

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 5 March 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council
Cllr C J Eginton	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr L K Kennedy	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr R F Radford	Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Ken Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr P Brind	The Tiverton Canal Company
Cllr D Cutts	Sampford Peverell Parish Council
Miss Jean Hall	Inland Waterways Association
Mr J Hampshire	Cycling UK
Mr G Moore	Canal Business Group
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus and Burlescombe Parish Councils
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Unit Sea Cadets Corps
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling
Mr T White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal

Officers:

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, DCC
Mrs R Mills	Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC
Mr S Densham	Housing Development Service Manager, MDDC
Mrs S J Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

17 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Mrs Heather Bainbridge
- Dion Howells
- Ray Jones

18 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chairman had received the following public question from Mr William Clarke by email which he read out to the Committee:

“Myself and my neighbours are well aware of the problem of badgers in Wilcombe having lived for 10 years with devaluation and the systemic destruction of our gardens and fences not to mention the ever present threat of flood due to badger activity.

My question is: When are the badgers going to be definitively removed. The Committee seems solely to be concerned with preventing a leak. It ignores the plight of Wilcombe residents and their property for which surely it must have a duty of care. The construction of a barrier will not stop nightly damage in the vicinity nor will it strengthen the embankment being as it is sited water side of the towpath. The failure of the previous barrier proves this point.

Thank you again for accepting my question and associated remarks. I assume they will be presented to the whole Committee. Sir, it is time for the shilly-shallying to stop!"

The Chairman indicated that the comments from Mr Clarke would be addressed when the badger item was reached on the agenda.

19 MINUTES

Subject to the following two amendments, the minutes from the meeting held on 2 October 2018, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman:

1. The addition of Cllr Ken Browse as a member of the Cycling Signage Working Group.
2. Minute number 8, final sentence amended to read "He responded by saying that **Cycling UK** did not only represent cyclists but also walkers."

20 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- He informed the Committee that Cllr Kevin Wilson had resigned from Tiverton Town Council and was therefore no longer their representative. The Town Council would appoint a new representative after the election in May.
- Steve Densham had replaced Andrew Jarrett as the senior Mid Devon District Council officer representative on the Committee.

21 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising regarding the minutes of the previous meeting.

22 PROGRESS REPORT

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

Arising thereon:

Tree work by contractors

The largest job undertaken by tree surgeons along the canal this winter had been the felling of two Ash trees near Tidcombe Bridge. Both had been suffering from Ash Dieback.

New information panels in the Canal Basin

Two new panels had been installed in the Canal Basin. At the car park level, near TS Hermes, there was a new orientation panel which provided a map of the Canal Basin and detailed some of the highlights including the kilns. Feedback from the public had been very positive.

Manley silt trap

Beside Manley Bridge there was an ephemeral stream which drains run-off from Manley Lane into the canal. The stream brings in a lot of silt during storms and each spring a large excavator must be brought in to spot dredge the canal where the stream enters, so that the horse drawn barge and other boats don't run aground. The new silt trap should intercept most of the silt before it entered the canal.

Aqueduct repairs

An inspection had been carried out and a number of recommendations made with regard to the repairs needed, however, due to a number of various delays and distractions, the work could not be completed before Easter and so would need to be postponed until the autumn. The repairs needed were not classed as dangerous or critical.

Tilting weir alterations

The Canal Manager did not have complete confidence in the automatic control system described to the Committee in previous meetings and so it had been reprogrammed to offer him the capacity to operate it remotely. This was done by logging into a website and setting the percentage of full capacity he wished the weir to open and close to.

Pond restoration

Over the winter the Canal Rangers and volunteers had spent several days coppicing and winching out trees in and around the pond situated between Boehill Bridge and Holbrook Bridge in order to let more light in and allow more plant life, such as Marsh Marigolds, to establish.

Daffodil bulb planting

A County Council sponsored apprentice is currently working at both the Canal and Stover Country Park and has been very helpful in helping staff and volunteers recently involved in planting hundreds of daffodil bulbs at the entrance to the Canal Basin. This apprenticeship scheme is designed to give youngsters an environmental NVQ qualification and practical experience.

New content on visitor centre touchscreen

Visitor suggestions had included a number of children wanting more touchscreen interactive games in the Visitor Centre. The Canal Manager had become aware of some bat related games that had been developed for use on touchscreen systems and it was felt that the games and information provided would provide a fun way of raising awareness about the amazing lives that bat species lead.

Embankment badger barriers – 2010 case history and future works

In 2010, an application was made to Natural England (NE) to either have the badgers culled or relocated, but this was refused, as the local NE wildlife officer felt that other options which would enable the badgers to remain had not been fully explored. As there were no secondary setts known of in the area the badgers could not simply be excluded and the building of an artificial sett was not thought to be viable at that time due to issues around costs and land availability.

Eventually following lengthy discussions with DCC's engineers and the NE wildlife officer, a plan was devised to use scaffold poles to build a frame through which 2cm thick, 3m long steel rods would be inserted along the canal bank at a spacing of 7cm, thereby creating an impenetrable barrier to the badgers. Insertion through the 1.5m high frame would ensure that the rods remained at 7cm spacings, even at 3m below ground level. A badger licence for this work was applied for and was received in December 2011.

