

Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Tuesday, 1 March 2022 at 7.00 pm

PLEASE NOTE: - this meeting will take place at Phoenix House and members of the Public and Press are encouraged to attend via Zoom wherever possible. The Protocol for Hybrid Meetings explains how this will work. Please do not attend Phoenix House without contacting the committee clerk in advance, in order that numbers of people can be appropriately managed in physical meeting rooms.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/93292247528?pwd=ME44WW5sQ094T3R4am4zaEd5ZXB0QT09>

Meeting ID: 932 9224 7528

Passcode: 505909

One tap mobile

08002605801,,93292247528#,,, *505909# United Kingdom Toll-free

08003582817,,93292247528#,,, *505909# United Kingdom Toll-free

Dial by your location

0 800 260 5801 United Kingdom Toll-free

0 800 358 2817 United Kingdom Toll-free

0 800 031 5717 United Kingdom Toll-free Meeting

ID: 932 9224 7528

Passcode: 505909

A G E N D A

- 1 **Apologies**
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 2 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions relating to items on the agenda from the public and replies thereto.

- 3 **Minutes** (*Pages 3 - 10*)
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 5th October 2021.
- 4 **Matters Arising**
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.
- 5 **Chairman's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.
- 6 **Canal Progress Report** (*Pages 11 - 24*)
To receive a report summarising the work that has taken place with regard to the canal since the last meeting.
- 7 **CSAS powers on the Canal**
Information to be provided regarding CSAS powers on the canal. A representative from Devon and Cornwall Police to attend the meeting to aid discussion.
- 8 **Water transfer system - Fenacre Brook to the Canal**
To receive an update in relation to the water transfer system from Fenacre Brook to the canal as requested at the last meeting.
- 9 **Anaerobic Digester Plant at Crownhill**
Committee to receive an update on the enforcement situation regarding the Anaerobic Digester Plant at Crown Hill.
- 10 **Memorial - Manley Bridge**
Cllr Mrs Sue Griggs has requested that item be placed on the agenda following recent correspondence she has received.
- 11 **Queens Platinum Jubilee**
Cllrs Mrs Sue Griggs and Les Cruwys have requested that the Committee discuss ideas for celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June.
- 12 **Any Other Business**
To consider any other relevant business.
- 13 **Identification of items for the next meeting**
To identify any issues for discussion at the next meeting.
- 14 **Date of next meeting**
To agree the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 4th October 2022 at 7pm.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday 21 February 2022

Covid-19 and meetings

From 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. However, the Council is also required to follow government guidance about safety during the pandemic. The Council will enable all people to continue to participate in meetings via Zoom.

You are strongly encouraged to participate via Zoom to keep everyone safe - there is limited capacity in meeting rooms if safety requirements are to be met. There are restrictions and conditions which apply to those in the building and the use of the building. You must not attend a meeting at Phoenix House without complying with the requirements in the new protocol for meetings. You must follow any directions you are given.

Please read the new meeting protocol which is available here: <https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/documents/s23135/MeetingProtocolUpdateOct2021nextreviewFeb2022.pdf>

If you want to ask a question or speak, email your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting. This will ensure that your name is on the list to speak and will help us ensure that you are not missed – as you can imagine, it is easier to see and manage public speaking when everyone is physically present in the same room. Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible.

If you would like a copy of the Agenda in another format (for example in large print) please contact Sarah Lees via:

E-Mail: slees@middevon.gov.uk

Public Wi-Fi is available in all meeting rooms.

This page is intentionally left blank

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 5 October 2021 at 7.00 pm

JAC Members Present:

Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council (Chairman)
Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council (Vice Chairman)
Cllr L Cruwys	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C P Daw	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Jo Norton	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr K Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr J R Rendle	Tiverton Town Council
Cllr Lewis Worrow	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr P Brind	The Tiverton Canal Company
Mrs Pat Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr J Hampshire	Cycling UK
Mr R Hodgson	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr Dion Howells	Community Patrol Boat
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 Richard Walton	Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC
Mr M Baker	Country Park Manager, DCC
Mr John Millar	Principal Planning Officer, MDDC
Mr S Densham	Land Management Officer, MDDC
Mrs S Gabriel	Member Services Manager, 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 2021 / 2022.

(Proposed by Cllr C Daw and seconded by Cllr A Pilgrim)

2 Election of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Cllr C Slade be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2021 / 2022.

