

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 7 March 2023 at 7.00 pm

JAC Members Present:

Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council (Chairman)
Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council (Vice Chairman)
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 J Norton	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr K Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr J R Rendle	Tiverton Town Council
Cllr L Worrow	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr P Brind	Tiverton Canal Company
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr John Hampshire	Cycling UK
Mr R Hodgson	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr Dion Howells	Community Patrol Boat
Mr G Moore	Canal Business Group
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 S Scriven	Parks and Open Spaces Officer
Mr Andrew Seaman	Member Services Manager, MDDC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

19 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Peter Burgess
- Cllr Les Cruwys
- Cllr David Cutts
- Cllr Andrea Davis
- Dion Howells
- Graham Moore

20 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Nick Govier asked the following questions in relation to item 7 on the agenda, Bycott Farm:

My name is Nick Govier and the purpose of my question this evening relates to the planning application for an Anaerobic Digester at Bycott Farm in Halberton which is to be discussed as part of this meeting agenda.

This committee has in the past consistently objected to planning applications that lead to material visibility impacts from the Grand Western Canal with one such example being the note from Adam Pilgrim on behalf of this committee objecting to the development at Halberton Court. That note included and I quote:

'Members wish to object to this application due to its potentially damaging effect on the GWC's conservation area which is classified as a country park and local nature reserve. It's rural environment is greatly valued by members of our communities and visitors to Mid Devon'

More recently this committee was asked to provide consultee comments on the 9th November 2022 to the proposed AD at Bycott Farm and ahead of any proposed response i would like to provide the additional context:

- the AD will be of such size that it will be seen up to 5km away including Chevithorne, Sampford Peverell and Willand along with various parts of the canal in the Halberton locality
- the digestion plant at its peak will be the same height as the Halberton Church Tower which i believe is the present stand out image when looking at or travelling into Halberton. It will now have competition.
- the parishes of Willand, Sampford Peverell, Uffculme and Halberton have all objected

The Mid Devon Conservation Officer himself commented:

- 1) On how the proposed development will have impacts on the views from the GWC which would not lessen over time
- 2) How the application fails to consider the Mid Devon Planning Policy requirements in S9 (Environment) and DM25 (Development Affecting Heritage Assets)

To date almost 200 residents have signed a petition against this development with over 100 objections direct to the planning team and these objections refer to and my list is not exhaustive:

- scale of development and impacts on the environment and landscape of the locality
- doubling of HGV volumes and the environmental impacts including the passing over of canal bridges as well as travelling directly through an important conservation area
- odour and pollution

Against this context can I please ask that this committee continues to apply their

previous approach and now takes the opportunity in responding direct to the Mid Devon Planning Function and in doing so object to the proposed application

21 **MINUTES**

The minutes from the meeting held on 4 October 2022, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record.

22 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters raised in relation to the minutes of the previous meeting:

23 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:06:00)**

The Chairman stated that he had recently been very impressed by the condition of the towpath, being free from debris, dry and easy to walk on. He wished to thank the Canal Ranger team.

24 **CANAL PROGRESS REPORT (00:07:00)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Country Park Manager summarising the work that had taken place on the Canal since the last meeting. A brief discussion took place regarding the following issues:

Community Safety Accreditation Scheme

Training events would be held over two dates in April. The Canal Ranger Service's CSAS accreditation would then be publicised in early May.

New noticeboards and A2 information panels

The Canal Manager thanked the Inland Waterways Association for providing some recent funding towards new notice boards.

Warnicombe Bridge 'bypass'

Mr Brind thanked the Canal Ranger team for the 'bypass' at Warnicombe Bridge as it had become the highest risk location with regard to cyclists colliding with the horse.

Fenacre water transfer system

The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager (DCC) provided an update stating that the County's Chief Planner is liaising with Aggregate Industries on this matter, and also consulting with the County's Legal Team to ascertain what enforcement options might be feasible. The Chairman requested that he be kept updated so that he would be able to report back to the Committee.

Hedge laying

Mrs Brind thanked the team for the work they had done beside the boat moorings.

Hedge planting

It was reported that students from Blundell's School had helped to plant a section of new hedging the previous day, as part of their Community Partnership field day

Bird and Bat boxes

Another 20 boxes had been built with the help of Blundell's students.