Whilst there had been some local consternation at the cost in money and labour of undertaking these works DCC has a strong case in arguing that it had no option but to act within the law and to obtain the necessary Natural England support and consents in order to carry out the works that were necessary to safeguard the Canal and the town below. DCC had to comply with the rules laid down by the law and Natural England. It was recognised that this was a very difficult situation.

As the badgers have now extended their burrows along the embankment, work will shortly take place to extend the line of steel rods along the whole embankment. The towpath would be closed during the works and a diversion would be waymarked. A Badger Licence from Natural England had been secured to enable the works to proceed.

It was suggested that a possible way of removing the badgers from the embankment would be to build an artificial sett in a nearby locality, perhaps as a wildlife interest with unobtrusive camera recording their activity which might be of interest to some enthusiasts.

Discussion took place regarding how unhelpful it was that a local resident was allegedly feeding the badgers. It was suggested that some publicity be undertaken asking members of the public not to exacerbate the situation by feeding the badgers and that contact be made with the local MP bringing the significance of the situation to his attention. The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager also stated that a contingency plan would be drawn up addressing any potential flooding issues, she also stated that it was important not to cause alarm to the public. DCC was doing all it could and was working proactively with Natural England to provide a solution within the law.

23 **UPDATE FROM THE CYCLING SIGNAGE WORKING GROUP**

The working group had recently met to consider the best way forward with regard to cycling signage along the canal which was specifically designed to insist that cyclists dismount when approaching bridges.

Following discussion, it was felt that a simple visual image was needed designed to grab people's attention rather than a lot of unnecessary words. Two suggestions had been made to the Committee, one showing the horse pulling the barge through a bridge and another with a person in a mobility scooter, both of which may not be seen by a cyclist coming through from the other side. The signs would be A4 in size and mounted on posts.

Ultimately the improved signage was designed to protect the safety of all users of the canal. Examples were provided of dangerous instances in the past.

In terms of timescale, the Canal Manager explained that new signs could be designed and erected between Easter and the summer. Precise wording and images would need to be agreed and posts dug in. The likely cost was in the region of a couple of thousand pounds. The County Councillors present intimated that they could help to fund this through their locality budgets. The Tiverton Canal Company also offered to provide a financial contribution for the new signs indicating the horse drawn barge operating area.

It was **AGREED** that the new signs be erected at every bridge along canal. Within the zone in which the horse drawn barge operated, identified by special signs, cyclists would be asked to dismount and walk under bridges. Outside this zone signs will have advisory messages. The trial will take place as soon as practically possible and the Committee will review the situation at their next meeting in October.

24 **BINS ON THE CANAL**

The Vice Chairman reported that he had spoken to officers at Mid Devon District Council and it had been confirmed that the next time the black bins were emptied on the canal a sticker would be placed on them saying 'any bin will do'.

25 **THE COST OF FELLING THE TREES AS OUTLINED AT THE LAST MEETING**

The Canal Manager listed the costs involved in recent tree work. Since much of this work had had to be undertaken as a result of Ash Dieback there was a corporate DCC budget available to facilitate this.

A brief discussion took place regarding ivy growing up trees and the need to tolerate it as it did not take any nutrients from trees. It was also confirmed that the Canal Ranger team were still selling logs created by the trees that had been felled along the length of the canal. This was a useful source of income generation, however, the Clean Air Act might have an impact on this in terms of the weight limits required for the sale of wet wood in the future.

26 THE CONDITION OF THE PATH BETWEEN THE BASIN AND TIDCOMBE BRIDGE (SIZE AND DEPTH OF PUDDLES)

The Vice Chairman had requested that this item be included on the agenda but stated that it had been dealt with under the progress report discussed earlier in the meeting. He had had some concerns regarding this section of the canal. The Canal Manager explained that when the current surface was laid, the contractor hadn't taken enough care raking it out before it was rolled thereby creating an undulating surface. Following a decade of wear and the gradual development of soil on either side, the path had become slightly sunken and held water in all the undulations following heavy rain. The only way of rectifying this was to have it resurfaced. He had recently received an estimate of £9800 to do this work but funding would need to be secured first.

27 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following issues were raised under this item:

- The badger repairs case study had been published on forums that other navigation authorities had access to so that best practice could be shared nationally.
- The quality of the wall construction at the Canal Basin end was again referred to as being outstanding. The standard of construction was described as being 'second to none'. The Canal Manager and his team were congratulated for overseeing this. Recognition of this on behalf of the committee would be sent to the contractor, Overall Construction, from the Chairman.
- It was reported that the Mid Devon Attraction Association had recently received some funding to promote Mid Devon. This would be used to improve the website which would have a Mid Devon brand and would feature the canal as a top visitor attraction.
- The Committee Clerk would circulate suggested dates for the summer site visit in due course.

28 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

No additional items were requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting.

29 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting take place on Tuesday 1 October at 7.00pm.

(The meeting ended at 8.28 pm)

CHAIRMAN