(Proposed by Mr P Saupe and seconded by Cllr J Rendle)

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following representatives:

- Cllr David Cutts
- Cllr Andrea Davis
- Ray Jones
- Graham Moore
- Trevoe White

4 **Protocol for remote meetings**

The protocol for remote meetings was **NOTED**.

5 **Public Question Time**

No members of the public had registered to ask a question.

6 **Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 2nd March 2021, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record.

7 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising in relation to the minutes of the previous meeting.

8 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

1. He thanked the Committee for electing him Chairman and for having faith in his ability.
2. He welcomed Cllr Lewis Worrow back onto the Committee. He was replacing Cllr Luke Trevelyan as the Committee representative from Burlescombe Parish Council.
3. He welcomed Richard Walton from Devon County Council as the new Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager.
4. He explained that because of the hybrid nature of the meeting and the technical challenges it presented with the clerk working remotely, the meeting would be audio recorded in case there was a problem with the technology. He confirmed that the recording would only be used for internal purposes.

9 **Terms of Reference and membership review**

Members considered the Terms of Understanding * and membership of the Committee.

A brief discussion took place regarding the 'Canal Businesses Group' and which businesses it comprised of. It was agreed that the Country Park Manager would contact the current representative to ascertain whether the Group met formally and who might be the best representative to attend JAC meetings. The Country Park Manager stated that he had recently contacted a director of the Devon Wildlife Trust with regard to their representation on the JAC and was awaiting a response.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Understanding and membership of the Committee be agreed subject to the following being implemented:

With regard to bullet point number seven: That a more proactive approach be taken towards contacting those representatives who have been absent for two or more consecutive meetings. Contact to be made by the Clerk to establish the reason for this and whether or not a replacement or substitute representative could be found from within the relevant stakeholder group.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: * Terms of Understanding and membership previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

10 **Progress Report**

The following issues were raised in relation to the progress report:

- **Fishing platforms** – The Canal Ranger Service were thanked for installing the new plastic boarded platforms which would last longer in the future.
- **Boat permits** – an online boat permit purchasing facility was due to go live in the near future.
- **Fuel spillage** – The Canal Ranger Service were praised for the way in which they had dealt with this. A disaster to wildlife had been avoided.
- **Wild flower meadows** – the Canal Ranger Service would continue to maintain and improve wild flower meadows where they could. There was a plan to consider planting in an area beside the William Authers footbridge but an excavator would need to be found that could fit under it and this would require additional funds.

11 **Water transfer system from Fenacre Brook to the Canal**

For the benefit of new members attending the meeting, the Country Park Manager provided a brief summary of events to date:

- The Canal was spring fed and whilst it did receive input from rainfall and drainage, spring supplies from the northern end were important.
- Due to groundwater changes relating to quarrying operations, a S106 agreement had been entered in to with Aggregate Industries (AI) to provide a system that topped up the Canal, however, the system had worked poorly. A new S106 was agreed in 2019 with AI agreeing to provide an improved system but this needed the consent of the Environment Agency (EA).

- The EA could only offer advice once an application had been submitted. AI did submit an application but had done so without consulting with DCC. This had led to delays. Hydrological modelling had had to be undertaken and then Covid had come along.
- The EA required AI to withdraw this application at which point DCC met with AI to agree a revised way forward.
- Progress has been slow with some flow data having to be inferred rather than using 'real' information due to faulty monitoring equipment.
- A revised pre-application was about to be submitted. DCC had used an independent consultant and had fed back corrections to the data. AI had provided a technical note outlining how they proposed to provide an improved system which would meet the requirements of the EA. A pre-application was expected within the next fortnight. However, there were staff shortages, internal processes and a backlog of work within the EA therefore a decision was not expected for some time.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Whether the company's licence could be taken away unless a satisfactory solution could be found quickly. It was confirmed that this was not within the gift of DCC. Exerting too much pressure might result in a minimal scheme being proposed to the detriment of the Canal.
- Nothing could move forward with any pace until an officer had been assigned to the case by the EA.
- DCC and AI had moved the situation forwards, but there was substantial potential for future delays once the application was in the hands of the EA.
- Pressure needed to be brought to bear highlighting the serious effect on the water levels of the Canal.
- Challenging environmental conditions and climate change.
- Springs no longer seemed to bring the volume of water to the Canal that they used to.
- There were potentially disastrous consequences for the Canal and a 'wall of politics' was exacerbating the situation.
- Pressure needed to be applied to get the EA to raise the profile of this matter.

