

Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Tuesday, 3 October 2023 at 7.00 pm

Please Note: This meeting will take place at Phoenix House and members of the Public and Press are able to attend via Teams. If you are intending to attend in person please contact the committee clerk in advance, in order that numbers of people can be appropriately managed in physical meeting rooms.

[To join the meeting online, click here](#)

A G E N D A

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

- 1 **Election of Chairman for 2023/2024**
To elect a Chairman for 2023/2024 (the Terms of Reference state that the appointment should be made from the Mid Devon District Council representation for 2023/2024).
- 2 **Election of Vice Chairman for 2023/2024**
To elect a Vice Chairman for 2023/2024 (the Terms of reference state that this appointment should come from the Devon County Council representation for 2023/2024).
- 3 **Apologies**
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 4 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions from the public and replies thereto.
- 5 **Minutes of the previous meeting** (*Pages 5 - 10*)
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 7 March 2023.
- 6 **Matters Arising**
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.
- 7 **Chairman's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.
- 8 **Canal Business Group Representation**
Committee to discuss.

- 9 **Terms of Reference and membership review** *(Pages 11 - 14)*
To consider and approve the Terms of Reference and membership of the Committee for 2023/2024 (please find attached).
- 10 **Progress Report** *(Pages 15 - 30)*
To receive a report summarising the work that has taken place with regard to the canal since the last meeting.
- 11 **Draft Memorial Bench Policy** *(Pages 31 - 34)*
To consider and endorse the draft Memorial Bench Policy, subject to any agreed amendments.
- 12 **Update on the situation regarding Aggregate Industries**
To receive an update and discuss.
- 13 **Impact of Planning Enforcement activity**
For the GWCJAC's members to consider asking Mid Devon District Council's Chief Executive to explain the impact and implications of the shortfall in Enforcement Activity when Planning Conditions are breached.
- 14 **50th anniversary of the horse drawn barge**
Committee to note and discuss any ideas to celebrate this anniversary.
- 15 **Any other business**
To consider any other relevant business.
- 16 **Identification of items for the next meeting**
To identify any issues for discussion at the next meeting.
- 17 **Date of the next meeting**
To agree the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 5th March 2024 at 7pm.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday 25 September 2023

Meeting Information

From 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. The Council will enable all people to continue to participate in meetings via Teams.

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. Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible.

Residents, electors or business rate payers of the District may make a statement or shall be entitled to ask questions at a meeting which concerns the Council's powers / duties or which otherwise affects the District. If your question does not relate to an agenda item, the question must be submitted to the Democratic Services Manager two working days before the meeting to give time for a response to be prepared.

Please note that a reasonable amount of hardcopies at the meeting will be available, however this is a limited number. If you are attending the meeting and would like a hardcopy of the agenda we encourage that you notify Democratic Services in advance of the meeting to ensure that a hardcopy is available. Otherwise, copies of the agenda can be found on our website.

If you would like a copy of the Agenda in another format (for example in large print) please contact Sarah Lees on: slees@middevon.gov.uk

Public Wi-Fi is available in all meeting rooms.

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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

TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

The Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee (GWCJAC) supports and encourages an active partnership between all the bodies involved in and co-ordinating management across all activities of the Grand Western Canal (GWC). The management of the GWC is co-ordinated by the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager on behalf of Devon County Council.

The Joint Advisory Committee represents the main mechanism for the co-ordination of advice and the collation of local views relating to the management and maintenance of the canal.

The aim of the County Council is “to conserve for the future the integrity of the Grand Western Canal in its setting as a wildlife, historic, recreation and education resource”.

