointed and the base was protected from future spray damage by the inclusion of a kerb and a shoulder of cement. A mortar coping was added to protect the wall from water ingress. The work was approved by the MDDC Conservation Officer and funded by a corporate premises budget.



At present, the Canal Basin picnic area contains a mix of different style seats and benches giving it a rather cluttered appearance. A new style of oak seats and benches – the *Woodland Range*, provided by Streetmaster – has been selected and a number of seats and benches have been ordered to replace many of the existing ones in the Canal Basin, with most of the original ones to be redeployed elsewhere along the canal. The new structures should be installed before the Easter holidays.

In response to feedback from visitors who would like to see more benches with backs along the towpath, the *Hawthorn* oak seat (part of the *Woodland Range*) is now being offered to people enquiring about memorial benches along the canal, as well as the basic oak bench which we build ourselves.



Hawthorn Seat

There are plans to replace the green parking signs and posts around the Canal Basin car park, many of which are damaged and which are a mish-mash of styles / colours / fonts, with a uniform house style which will be adhered to in future. It is likely this work will need to wait until the new financial year at which point it can be afforded.



All of these improvements should help to make the Canal a more pleasant and appealing place to visit, providing a boost for canal businesses and the wider local economy.

5. Reed management

The ongoing programme of reed management continued this winter with a section on the Sampford Peverell side of Ayshford Bridge being dredged. Due to the lack of available adjacent land to spread the dredged material on, a new technique was trialled which proved effective. An excavator worked from the towpath side and separated chunks of reed growth and set them afloat for the new weedboat to collect and offload on the offside bank. This year only the towpath side margins were dredged and it is anticipated that the offside will also need to be done in a few years' time.



A 10m section near the Ebear dragonfly interpretation panel was also dredged in the same way to provide space for a new landing stage due to be built in the coming months.

6. Towpath surfacing and drainage works at Lowdwells



A section of towpath at Lowdwells had become very muddy and the existing French drain had become blocked in one area. This was limiting vehicle access for the Canal Ranger Service. A contractor was engaged to refurbish the French drain, scrape mud from the edges and re-dress the path with compacted stone.

7. Tree management works

Throughout the winter the Canal Ranger Service has been undertaking annual tree management works. Most of the work has been focussed on the offside banks, using the maintenance barge with the chipper on board, but work has also been undertaken on trees along the towpath side.

Following the intensive willow coppicing work on the Manley to East Manley section last winter, similar work has been undertaken on the section at the top of the Swans Neck this winter, as shown in the photos overleaf. Willows growing from the water's edge have been

treated with ecoplugs to prevent regrowth, whereas willows further up the bank will grow



back and will be managed by coppicing on a rotation period of approximately 10 years.

As well as the usual work of trimming back overhanging branches, much greater effort has been made this year to address longer term tree management considerations. To this end, rangers have been thinning (selecting the best formed and positioned trees and coppicing adjacent trees to give space and light to the selected future standard trees), formatively pruning young trees, and felling a small number of badly formed trees that are only going to present expensive management headaches in future. This work has been guided by advice from an arboricultural consultant who makes management recommendations as well as safety recommendations as part of the routine tree safety inspections.

Tree surgeons have undertaken a small number of works which require climbing or felling large trees. Deadwood has been removed from a number of large oaks. One large dying ash at Greenway car park (suspected ash dieback) was felled and another near Tidcombe Bridge had its crown reduced and deadwood removed. Two large overhanging willows near Beech car park have been pollarded and a group of sycamores growing on a section of cutting at Lowdwells has been coppiced.

A small number of trees were blown down during the storms in early January. Most were cleared by the Canal Rangers, but the largest, near Lowdwells, required tree surgeons and a winching contractor to extract it from the canal.



Ivy growth had become prolific on a number of large trees in the cutting between Waytown Tunnel and Fenacre Bridge. Whilst ivy is very important for wildlife and does not damage healthy trees, it can add to the 'sail effect' of large trees when it begins to extend throughout the crown, making them more prone to being blown over in storms. This winter, ivy has been severed on all the large trees in this section where it had begun to extend throughout the crown. This is a periodic exercise which will be repeated every 5 years.

8. Hedge laying and planting

Two sections of hedge have been laid this winter. Canal Rangers and volunteers laid a section between Manley Bridge and East Manley Bridge (pictured) and a hedgelaying contractor laid a section between the Aqueduct and Crownhill Bridge. The aim of laying this second section is to thicken the hedge at the base and provide better screening of the AD plant at Crownhill. A large number of hedging trees have also been planted to fill the gaps and thicken the hedge. Half of the section has been laid this winter and the other half will be laid next winter. Although the work will actually open up views of the AD plant in the short term, it will provide much better screening in two to three years' time and thereafter.