It was **AGREED** that this item needed to appear on the agenda for the next meeting when hopefully all parties would be nearer to resolving this important issue.

12 Anaerobic Digester at Crownhill

The Committee discussed their concerns in relation to the Anaerobic Digester (AD) plant at Crownhill. These included the following:

- A new planning application was due to be submitted which would propose additional buildings and new dwellings on adjacent farmland to the AD. However, a condition of the original planning application approval had been that by-products from the plant be spread on the land. What would happen if all the farmland was used for housing?
- Halberton residents had commented that they were seeing more material coming and going than originally envisaged.

- Traffic movements had escalated with large conveys of lorries being seen going into and out of the site despite an original limit being place on the scale of permitted activity. There was also concern that these may be coming from a wider geographical area than agreed.
- The lack of published data in relation to all the movements on and off site.
- Concerns regarding the type of product being used to 'feed' the digester.
- There had been a liaison group set up initially but they had ceased to meet. It was suggested that this be re-established, connecting the relevant parties and trying to establish the precise nature of what was going on. However, the AD plant was now in new ownership and they had not been keen for the group to be re-established. The Chairman, who had been a member of the original liaison group stated that he been advised by the Planning Department that figures suggested that the plant had been complying with conditions regarding vehicle movement numbers. However, the enforcement file had been 're-opened'.
- The Tiverton Neighbourhood Plan might soon be able to bring some weight to any planning application objections. Halberton Parish Council had also considered the application carefully and would continue to do so. There was a great deal of strong local opinion.
- Increased vehicle movements and the effect upon road safety had been brought to the attention of the Police and Crime Commissioner by the Vice Chairman.
- A full report on the planning application would be coming to the Planning Committee in due course.

The Principal Planning Officer stated that he could not refer to the site discussed specifically but could reassure the Committee that AD plants were generally being looked at by the authority in terms of enforcement. He had noted the points discussed and encouraged Committee members to raise their concerns when the planning application came forward for consultation.

It was **AGREED** that this item be placed on the agenda for the following meeting so that further consideration cold take place.

Note: (i) Cllrs L Cruwys and C Daw declared personal interests as they were members of the Mid Devon District Council Planning Committee and they would not take part in the discussion.

(ii) Mr Peter Saupe declared a personal interest in that he had helped to install the digester plant initially.

13 **Community Patrol Boat update**

The following update was provided:

- It had been in the water since May 2021 and had undertaken approximately 100 hours of patrols.
- The whole of the Canal had been patrolled with azolla and soldier weed causing some difficulties although the Ranger Service had cleared a lot of this.
- There had been two night patrols with the boat having to deal with a range of incidents from rugby balls to criminal damage.
- A new website would be developed seeking to engage the public.

- Initial discussions had been held with the police officer who oversees Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) to see what powers could be given to the patrol boat crew and the Canal Ranger team. . The whole list of powers available to the Chief Constable totalled between 20 and 30, it was felt that approximately 8 of these could be applicable to the Canal setting. Further discussion was required.
- There was now a defibrillator on the boat and those operating the boat had undertaken the necessary first aid course.
- Funding remained a concern.
- A body camera had been purchased which it was hoped could be used once approval has been secured from the DCC Data Protection Officer.
- Appropriate cycling signage continued to be an issue.
- There had been no reported incidents involving users of the Canal and the horse drawn barge this summer.

Discussion took place with regard to the ambition for CSAS powers to effect a change in attitude although it was reiterated that the vast majority of Canal users were very respectful of other users. However, a growing minority remained unconcerned about the effect of their behaviours and this was causing some visitors to be frightened of using the Canal especially at night.

14 **Any other business**

The following matters were raised:

- The Canal Ranger Service, though small, were thanked for the incredible work they had undertaken since the last meeting in keeping the water quality so good within the Canal. This had been commented on by visitors over the summer months. The Canal was felt to be in excellent condition.
- The Country Park Manager was particularly thanked since he often worked out of hours and the Canal was lucky to have him.
- Reference was made to the last meeting where Cllr Griggs had talked about moving forwards with the Tourism Group. The Committee were informed that a lot of work had been undertaken with the 'Visit Mid Devon' website but that the sub-group was somewhat unwieldy, and had no decision-making powers and no funding. The Canal Business Group were key to moving this forwards. Mr Brind offered to contact each of the businesses regarding their input in promoting the Canal in the interests of all users and stakeholders. Further discussion and a proper plan was needed but it needed to be led by the Business Group.