The principle functions of the GWCJAC are to:

- Promote and act as champion for the canal;
- Support the aims of the County Council for the GWC which are to:
 - Preserve and maintain the canal as a civil engineering asset;
 - Develop, conserve and interpret the biodiversity in the surrounding area;
 - Promote the canal for amongst other things – tourism purposes.
- Provide a forum for discussion and information exchange between the different interested parties;
- Provide advice for the County Council on issues of management of the GWC

This will be achieved through providing advice:

- To assist the implementation of the Management that supports the County Council's aims for the GWC;
- To inform a review of the Management Plan at appropriate intervals;
- To permit the monitoring of the success and achievement of the GWC Team and the use of the Canal;
- To inform the County Council on the impacts of existing or proposed uses of the Canal;
- To inform the commissioning of special studies of issues if necessary, utilising appropriate forums;
- To inform the local planning authorities about developments which are likely to affect significantly the GWC, its environs and landscape character;
- On the likely resources necessary for effective management;
- On the dissemination of information and by undertaking this through appropriate organisations;
- On the accommodation of new requirements due to changes in legislation affecting the GWC.

It should be noted that the GWCJAC does not have executive powers over the funding partners, but acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to the funding partners and others as required.

TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

- The GWCJAC will meet twice a year;
- The Chairman and Vice Chairman will be elected annually;
- The position of Chairman and Vice Chairman will rotate between the main funding partners of Mid Devon District Council and Devon County Council;
- The secretariat for the GWCJAC will be Mid Devon District Council and the Committee will be run under MDDC standing orders;
- The GWCJAC will be considered quorate when eight representatives are present of whom 3 should be County or District Councillors with 1 being a County Councillor;
- Representatives will be expected to attend all meetings or to send a suitable replacement with prior notice;
- If a representative fails to attend two GWCJAC meetings within the year, without reasonable cause, then their eligibility to attend any future meetings will be terminated with immediate effect;
- Meetings will be open to the press and public with opportunities for the items to be brought in by the public for part of the meeting with prior notice;
- Suggested agenda items and questions should be presented 3 weeks before any meeting;
- Press and publicity must be channelled through Devon Media Services having initially been authorised by the Chairman or Vice Chairman or the Public Rights of Way & Country Parks Manager;
- The membership of the GWCJAC will be reviewed once during each financial year to ensure there is a wide and balanced representation of canal interests;
- New members may be co-opted onto the GWCJAC with the agreement of the GWCJAC following a presentation to the Committee outlining the reasons why they should have representation;
- These Terms of Understanding will be reviewed by the GWCJAC following the agreement of the Chairman with recommendations for change being made to the funding partners;
- All organisations will have equal voting rights should the occasion dictate, with the Chairman having the casting vote;
- The GWCJAC will report to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport who will be the County Council's representative on the advisory committee.

GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP

Group Represented	Votes
Members	
Devon County Council - Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport	1
Devon County Council – Member for Tiverton East	1
Devon County Council – Member for Willand and Uffculme	1
Mid Devon District Council – Portfolio Holder for Environment	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Cranmore (3 councillors)	3
Mid Devon District Council – Member for Halberton	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Canonsleigh (2 councillors)	2
Tiverton Town Council	1
Halberton Parish Council	1
Sampford Peverell Parish Council	1
Burlescombe Parish Council	1
Holcombe Rogus Parish Council	1
Friends of the Grand Western Canal	1
Devon Wildlife Trust	1
Wildlife Advisory Group	1
Inland Waterways Association	1
Tiverton and District Angling Club	1
Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society	1
Tiverton Sea Cadets	1
Cycling UK	1
The Tiverton Canal Company	1
Mid Devon Moorings	1
Canal Businesses Group	1
Community Patrol Boat	1
Officers	
Devon County Council – Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager	0
Devon County Council – Country Park Manager	0
Mid Devon District Council – Land Management Officer	0
Mid Devon District Council – Member Services Officer	0
Total	27

Each organisation may register a deputy to be their representative, which must be approved by the GWJAC in advance.

The GWCJAC will be advised by the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager and Country Park Manager and other officers as required.

