

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 3 March 2020 at 7.00 pm**

#### **Present:**

Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council (Chairman)
Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council
Cllr L Cruwys	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C P Daw	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr G Birch	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr D Cutts	Sandford Peverell Parish Council
Cllr J R Rendle	Tiverton Town Council
Cllr L Worrow	Burlescombe Parish Council
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 Cadets
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling Club

#### **Officers:**

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, DCC
Mrs R Mills	Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC
Mr S Densham	Land Management Officer, MDDC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

## **15 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from:

- Mrs Pat Brind
- Cllr Roger Croad
- Mr John Hampshire
- Cllr Jo Norton
- Cllr Luke Taylor
- Mr Trevor White

## **16 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The following statement was received from Mr Chris Downs, a Tiverton resident:

In a recent telephone conversation with the Planning Department the person I was speaking with happened to mention the forthcoming Consultation concerning the "Green Infrastructure " that runs between the Canal and the Railway Walk and made the comment:

Quote: - Maybe put a Car Park in the field at the end of Follett Road on the Glebelands Estate!

The person would not be aware that the Horse Drawn Barge Company have their horses in that field and to encourage more vehicles down Tidcombe Lane onto the Glebelands Estate would be a NO NO!!

I suggest the ideal entrance to the “Green Infrastructure” would be from the new development proposed off Blundells Road – Post Hill area at the end of the Railway Walk and of course much better for adults and children to use.

Mr Phil Brind, owner of the Tiverton Canal Company, explained that he did not own the field that had been referred to but that it was owned by friends.

The Canal Manager stated that he had attended a meeting the previous evening in relation to the consultation on the Tiverton EUE. Information had been given in relation to Area B and the Green Infrastructure and the display plans did show this field as an orchard and picnic site with a small car park. However, he was not sure whether the planners or developers had spoken to the landowner.

It was explained by Cllr Cruwys that this was the proposal which had been presented to Members when the EUE had first been unveiled and he had been concerned that this particular area should not become a ‘rat run’.

## 17 MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 1 October 2019, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## 18 MATTERS ARISING

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

## 19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

## 20 FENACRE UPDATE AND TIMELINE

A timeline of activities in relation to the Fenacre water transfer system was circulated to those present.

The Canal Manager explained that in January 2019 a new S106 agreement between DCC and Aggregate Industries (AI) was signed which required AI to provide an updated water diversion scheme to be approved by DCC in consultation with the EA incorporating alterations to be made to the existing water transfer structure. It also required the designs to be submitted to DCC within 6 months.

In the Autumn of 2019 a DCC Senior Planning Officer wrote to AI pointing out that the six month period had elapsed with no design forthcoming. Legal action was threatened if the design could not be provided forthwith. AI responded by requesting

an extension to July 2020, however, this was turned down. In November 2019 AI submitted an Abstraction and Impoundment Licence to the EA without any input from DCC. In the meantime, DCC engaged Jacobs hydrologist to assess the designs who suggested that the proposed design would bring minimal benefits to the canal in times of drought. They also outlined several improvements to the proposed design that would increase water transfer when the quarry was dewatering into the stream whilst maintaining hands-off flow.

In February 2020 DCC responded to the EA consultation on the applications made by AI, supporting the Abstraction licence application (which requested an acceptable level of water transfer to the canal) but stated reservations regarding the Impoundment licence application (the design of which was unlikely to ever yield the amount of water requested in the Abstraction licence application).

Since then AI have agreed to instruct their consultants to liaise with the Jacobs hydrologist to revise the impoundment designs in order to maximise the potential transfer of water to the canal during summer drought conditions whilst satisfying the EA's hands-off flow requirements. They have stated that the revised designs would be submitted by the April 2020 deadline.

The Committee thanked all those who had been involved in moving this forward and requested a further update at the next meeting.

## 21 WEED IN THE CANAL

Clarification was sought as to the possibility of clearing weed from the entire length of the canal rather than just from particular areas where for example fishing matches were taking place. Members of the Tiverton and District Angling Club had become disgruntled with explanations provided to them about global warming and lack of resources.

Following the previous meeting a letter had been sent by the Chairman to the Chief Officer responsible Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste at DCC outlining the strong concerns of the JAC regarding weed in the canal requesting that more resource be allocated to this area. No reply had been received thus far but the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager would chase this up.

The Canal Manager explained that the canal team spent more time clearing weed than they ever had before and that their workload in this area had at least doubled due to the spread on the invasive plant Water Soldier, with them spending 4 out of 5 days a week clearing weed. Limited funds were a reality.

Further discussion took place regarding the extreme concerns of the Committee with regard to a recent decision of Mid Devon District Council to impose a charge of £10k on DCC for the emptying of the bins along the canal. It was **AGREED** that the Chairman write to MDDC's Cabinet again expressing the Committee's serious disappointment regarding this recent decision and a wish that this be factored into any decisions regarding funding next year. The Committee requested that the Vice Chairman also sign this strongly worded letter.