15 **Identification of items for the next meeting**

The following was **AGREED** to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- The usual Canal Progress Report
- Water transfer system from Fenacre Brook to the Canal
- Anaerobic Digester at Crownhill
- CSAS powers and their use on the Canal

16 **Date of next meeting**

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 1st March 2022 at 7pm.

(The meeting ended at 8.51 pm)

CHAIRMAN

This page is intentionally left blank

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee 1st March 2022

Progress Report (October 2021 to February 2022 inclusive)

1. 50th Anniversary tree planting

During November and December, school children, volunteers and councillors helped the Canal Rangers plant 50 trees along the Canal to celebrate 50 years since its declaration as a Country Park in 1971.

The impacts of the pandemic led to a decision not to organise a big public celebratory event. The planting of 50 trees was felt to be a good alternative for a variety of reasons. Planting the trees will have a positive and long-lasting legacy in terms of the wildlife and landscape of the Canal. Sadly many of the large 'standard' Ash trees within the hedgerows which line the towpath are having to be felled due to Ash Dieback, and so these 50 trees will grow on to become replacements. The trees will also absorb carbon and so will contribute to the current efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change through tree planting.



The tree planting also provided an opportunity to engage and celebrate with local school children and community groups. Trees were planted by:

- The two local DCC (and MDDC) councillors, Colin Slade and Ray Radford, and DCC Cabinet member Cllr Andrea Davis
- Mayor of Tiverton Cllr Sue Griggs
- Friends Chairman, Robert Hodgson
- Children from 2nd Tiverton Beavers and Cubs
- Pupils from Blundell's Prep, Sampford Peverell and Burlescombe Primary Schools



The Canal Ranger Service would like to thank all the people and organisations that helped with this celebration and who contribute to the Country Park's ongoing success.

2. Winter tree work

The Canal Rangers have spent much of the winter working on the maintenance barge cutting back overhanging branches and coppicing or pollarding bankside trees. Last winter the section between the Canal Basin and Halberton was the subject of more intensive work. Most of the work this winter has so far focussed on the section between Sampford Peverell and Waytown Tunnel. At the time of writing (mid Feb) the barge is back in Tiverton, with offside banks (not rented under Garden Agreements) receiving their annual cut. Over the next month it will work its way back out towards Sampford Peverell.



For several days in November, work focussed on an offside pond located between Buckland Bridge and Boehill Bridge. This pond had completely silted up and become overgrown with willows but was restored in 2006. The pond was re-excavated and many of

the willows were removed or pollarded. In recent years, several of these willows have got quite big again, shading the pond and reducing its value for wildlife. The Canal Rangers have re-pollarded the willows at its southern end, letting in more light and allowing a greater variety and abundance of plant and insect life to flourish.



3. Hedgelaying

Rangers and volunteers have spent the November and December volunteer days laying the hedge between the Sampford Peverell picnic site and the tennis courts. Most of the 'laid' stems will continue to survive and grow for many years, and several new stems will bud and grow below the hinge. In this way the base of the hedge is thickened up, creating a much better habitat for a range of wildlife including birds and small mammals.



4. Sampford Peverell Community Orchard

Ongoing works to improve the community orchard have included the installation of a Sweet Chestnut fence, made of morticed posts and cleft rails. The traditional look blends in well and is complemented by a new CNC routed oak entrance sign, which was installed by volunteers in January.



5. Green Flag Award

In October 2021, the Canal Ranger Service announced that the Country Park had retained the Green Flag Award. This is the 13th consecutive year the park has held the award, with the judge's overall score continuing to increase as further improvements are made.

Notably, the score for the management plan increased following the latest review, which adopted the Green Flag Award criteria to focus and structure the plan.