We endorse the above Terms of Understanding for the GWCJAC and hereby agree to represent, to the best of our ability, the interests of the GWC. We understand our role is to act as an ambassador for the GWCJAC and further its aim to conserve, for the future, the integrity of the Grand Western Canal in its setting as a wildlife, historic, recreation and education resource and to be supportive of sustainable economic activity and tourism in the area.

Organisation.....

Named
representative.....

Position.....

Date.....

Signature.....
Contact Details

Address.....
.....

Tel.....Fax.....
.....

Email.....

Named
Deputy.....

Date.....

Signature.....

Contact
Details.....

Address.....

Tel.....

Fax.....

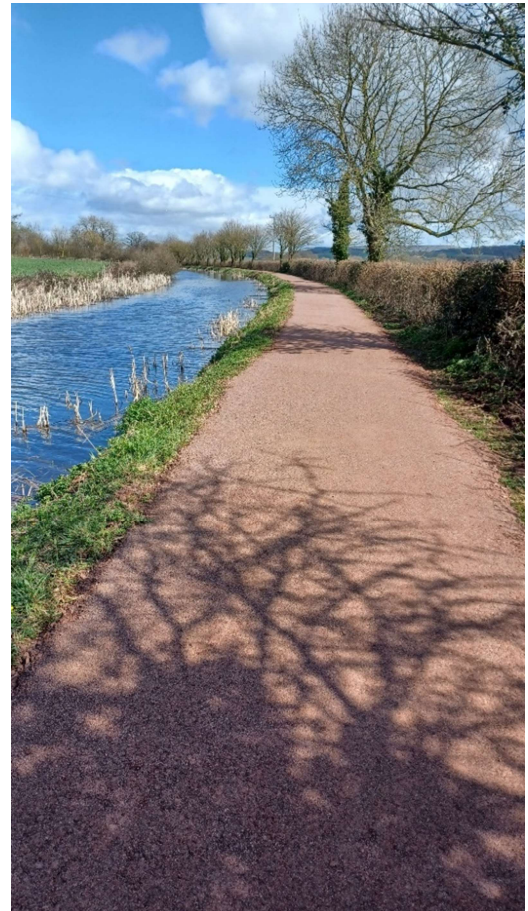
Email.....

Progress Report (March 2023 to September 2023 inclusive)

1. Towpath Resurfacing

A 900m long stretch of the towpath between Battens Bridge and Chains Road in Sampford Peverell has been resurfaced. In response to a few issues with resurfacing work undertaken last year (when the limestone scalping mix didn't bind very well in places, leaving loose stones on the surface), the contractor mixed in extra stone dust which led to a very smooth and well compacted finish.

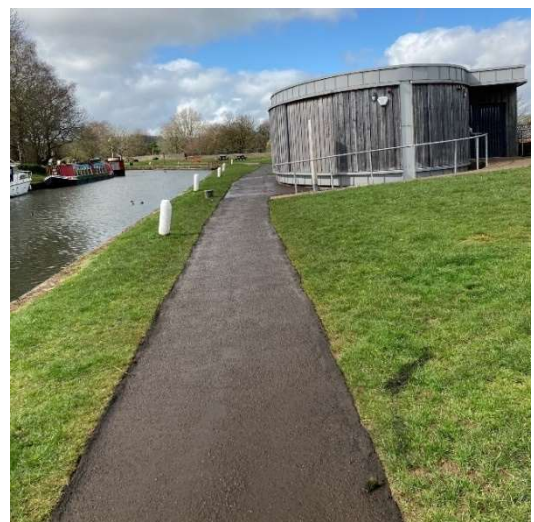
Feedback from towpath users and local residents has generally been very good. Some cyclists have reported that the surface is undulating, but the Canal Manger has cycled the section and found that the slight undulations only seem to become apparent at higher speeds and so are not deemed to be a significant cause for concern.