Lots of other hedge planting and gapping-up is being undertaken along the Canal at present. An 80m length of hedge is being planted near Fenacre Bridge, with half having been completed during a Volunteer Day in early February and the other half due to be planted by students from Bicton College during a work experience day at the end of February.



Further hedge planting will be undertaken by Canal Rangers and volunteers from Blundells School, Tiverton Scouts, Tiverton High School during March. 420 of the trees being planted will be provided for free by the Woodland Trust thanks to an application made by the *Friends of the Grand Western Canal*.

9. Hedge and bank cutting

All of the usual hedge and bank cutting work was completed by a contractor during February, with the exception of a few sections too narrow for his tractor to access, which have since been done by the Canal Rangers using their Kubota tractor.

10. Atherton Way ditch works

The last major project using capital funding allocated for infrastructure improvements following the breach is currently underway. The open ditch which runs parallel to the canal behind Atherton Way and Francis Crescent is being excavated and lined with a cement-impregnated fabric liner. This will reduce the likelihood of the ditch overflowing into the canal or backing up and contributing to flooding problems in Atherton Way during extreme rainfall events. The liner will also make future maintenance of the ditch (which



has to be done by hand) much easier as there will be a smooth and defined base of the ditch to run a shovel along.

11. Badgers in Wilcombe embankment

A badger sett with a family of around 5 or 6 badgers has been present in the embankment beside Wilcombe Primary School since around 2009. In 2010, the Canal Ranger Service submitted a Badger licence application seeking permission to have the badgers relocated, due to concerns about the effect their burrowing could have on the embankment. This application was turned down by Natural England who felt there were other options for managing the effects of the badgers.

Following discussions with the DCC Chief Bridges and Structures Engineer, a second application was submitted in 2011, seeking permission to install a line of steel bars extending to a depth of 3m below water level at 7cm spacings along a length of 20m between the towpath and the canal bank. The aim here was to prevent the badgers from burrowing too close to the canal channel and creating a leak. This application was approved and the work was undertaken in December 2011.

In January and February this year there have been some collapses of burrows on the hedge side of the towpath following heavy rainfall and hedge trimming by the tractor. The most recent of these encroached onto the edge of the towpath and more importantly was located close to the end of the run of steel rods. The Canal Ranger Service will therefore as a minimum be applying to extend the run of steel rods; but an ecological consultant will also be engaged to see if a stronger application for removing the badgers from the embankment can be submitted.

12. Bank repair beside Buckland Bridge

Following a 3m long slip of the bank beside the Buckland Bridge steps in Sampford Peverell, various repair options were considered before a dry stone masonry repair was selected and then undertaken by contractors. It is felt that the dry stone wall provides a long term but affordable solution to supporting this steep section of bank.



13. Maintenance barge decking

The Canal Ranger Service has two old tub barges which are used for maintenance work – the main one with a cab which was refurbished last year and another without a cab that has not been used much in recent years due to rotting and uneven decking. The planks making up this decking ran long-ways along the hull and were inadequately supported, so were prone to warping and breaking.

The old decking has been removed and the hull cleaned out and new bearers have been welded in along the hull, enabling the barge to be decked with shorter planks running across the hull from side to side. This new decking will be installed during March or April and will increase the capacity of the Canal Ranger Service to transport materials, work simultaneously at different points along the canal or provide a barge for contractors (such as tree surgeons) to work from whilst the Rangers work elsewhere on the main barge.

14. Benches

5 new oak memorial benches have been built and installed near the following locations:

- Follett Road, Tiverton
- Snakes Wood
- Greenway Bridge x 2
- Westcott Bridge

There are also orders for two more oak benches and one *Hawthorn* seat.

15. Relaunch of Volunteer Warden scheme

The Volunteer Warden scheme, run in partnership between the Country Park and the Friends of the Grand Western Canal, had not had a co-ordinator for several years and there was uncertainty over how many Volunteer Wardens were still active and what they were doing. A new co-ordinator, Colin Swains, came forward last year and following a meeting with the Canal Ranger Service it was agreed that the scheme would be re-launched.

Colin has been in touch with the majority of existing Volunteer Wardens, many of whom are still active. In order to help encourage more people to take up this role, a new poster has been agreed with Colin, designed by the DCC design team and has been placed in all of the noticeboards along the towpath.

Several Volunteer Wardens and members of Tiverton Litterpickers will be taking part in a Canal litter pick as part of Keep Britain Tidy's *Great British Spring Clean* on the 2nd and 3rd March.

16. Staff training

Members of the Canal Rangers Service have been required to attend a large number of training courses during the period of the report. One of the drivers for this has been an increasing requirement for DCC staff to attend refresher courses every three years. Whilst much of this training is useful and necessary, it has had an impact on the team's capacity to keep up with its workload in the last few months.