6. MDDC funding

In the autumn, Mid Devon District Council's Grants Working Group undertook a review of the external grants provided by the District Council, including the contribution to the Canal Revenue budget (currently standing at £45k pa). The Canal Manager provided a report justifying the ongoing funding and providing a range of data to help the working group in their assessment. He also provided a PowerPoint presentation about the Country Park via Zoom at one of their meetings.

In early January, MDDC announced that their Cabinet members had approved the recommendations of the Grants Working Group that the grant should stay at current (21-22

levels) for the following two years (22-23 and 23-24). The Canal Ranger Service is pleased and relieved that the funding contribution has been maintained.

7. Tiverton Town Council funding

For several years Tiverton Town Council has been making an annual £4k contribution to the Country Park for improvements made between the Canal Basin and Manley Bridge. This contribution has once again been made this year and will cover much of the cost of resurfacing the towpath between William Authers Footbridge and Tidcombe Bridge, due to take place in March.

8. Fenacre Water Transfer System

At the October 2021 JAC meeting, members were told that a pre-application to the Environment Agency for a Water Abstraction licence was being prepared by Aggregate Industries, with input from DCC's consultant hydrologist Marcus Francis. This pre-application was submitted a few weeks after the meeting, following suggestions by Marcus Francis for further improvements.

Despite warnings that it could be several months before any response may come from the EA, they contacted AI in early January to say that a senior permitting officer at national level had assessed the pre application. He felt the proposed approach to be reasonable and carrying out additional pre-application work would likely duplicate much of that which would be undertaken in the determination of a full application. Therefore, he was of the opinion that it was probably best to recommend the formal application be submitted but suggested it would benefit from running the proposal past the local EA area teams beforehand for their input.

In late January, AI received confirmation that the local EA area teams were happy with the pre-application and recommended submission of the full application, subject to the supply of some further hydrological data. AI consultants, Wood Plc, confirmed that they would be working on preparing the requested data with a view to submitting the full application within the next few weeks.

9. Covid 19

Country Park signage and website headlines have been adapted to reflect the current government Covid 19 guidance / rules as these have changed during the reporting period.

The Canal Ranger Team has been fortunate in that no members of staff or their families have had the disease to date, and so their work has not yet been directly affected through absences due to illness with the virus, or self-isolation.



10. Aqueduct snagging works

Following the recent relining of the aqueduct, there remained some leakage into the cutting below. The likely cause of this was identified as the seals above the returns of the liner to the canal bed at either end of the structure. Re-sealing the ends of the liner was initially proposed by the contractor for summer 2021, but this was pushed back to the autumn in order to minimise the impact of re-draining the aqueduct on boaters.

Once an EA licence for dewatering the aqueduct was received the aqueduct was dammed and a fish rescue was completed, before the section was drained. The clay seals above the ends of the liners were replaced and the leakage stopped. The aqueduct was then rewatered and the dams removed. All of this work was undertaken under warranty.

Boaters and the Canal Rangers have since discovered a 4m x 6m mound of clay and rock extending from the offside bank to the centre of the channel beyond the southern end of the aqueduct, roughly in line with where the dams were installed. It's unclear how this material got here, but certainly relates to the aqueduct relining works and so the DCC engineer who oversaw the project is currently liaising with the contractor to get this material cleared by an excavator working from the offside bank. In the meantime, the area is roped off to prevent boats hitting the underwater mound.



11. Community Safety Accreditation Scheme

At the end of November, the Canal Manager and Rangers attended a CSAS training day, which was also attended by rangers from Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks. Topics included key aspects of CSAS such as how and when to use the powers, as well as sessions on some of the key issues which Devon and Cornwall Police are currently looking to address (e.g. modern slavery, county lines drug dealing and child abuse) and signs to look out for and report.

Application forms for Devon County Council to engage in the scheme, and for the individual staff members to be accredited have been submitted and staff vetting is taking place. It is anticipated that the accreditation will be confirmed later in the spring, at which point the Ranger Service's involvement in the scheme and new powers will be publicised. Further ongoing training will be provided by the police on topics like dealing with conflict and personal safety.

Dion Howells, skipper of the Community Patrol Boat, also attended the training and he and his fellow CPB volunteers will be following a parallel scheme run by Devon and Cornwall

Police to become Accredited Police Volunteers. This will provide them with the same powers and training opportunities as CSAS, but is focussed on volunteers, whereas CSAS is only open to paid staff members of approved organisations.