2. Slurry-sealing of Canal Basin paths

In mid-March the tarmacked paths in the Canal Basin were slurry-sealed by specialist contractors. Slurry-sealing is a relatively low-cost method of maintaining tarmacked paths and is often used on pavements.

The paths here were last slurry sealed in 2010, but that layer was being worn away quite significantly in some areas and so needed to be redone. A liquid coating that includes bitumen and grit is spread on the paths and this dries hard and should preserve the surface for many years to come.



3. Vandalism in Canal Basin toilets

During the spring, there were a series of vandalism attacks in the Canal Basin public toilets. A sink and a hand drier were broken off the walls, and tiles in one of the Ladies cubicles and under the sinks in the Gents were broken off the walls. Doors and doorframes have also been badly damaged.



Repairs were carried out, costing close to £1000. This followed vandalism of toilets, the bin outside the toilets and to the equipment in the nearby Play Park last year.

In order to deter further vandalism in these areas, CCTV cameras have been fitted on the outside of the public toilet block in July and signage has been updated to inform of the presence of CCTV cameras. No vandalism has taken place since then. The purchase and installation of the CCTV equipment was generously funded by the Friends of the Grand Western Canal.

4. New dipping pond

Having completed much of the excavation of a new pond in the garden of the Ranger's Office during a Volunteer Day in March, another Volunteer Day was held at the start of May to finish off profiling the pond, add a marshy overflow area at the back of the pond, and then install the liners.

The bed of the pond has since been lined with some gravel; and it's been filled with water and had some rocks, logs, plants and pond mud added from



another pond in the garden added to kick start its colonisation by wildlife. Damselflies have already been seen ovipositing (laying eggs).

The pond has been left to establish through the year and hopefully next year the Canal Rangers can begin using it for pond-dipping activities during school visits and public events.



5. Flooding at Lowdells

Intense downpours on the 9th May led to flooding at several locations around the county. One such downpour was centred on the Holcombe Rogus area, with roads being submerged throughout the village. Nearby at Lowdells, a stream which runs beside the canal ran at levels not witnessed before and inundated a culvert which carries the flow some 130m to the highway. Properties at either end of the culvert (which is owned by DCC as part of the Canal holding) were flooded and a resident at one of the properties was assisted to leave by the Fire and Rescue Service. The image below shows flooding on the road and water blasting out of the culvert outlet.



There was considerable concern about the condition of the culvert, as a large quantity of debris had been washed out onto the road and some of it was clearly masonry from the culvert structure. After the initial clear up of the road was completed, a remote CCTV survey was undertaken and ascertained the culvert was still safe enough to conduct an in-person inspection. An enclosed access team conducted a visual inspection of the culvert. They reported that whilst there has been some scouring of the floor of the culvert, the walls and roof are still in good condition and have not been undermined.

Following a period of design work, health and safety assessment and contract arrangement, repair work started in August. At the time of writing, repairs to the 8m deep shaft that leads into the culvert have been completed, and work on the culvert itself has commenced. In order to safely access the shaft, a complex scaffolding system has been installed with a winch and tripod fitted to take in and bring out materials.



Investigations have revealed that within the culvert some sections are scoured (with holes washed out in the bed of the culvert floor), whilst in other areas there is an accretion of stones and silt which has built up over decades, possibly centuries.



The annotated photo shows one such section where there has been an accretion of material against the walls. The red line shows the original profile, which will be reinstated. The photo was taken close to the base of the shaft looking towards a 90 degree turn in the culvert. This sharp bend will have slowed down the flow of water and led to the depositing and blocking of material over time. Work is being funded via the highways capital programme and is being supervised by DCC's Engineering Design Group and set to continue for several months.

6. Badger Fencing

In 2022, a badger sett in an embankment near Battens Bridge was demolished under licence from Natural England (as reported in the October Progress Report). In March, the Canal Manager and an ecologist spent a day covering the embankment in that area with badger-proof fencing in order to prevent any potential re-excavation of the sett tunnels by badgers.