## 22 COMMUNITY PATROL BOAT UPDATE AND WORKING PRACTICES FOR THE FUTURE

Mr Dion Howells, operator of the Community Patrol Boat, provided the Committee with a summary of the activities that had taken place over the previous 12 months. This included:

- Refurbishment of all the wood inside the boat.
- Painting inside and out.
- Servicing of the boat engine.
- The boat had been on patrol every week between March and December.
- They had dealt with many incidents including, dog fouling, rubbish disposal, fishermen without the correct licences, antisocial behaviour, reporting fallen trees and excessive weed.
- Good working relationships had been built up with boat owners.
- Continued funding remained a strong concern.
- He had completed 220 hours on the boat over the past year.
- He had spoken to hundreds of visitors handing out advice and leaflets about the canal and Tiverton.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Patrol Boat resource was providing an invaluable service often sorting out issues quickly and efficiently in support of the Tiverton Canal Company and the Canal Ranger team. Mr Howell was warmly thanked for the work he undertook.
- Mr Howells had a police background and his training in this area was extremely helpful.
- It was confirmed that the Community Patrol Boat did not have official Terms of Reference. It was **AGREED** that a small working party be established to consider a draft for consideration. This working party to include, the Canal Manager, Mr Phil Brind, Cllr Lewis Worrow and Mr Dion Howells. If any other members of the Committee wanted to contribute they could email Mr Howells. Issues that needed consideration included by-laws, powered vehicles, fishing at night etc. The Canal Manager would co-ordinate a date for the first meeting.

## 23 PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to a report of the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager and a brief discussion took place regarding:

- The relining of the aqueduct and the reasons why it had taken so long to repair it. It was explained that before the work had commenced the extent of the damage to the brick work had not been clear. The brick work repairs had added additional time to the project as had the design of the fenders. However, the tow path had remained open throughout the process and the canal channel had been open for several weeks. Completion should take place at the end of this week.
- The Committee commented that the new fencing at the Canal Basin and new Country Park signposts were looking very 'smart'.

- The tow path between Canal Basin and William Authers Bridge had become very muddy. This would be resurfaced in the next week or two with new stone being laid.
- The area where the horse stood would also be resurfaced.

The Canal Ranger team were congratulated for all the work that they did.

## 24 **CANAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2020 - 2025**

The Committee had before it a draft of the Canal Management Plan for 2020 – 2025. It was explained that one reason for needing this was to enable DCC to apply for the Green Flag Award again.

Comment and an endorsement was requested from the Committee. The following comments and proposals were stated:

- Section 4.7.3 needed to be amended to state that ‘most’ of the proposed Tidcombe Hall development would be visible from the canal not just ‘some’ of it.
- The Plan needed to make reference to the Tiverton Neighbourhood Plan.
- The Plan also needed to include a statement of fact regarding the funding arrangements and how Mid Devon District Council had reduced its share in recent years.
- The Canal was the ‘jewel’ in the crown of Mid Devon and its economic value needed to be appreciated more by MDCC.
- The Plan needed to mention that Tiverton Town Council also provided funding to the canal on an annual basis.
- Refurbishment of the toilets was already identified as an action needing to take place in the future.

The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager explained that the targets identified in the plan would be monitored over a five year period and an action plan would be brought to the Committee on an annual basis in March for review. It was hoped that the Plan reflected the aims and aspiration of DCC, MDCC and relevant neighbourhood plans. The benefits to the economy of Mid Devon and the health and well-being of visitors and locals alike were paramount considerations within the Plan. The Plan would also be a key document in terms of applying for additional funding in the future, for example.

The Committee **AGREED** that the Canal Management Plan for 21020 – 2025 be endorsed.

(Proposed by Cllr C Slade, seconded by Cllr L Cruwys)

## 25 **FORMAT OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee **AGREED** that the format of the meeting this evening had been much better in that only topics which were of interest within the progress report were discussed. The meeting had flowed better and had not been over lengthy.

## 26 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following issues were raised under this item:

- The Tiverton Canal Company were running out of areas to keep their horses due to increasing proposed development.
- DCC were having to draw up plans to deal with Covid 19. Staff levels may have to reduce as the weeks progress with only high priority work being undertaken. Staff may need to be deployed from other areas. The Committee would be kept informed as and when any significant changes occurred.
- A half marathon was being planned between Sampford Peverell and the Canal Basin on October 4<sup>th</sup> 2020. This was a commercial event which would bring income into the canal.
- The Country Parks would be celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year and a number of events would take place to celebrate this milestone. Ideas for celebratory events and activities were invited by the Canal Manager.
- A site visit would take place in the summer as usual and possible dates would be circulated shortly.
- A meeting of the Wildlife Advisory Group could be convened if requested. Regular meetings had ceased with an agreement that they only take place if there was something to discuss.
- The Committee complimented the Canal Ranger team on the flower bed (and daffodils in particular) at the Canal Basin entrance.

## 27 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

It was **AGREED** that the Committee would notify the Clerk if they had any items for the next meeting.

## 28 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as being Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at 7:00pm.

(The meeting ended at 8.30 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**