12. Kickstart Trainee Rangers

Trainee Rangers Alastair and Sam are now approaching the end of their 6-month trainee positions and have done a great job alongside the Canal Rangers this winter. They have also made the most of the £1500 training and equipment bursaries which come with the Kickstart positions. Some has been spent on uniforms and chainsaw PPE, but most has been spent on training, with both trainees securing chainsaw, brush-cutter, first aid, and All Terrain Vehicle competency certificates; and with chipper training due to follow later in February. The combination of work experience and training tickets will stand them in good stead to find work in the countryside management sector once their position ends.

A further three Kickstart Trainee Ranger positions are currently being advertised to commence in March although early signs are that there are fewer potential candidates that meet the eligibility criteria and have an interest in applying this time round, and so all three positions may not be filled.

13. Bank / hedge trimming and ditching work

In January a local contractor was engaged to cut the banks and trim the hedges along the canal. Fortunately the weather has been dry and so the tyres of the tractor haven't made a mess, as they sometimes can during wet winters. The 50 trees that had been planted last year were protected, in part, through being marked with orange hi-vis tape.

Another local contractor undertook some ditching work near Fossend Bridge. Sediment is carried into and deposited along this small watercourse and so cleaning with an excavator is necessary every few years to make sure the ditch doesn't overtop into the canal and adjacent field during high rainfall.

Although spreading the mud right beside the towpath isn't ideal, there is nowhere else for it to go whilst its wet. It usually dries out and grasses over nicely during the spring. The adjacent landowner is happy to take the dried-out soil and so either this summer or in the summer after the next ditching operation we will scrape it up with an excavator and pass it over the fence where he takes it away in a trailer to build up hedge banks or fill in hollows.



14. Bankside dredging at Lowdwells

In the autumn a contractor was engaged to pull a fallen tree from the canal near Lowdwells. He used a large excavator to do this, and whilst there he also dredged fringing reed growth which had been spreading out from the towpath side bank towards the central channel.

15. Noticeboard repairs

Following vandalism to the noticeboard at Crownhill Bridge, five new polycarbonate windows have been purchased to repair the vandalism and to replace three other windows which have become permanently 'misted' and difficult to see through. Some of the pin boards which have been discoloured by UV light will also be replaced. Irreparable damage to the noticeboard at Tiverton Road Car Park, means that this one has been earmarked for replacement.

The existing brand of noticeboards are no longer available and so a very well built and attractive alternative noticeboard (photo right) has been identified as the long-term replacement for the Country Parks noticeboards, several of which are in poor condition. However, they are built of steel rather than aluminium and come complete with steel legs and are quite expensive and so it is envisaged that the park may purchase one per year over the next ten years, so that the cost can be spread, unless an external funding source is identified which enables them to be purchased more quickly.



16. Pressure washing in the Canal Basin

In February, a Ranger and volunteer spent a day pressure washing the play park equipment which had moss and algae beginning to grow in lots of nooks and crannies; and the blue poured-rubber surfacing which was becoming quite grubby with lots of use through the winter. They also began pressure washing the moss which had grown along the top of the wharf wall.

17. Visitor Centre vandalism and repairs

In November, the Visitor Centre door was vandalised by youths, with the large, double-glazed panel being shattered. The incident was captured by the centre's CCTV cameras, and the footage was supplied to the police. The local PC who leads on youth crime was able to identify the group and the individual who shattered the glass and has followed up on this with the individuals and the school.

As the youth responsible is 15 years old, the options for addressing his behaviour are limited. The PC has discussed the matter with the Canal Manager, the youth and his

mother, and it has been agreed that the youth undertakes some restorative justice by spending some time working at the Canal Basin with the Canal Ranger Team, possibly doing some more of the pressure washing described in item 16, above. The glass panel was repaired and the cost of this has been covered by DCC's property insurance.

18. Memorial seats and benches

Since October 2021, two new memorial seats (with backs) have been installed near Sellake Bridge and Black Bridge, and a replacement oak bench has also been built and installed near the Globe Inn car park steps. Two more memorial seats with backs are currently on order.

19. Bridge nameplates

The nameplate of Buckland Bridge was missing for some time and the Sampford Peverell Bridge nameplate was badly corroded. Sampford Peverell Parish Council offered to fund replacements and so new nameplates have been cast and were installed by the Canal Rangers in November. A big thank you to the Parish Council for their support!