7. New Ranger Service vehicle

Two years ago the Canal Ranger Service's Ford Ranger suffered a gearbox problem that meant the vehicle was beyond economic repair and needed to be replaced.

A new Toyota Hilux was ordered, and a temporary replacement Ford Ranger was found in the meantime, but due to backlogs in car deliveries to the UK, the Hilux only arrived in April. The Canal Rangers are pleased with the new vehicle and it should be a real workhorse for them over the next decade.



8. Community Safety Accreditation / Accredited Police Volunteers

The Canal Ranger team and members of the Community Patrol Boat crew are being accredited by Devon and Cornwall Police and have received limited police powers to deal with anti-social behaviour in the Country Park and offences against the Canal Byelaws.

In April they attended two training days. The first was at the Canal during which 'actors' challenged them with a range of difficult scenarios and behaviours to deal with. This was rather daunting but excellent practice as it mirrored the realistic scenario of entering a situation without knowing how people will react to a request for them to cease whatever anti-social behaviour it is they are undertaking. They practiced non-confrontational but assertive approaches, and how to use their police powers as a last resort if the antisocial behaviour persisted.

The second training day was a get together of over 100 Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) accredited employees across Devon and Cornwall, held at Saltash. There are three main types of occupations that have engaged with CSAS – countryside and urban greenspace rangers (there was a large contingent of Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Rangers in attendance); District Council enforcement /community welfare officers; and civil parking and traffic management officers / companies. As well as



updates on CSAS, there were a series of presentations on topics including mental health first aid, cyber-crime, traffic crime reduction, and counter-terrorism initiatives.

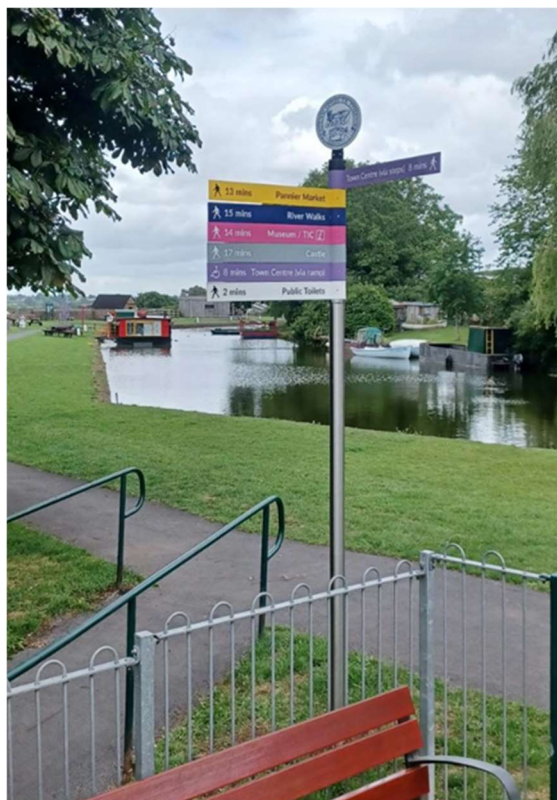
In June there was an official public launch of the two schemes at the Canal, as shown on the photo above. Since then, the Canal Rangers have had no need to use their police powers. The skipper of the Community Patrol Boat will provide an update on their activities with a verbal report at the JAC meeting.

9. Tourism promotion

The Canal Visitor Guide was updated and reprinted ahead of the Easter holidays. During the summer the Canal Manager had meetings with members of the MDDC Economic Development Team to discuss potential tourism promotions involving the Country Park. As a result the Canal Manager has submitted an expression of interest and is intending to submit an application for funding for new displays within the Canal Visitor Centre. Several other potential projects, including refurbishment of the Public Toilets, were determined to be outside the scope of the funding scheme.

The Country Park has been included within the colourful array of new directional fingerposts that MDDC have installed around Tiverton, strengthening the link between the Canal and the town centre.