Could you be a Volunteer Warden?

Do you enjoy walking the Canal towpath, perhaps with a friend or a dog or simply on your own? If so would you like to become a Volunteer Warden to help keep a watchful eye on your favourite section of the Canal?

There are various ways in which you can help, including:

- Acting as 'eyes and ears' and reporting issues to the Canal Rangers
- Using secateurs to trim back small overhanging branches and brambles
- Helping to keep it litter free

All necessary equipment will be provided and there are no set times or daily commitments, just whatever you feel you can manage.

If you feel you are able to join us in helping to keep this wonderful environment just the way we would all love to see it, then please contact our Volunteer Warden Co-ordinator Colin Swains on 01884 258456 for an informal chat.

17. Green Flag Award / Management Plan

The Canal Manager has made good progress on drafting a new management plan for the Country Park, based around Green Flag Award criteria.

The format is now settled and about three quarters of the plan has now been drafted. A draft will be emailed to JAC members for their feedback in the spring.

The work plan within the existing management plan has been extended to cover 2018/19 and this was submitted as part of the 2018/19 Green Flag Award application.

18. Volunteers

Weekday volunteers (mainly long term volunteers Lee and Craig, but also Bicton College student, Luke, who is working one day per week): 152 days

19. Events

- 10.10.17 Farmwise Event at Westpoint- 15 schools from all over Devon took part in a canal hedgerow tree identification quiz throughout the day led by JR.
- 17.10.17 Devon Recovery Learning Community - providing courses for the wellbeing of people in Devon who have mental health difficulties
– 4 walkers + JR – Fossend to Lowdwells Lock return
- 18.10.17 Walk & Talk – Sampford Peverell - 26 walkers + JR
- 12.11.17 Volunteer Day – 9 volunteers + JR
- 14.11.17 Devon Recovery Learning Community - 7 walkers + JR – Sampford Peverell
- 29.11.17 Walk & Talk – Holcombe Rogus – 22 walkers + JR
- 3.12.17 Christmas Wreath event – 26 Adults & 8 Children + JR
- 5.12.17 Devon Recovery Learning Community - 5 walkers + JR – Canal Basin to Manley Bridge return
- 10.12.17 Volunteer Day – CS – Cancelled due to heavy rain
- 10.01.18 Walk & Talk – Canal Basin – 32 walkers + JR
- 12.12.17 Stover Carols – MB + CS managed car parking at this popular annual event
- 14.01.18 Volunteer Day – 9 volunteers + MB
- 16.01.18 Devon Recovery Learning Community - 7 walkers + JR – Sampford Peverell
- 11.02.18 Volunteer Day – 7 volunteers + CS
- 20.02.18 Devon Recovery Learning Community – 7 walkers + JR – Swans Neck

21.02.18 Walk & Talk – Swans Neck – 34 walkers + JR

20. Schools

26.02.18 Blundell's – 10 students+ 2 staff +JR – Tree planting

28.02.18 Bicton College – 8 students +1 staff + CS - Tree planting

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF PRACTICAL WORKS

- Install new benches and seats in Canal Basin
- Relocate picnic benches elsewhere along the Canal
- Install new landing stage near Ebear Dragonfly Panel and extend Sampford Peverell landing stage to include kayak launch point. Funding for the timber for these landing stages has been provided through County Councillor Ray Radford's Locality Budget
- Finish tree and hedge management works. Finish hedge planting
- Plant up new Canal Basin flower bed
- Repair Canal Basin landing stage
- Replace horse corral in Canal Basin with new one
- Clean up Warnicombe Bridge
- Resurface towpath between Crownhill Bridge and the Aqueduct
- Install fence and gates around tilting weir
- Drain puddles in Tiverton, by Battens Bridge and in section between Waytown Tunnel and Fenacre Bridge
- Install fence and gate at Beech car park
- Clean outlying interpretation panels and stain/oil frames
- All usual mowing, strimming and weed cutting

MANAGEMENT PROJECTS TO BE PROGRESSED

- Complete drafting of new management plan
- Complete review of boating regulations and permitting
- Finalise design and oversee installation of new interpretation panels in Canal Basin, plus new Visitor Centre sign to be fixed on western side of building
- Organise update and reprint of Canal Visitor Guide
- Ongoing discussions regarding Fenacre water transfer system
- Organise Abstraction Licence applications (new legal requirement)
- Ongoing activities relating to Fenacre Water overtopping into the Canal
- Investigate options / submit applications /organise works relating to Badgers at Wilcombe embankment.
- Investigate possibility of applying for funding from Countryside Stewardship Hedgerows and Boundaries scheme and apply if eligible
- Audit signage at bridges and car parks and update / repair as necessary
- Organise agreements for residents parking at Sampford Peverell wharf