The Canal Manager has recently asked the clerk of Burlescombe Parish Council if they would be willing to fund the replacement of the corroded nameplates at Fossend and Ebear Bridges. She has confirmed that councillors are supportive in principle and will confirm at their March 7 meeting, once quotes have been received.

20. Canal Basin car park wall repairs

Following significant damage to the wall between the car park and the Bowls Club caused by a car, repairs have now been undertaken, with the cost being covered by the driver's car insurance.

21. Embankment flailing

The Canal Ranger Service endeavours to keep the Canal's highest embankments (near Swing Bridge and Sellake Bridge) clear of scrub so they can be easily inspected, and to benefit wildflowers and reptiles. On both sides of Swing embankment and on the offside of Sellake embankment this is mostly achieved through sheep grazing and occasional brush-cutting. The towpath side of Sellake embankment cannot be grazed and so this has been cut every year or two by the Canal Rangers and volunteers using brush-cutters and pedestrian reciprocating blade mowers.

Two years ago a volunteer slipped and fell whilst brush-cutting this fairly steep embankment. Thankfully he wasn't hurt; however (acting on the 'near miss') the Canal Manager assessed safer methods of cutting the embankment. Having seen the remote-controlled flail mowers being increasingly used on motorway and dual carriageways he thought this may provide a safer option and sought quotes.

As a result, grounds maintenance contractor Glendale Services Ltd was engaged to spend a morning in November cutting the embankment using their remote-control flail mower. As shown in the photos below, this did a good job and another order has been placed for the machine and operator to spend a day cutting Swing embankment in late February.



22. Online boat permit system

Plans to provide a new online permit purchasing system for unpowered boats have been delayed considerably as the developer for the company developing the system has been off sick for much of the winter, but he is back now and details have been finalised, meaning the system should go live very soon. The system will be accessed via www.devonpermits.org which mainly provides a system for online payment of DCC parking permits but will provide an extra option for purchase of unpowered boat permits.

23. Canal Visitor Guide

The Canal Manager is organising an update and reprint of the Canal Visitor Guide. Various small amendments will be made to text and maps, and many of the adverts will be changed. Printing is being scheduled to enable delivery of the new guides ahead of the Easter holidays. Advertising income should cover most of the design and printing costs.

24. Beavers

Since the government decision in 2020 to allow beavers to remain on the River Otter in East Devon and spread naturally, the beaver population within that catchment has grown and some beavers have moved to surrounding catchments. Recently, beaver signs have been found on the River Exe, north of Tiverton. Whilst beavers have the potential to provide significant benefits in terms of water quality, flood alleviation and nature recovery, they can cause problems at specific locations.

Embanked structures such as canals and reservoirs are examples of such locations where beavers will need to be managed (and possibly removed) due to their habit of digging into banks. Typically they will dig an underwater hole in a bank and then burrow upwards to create a chamber. These chambers are often extended over time and if they reach the surface, branches, mud and vegetation are piled on top.

Given that much of the canal is embanked on one side or both, beavers would clearly pose a threat to the integrity of the canal in terms of causing leaks or breaches. Devon Wildlife Trust, who took a leading role in the partnership that oversaw the River Otter Beaver Trial, fully understand the danger that beavers pose to the canal and have offered their support in helping to trap and relocate any which do arrive at the canal. They also offered a training session with one of their beaver officers to look at the field signs so that the Canal Ranger Service know what to look out for and can provide an initial assessment of any signs reported by members of the public.

The Canal Ranger Team spent a morning at Otterhead Lakes in the Blackdowns in mid February where they were shown feeding signs, a burrow and a dam. Feeding signs are typically small branches cut at an angle, and floating, bark-stripped sticks.



Any beavers living on the canal are unlikely to build dams, except possibly in front of any weirs where there is a flow of water – the noise and flow being the trigger to initiate dam-building behaviour.

Beavers are quite a large and conspicuous animal – their feeding signs are fairly obvious in the winter, and late evening sightings are likely in the summer and so it is unlikely that a beaver could exist for long on the canal without being noticed. If they were to arrive at the canal, every effort would be made to trap and relocate them as quickly as possible. Although they are currently quite close on the Exe, there are no likely routes for beavers to take to get from the Exe to the Canal and so colonisation would be more likely through the Culm catchment in the coming years.