There are also plans for a walking festival in Autumn 2024 which will incorporate the Canal, and potentially other initiatives to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the horse-drawn barge *Tivertonian* operating on the Canal.



10. Wheeled digger jobs

The Canal Manager spent a day in July and a day in September working with a JCB contractor, undertaking a series of tasks in the along the Canal.

These included:

- Clearing a landslip in the cutting beside Waytown Tunnel



- Rebuilding an eroded section of bank beside Waytown Limekilns



- Sealing a leak beside Westcott Bridge using puddling clay



- Rebuilding an eroded section of bank beside Manley Bridge.



11. Investigating other 'leaks'

The Canal Manager has spent a considerable amount of time this summer investigating two potential leaks from the canal where water is causing concern for adjacent residents.

The first related to water seeping out onto and under the road near Ayshford Bridge. This water was permeating into an adjacent properties drainage system preventing repairs to a water treatment unit. The usual divining survey carried out by the Canal Manager indicated the source was natural spring water flowing under the Canal, rather than a leak from the canal. This was backed up by water sample analysis undertaken by a water testing laboratory.

The second related to water seeping through the wall of a property located below and close to the canal in Sampford Peverell. Once again divining indicated no leakage from the canal and this was backed up by analysis of water samples. Again it is believed that ground water is the source. It is possible that some excavation of the towpath may be required in order to enable the homeowners to seal their property against the penetration of this water, in which case we will arrange for the required towpath closure / temporary diversion.

12. JAC summer site visit

The JAC summer site visit took place on 29th June. Attendees met in the Canal Basin and introductions were made as there were several new JAC members present following the recent district council elections.

After discussing some recent works and issues in the Canal Basin including the slurry sealing of the paths and the vandalism in the public toilets, the group headed out to Lowdells. Here they viewed the culvert inlet shaft in the garden of one of the properties that had been flooded in May, and the outlet at the road beside the other property that had been flooded.

The group then headed to the nearby quarry which houses a police live-firing range and which is subject of a planning application. The group did not enter the quarry but were able to get a sense of the proximity of the Canal. The meeting ended there.

13. Green Flag Award

The Country Park has achieved the Green Flag Award for 2023/24, this being the fifteenth consecutive year it has held the award.

The Green Flag is only presented to parks and greenspaces that meet a high standard of management and maintenance, based on judging and mystery shops undertaken by independent judges who work in the sector and have undergone training by the Award's organisers Keep Britain Tidy.

Because the Country Park has achieved consistently high scores over a number of years, it is only fully judged every other year and is subject to a mystery shop by a judge in alternate years. This year the Country Park was mystery shopped and, in all categories assessed, received a green grading, meaning it met the standards with no concerns raised. JAC members on the summer site visit helped to celebrate the achievement by being photographed with this year's flag:



14. Vegetation maintenance

Canal Rangers and Volunteers have undertaken all of the usual mowing, strimming and weedcutting through the spring and summer. The bankside vegetation from the Canal Basin to East Manley Bridge was flailed by a contractor in mid June to enable the horsedrawn barge to continue operating and the Canal Manager used the Kubota tractor to side up the vegetaion overhanging the towpath over eight days in early July.

Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts has spent the majority of her time working with volunteers strimming picnic sites and bridge abutments and around benches, gates and other structures. She has also mowed the sides of the towpath throughout its length on several occasions, with one more cut planned in late September.

Canal Ranger, Craig Saunderson has been operating the weedboat for 4 days per week for almost all of the period from April to September and will continue with occasional days on the boat until mid-October. He has generally spent his fifth day of the week mowing the Canal Basin and Sampford Peverell picnic sites.