Ducks Ditty electricity box

Mr Brind thanked Devon County Council for their help with the recent replacement.

Future works

Preparations had begun on slurry sealing Canal Basin paths and would recommence later in the month once the weather allows.

Management tasks

It is intended that a dog walking code be drawn up in order to address some of the recent issues where dogs had been attacking wildlife. Work would commence on this during the spring.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

25 BYCOTT FARM (22_02102_MFUL) (00:15:00)

The Chairman referred to the letter from the Conservation Officer that had been included as part of the agenda pack for the meeting. He reiterated the point that the Committee could only comment on the application if it was likely to impact the Canal. He made further reference to a number of emails which had been circulated from members of the public who were in objection showing the landscape with a superimposed picture of the proposed digester plant.

Mr Pilgrim, who usually had the responsibility of drawing up planning representations on behalf of the Committee, stated that initially he had considered the visual impact to be minimal, affecting only small sections of the canal towpath and that the digester would appear as an extra part of the farm buildings. However, he was willing to revise this on the basis of feedback from the meeting and the conservation officer report.

Consideration was given to:

- The Highways Planning Officer had requested a second traffic appraisal but it was not for the Committee to comment on this.
- The height of the proposed digester plant being commensurate with the height of the church tower in Halberton.
- The large number of emails circulating from objectors and the strong depth of feeling locally.
- Concerns with the effect on the water quality of the canal.

- Potential structural damage to bridges with the transportation of equipment in relation to the proposed site.
- Concerns regarding the size of the proposed structure.

It was **AGREED** that the Joint Advisory Committee make a formal representation as an official consultee opposing this application.

- Note: (i) Cllrs Mrs C Collis and R F Radford declared personal interests in that they were members of the Planning Committee at Mid Devon District Council and did not want to be seen as pre-judging the application. They both therefore refrained from comment.
- (ii) Cllrs Mrs C Collis and R F Radford requested that their abstention from voting be recorded.

26 **CORONATION EVENTS (00:33:00)**

Cllr Mrs S Griggs had requested that this item be placed on the agenda for further discussion.

The Canal Manager explained that nothing had been planned thus far. He did not have the capacity within his team to undertake the planning of an event but he would be happy to host if somebody else wanted to run something.

The Chairman stated that there were a lot of other Coronation events happening locally and that their planning was already underway. It was likely that it had been left too late now.

27 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following issues were discussed under this item:

Illegal fish removal from the canal

People had recently been seen at night with torches casting their nets and taking fish out of the canal. This was not acceptable and was actually illegal. A reporting process was needed that allowed people to notify the relevant people if they witnessed this sort of activity and did not want to approach the wrongdoers themselves. Technically this was a Police matter as it would be classed as theft. It was suggested that the Canal Ranger team in liaison with the angling club design a flyer to give to properties adjacent to the canal providing them with more information about how to report any incidents should they witness them. The canal team could also use links to the police service established through the CSAS accreditation process to emphasise the importance of police responding to any reported fish thefts.

Signage

More needed to be done to alert and attract tourists to the canal and the horse drawn barge. The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager (DCC) stated the relevant DCC highways team had advised that pictorial signs were only permitted on the boundary of relevant premises, and that brown signs were the most appropriate option for wayfinding. These are already present close to the suggested location, but he would talk to the necessary people to find out what options were available in

relation to improvements to the brown tourist signs such as placing a horse and/or a boat on them directing people to the canal.

Mr Brind reiterated the fact that the horse drawn barge was one of the last in the country and that a shire horse could be shown on the brown signage.

28 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:50:00)

It was requested that an update on the situation with Aggregate Industries come to the next meeting and that a standing item be included on every JAC meeting agenda going forwards. Cllr Worrow also stated that he would bring it to the attention of Burlescombe Parish Council which may be able to promote the need for progress on this issue during its regular liaison meetings with Aggregate Industries, and that he would report back through the JAC Chairman.

29 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (00:52:00)

The date of the next meeting was **AGREED** as Tuesday 3rd October 2023 at 7pm.

(The meeting ended at 7.53 pm)

CHAIRMAN