25. Talks

The Canal Manager often gives talks about the Canal to local clubs and societies. Unsurprisingly there has been a bit of a lull in this in the last two years due to the pandemic, but in January he gave a PowerPoint slide show via Zoom to the Wellington Rotary Club. The talk was well-received and the Club have since offered a donation of £150 to the Friends of the Grand Western Canal. The club are also interested in offering some practical volunteering assistance, perhaps working with the Tiverton Rotary Club, viewing

the canal as a connection between the two clubs which were once more closely linked, but now exist in separate administrative areas within the Rotary Club organisation. The Canal Manager and Robert Hodgson, Chair of the Friends Group, will liaise with the Rotary Clubs on potential volunteering opportunities.

26. Events

Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts held a series of four [wreath-making workshops](#) on Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th December. Wreaths and decorations were made from natural materials collected within the Country Park. The workshops were almost fully booked and feedback from participants was very good.



In November, Jo led a walk and talk between Halberton and the Canal Basin, but due to poor weather (and possibly Covid related concerns) only nine people attended.

During 2022, as the pandemic hopefully eases, the Canal Ranger Service intend to gradually recommence the programme of events which has been put on hold during the last two years.

27. Volunteers

The Canal Ranger Service has recently recruited several new wildlife and environmental monitoring volunteers:

- One (a recent ecology graduate) will be undertaking monthly water quality checks at watercourses around Fenacre Bridge (including the canal) as part of the Westcountry Rivers Trust's citizen science programme, as well as harvest mouse monitoring at the adjacent grassland beside Beech Car Park.
- Another (who is training to become an ecological consultant) will be undertaking amphibian and reptile survey and monitoring at Ebear pond and Long Pond (mentioned and pictured in item 2, above) as well as water quality testing at the two ponds.
- A third already works as an ecological consultant and is keen to start a dormouse monitoring programme along some of the wooded embankments and hedges along the canal.

The data gathered by these volunteers will feed into ongoing management planning and may raise awareness of issues that may otherwise be overlooked.

The Canal Rangers continue to receive the assistance of a number of volunteers and college work experience students. During the reporting period a total of 102 volunteer days have been recorded.

Future programme of works

Practical works

- Resurfacing sections of towpath between William Authers Footbridge and Tidcombe Bridge, Tiverton Road Bridge and Crownhill Bridge, and Fossend Bridge and a seat 400m south.
- Resurfacing underneath Tidcombe Bridge and possibly other bridges depending on budget situation at year end.
- Improvements to / rebuilding of steps near Tidcombe Bridge (subject to securing funding)
- Remote control flailing of Swing embankment
- Repair of eroding bank beside Manley Bridge hole wall (towpath side)
- Ongoing small-scale bank erosion repairs using Deltalok bags.
- Landing stage extensions in Sampford Peverell.
- Construction and installation of memorial benches
- Re-stain seats
- Pressure wash benches, panels and dog bins as necessary
- Removal of ditch dredgings near Fossend Bridge
- Installation of new bridge nameplates
- All usual mowing strimming and weed-cutting work

Management tasks (* = ongoing works already in progress)

- Organisation of all works listed above
- Working with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan *
- Fenacre water transfer system *
- Complete update of boating regulations and procedures and design/printing of new permits book *
- Ongoing work with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan *
- Scenario-based test of Emergency Plan (once DCC Emergency Planning Team have capacity – still focussed on covid at present) *
- Complete the update and reprint of the Canal Visitor Guide *
- Organise production and installation of a second orientation panel (similar to the one on rock beside the steps) to go beside the public toilets for visitors entering at that location *
- Secure quotes and capital funding for slurry-sealing the tarmac paths in the canal basin and for filling potholes in Canal Basin and Tiverton Road car parks
- Provision of tree and plaque stone for MDDC Chairman to mark Queen's Platinum Jubilee by planting tree near Rock Bridge *
- Organise update and replacement of the Ebear dragonfly panel.
- Organise repairs, improvements and updates to Visitor Centre displays *
- Complete Community Safety Scheme Accreditation process for Canal Ranger Service staff and Community Patrol Boat crew *
- Organise ongoing Ash Dieback felling works and a range of recommended tree management works arising from the tree safety inspection undertaken last summer *
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all relevant H&S policies / guidelines *

This page is intentionally left blank