15. Invasive plant species

Following the discovery (and subsequent removal) of the invasive alien species Water Primrose in a couple of small patches near Tidcombe Bridge last summer, the Canal Manager has discovered and removed several more small patches in the same area this summer. In open conditions, the plant forms distinctive trails that drift out across the channel in a few lines (as opposed to the clump forming nature of most other floating plants on the canal).



However, on the other side of Tidcombe Bridge near Milestone 1, the plant was found growing in amongst a large patch of the native Bogbean, where it was difficult to spot and extract. These areas will be closely checked each year for any further Water Primrose growth.

Several new patches of Fringed lily have appeared at points between Boehill Bridge and the Canal Basin. A licence application to the EA for ongoing herbicide control of this invasive plant was submitted several months ago, but due to backlogs the EA has in processing applications, the application has still not been determined. The window for effective herbicide control of this plant closes in the autumn as the leaves die back and so the intention will be to resubmit the application early in the new year to enable the treatment to proceed next summer.

16. Wildlife monitoring

The British Trust for Ornithology's Wetland Bird Survey continues to be undertaken along the canal with the Canal Manager and some volunteers undertaking a count of wetland birds on a roughly monthly basis (based on dates set by the BTO). One volunteer has had to step back from being involved and so there is currently a vacancy for a counter in the Burlescombe to Lowdwells section. Given the relatively small range of wetland birds encountered on the canal, counter's ID skills don't have to be extensive and anyone interested can contact the Canal Manager for more information.

During the spring and summer, a volunteer has continued the reptile and amphibian monitoring programme that he started last year. This has been focussed on areas of the Country Park which are not publicly accessible and include offside ponds and the south-facing side of Swing Embankment.

17. Memorial seats

New memorial seats have been installed in the following sections of towpath:

- Greenway Bridge to Sellake Bridge:
The seat is in memory of a couple who used to live at Halberton Court Farm (located in front of the church, behind the bench in the photo). It has been positioned so that as the Cherry tree behind it grows, it will offer shade to those sitting below.
- Buckland Bridge to Boehill Bridge x 2
- Crownhill Bridge to the Aqueduct



18. Garden and Gateway Agreements

Throughout most of the Canal holding, Devon County Council owns several metres of the offside bank and also the land on which the hedge beside the towpath grows. Adjacent residents are able to rent the offside land between their garden and the Canal through Garden Agreements; or enter a Gateway Agreement with DCC to have and use a gateway

through the hedge to access the towpath. The current rental fees at £50 and £25 respectively.

The Canal Manager has spent several days through the summer knocking on doors and liaising with the DCC revenue and legal services teams, to ensure that the agreements and rental payments are up to date. In several cases, elderly residents had died or moved into retirement homes without DCC being informed. As a result several obsolete agreements have been terminated and several agreements with new residents have been commenced.

19. Temporary Ranger

The Canal Ranger Service has benefitted from some extra help this summer, in the form of a temporary member of staff, Will, who has spent three months splitting his time between the Canal Ranger Service and the Public Rights of Way team. For three years Will had previously undertaken one day's work experience per week with the Canal Rangers as part of his courses at Bicton College, and so he knew the work and fitted in seamlessly. The extra help was really welcome as one of the Country Park's long-term volunteers has been unavailable for much of the year due to health issues. Will's contract ends in early October and the team wish him well in his future endeavours.

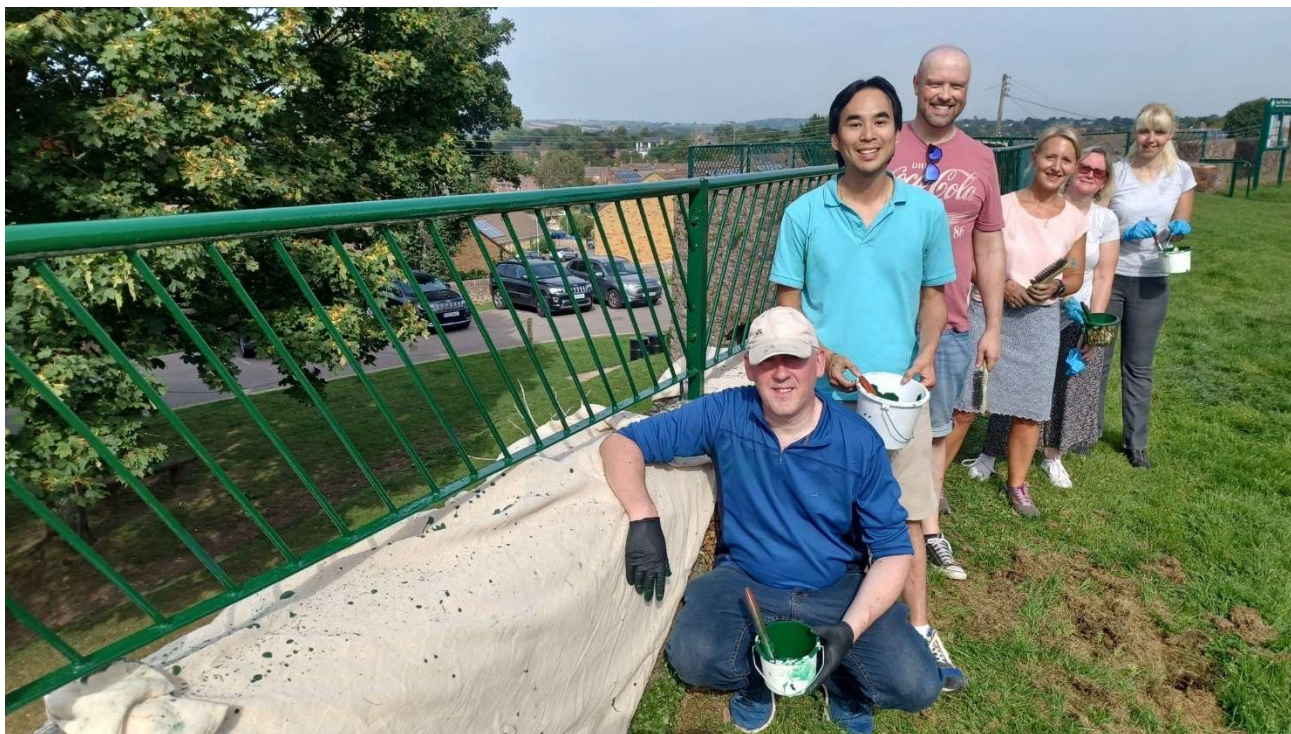
20. Volunteers

Despite the absence of one of our key volunteers due to health issues for much of this year, we have continued to benefit from the contribution provided by various volunteers and work experience students. The totals for March to September inclusive are as follows:

- Weekday volunteering = 39 days
- Work Experience students from colleges and schools = 30 days
- Volunteer Days = 41 days
 - 6 March - Blundells School Community Partnership Field Day, planting a new hedge near Burlescombe and building bird and bat boxes - 21 students



- 12 March - Volunteer Day - Digging new pond in garden - 8 volunteers
- 4 May - Volunteer Day - Finishing pond and thank you BBQ - 6 volunteers
- 11 Sept - Volunteer Day - 6 volunteers from Barratt David Wilson Trading Ltd, Exeter painted railings in the Canal Basin (photo below)



21. Walk and Talks

As part of the Tiverton Walk and Talk programme, Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts has led walks starting at the following locations, incorporating the towpath and local footpaths:

- 22 March - Swans Neck - 35 walkers
- 19 April - Holcombe Rogus – 22 walkers
- 28 June - Canal Basin - 20 walkers
- 13 September – Sampford Peverell - 20 walkers

22. Events

During the Summer holidays Joanne Roberts organised and ran a very successful series of 'Wild Wednesday' events. Each day comprised separate morning and afternoon sessions lasting two hours.

- 9 August - Pond Dipping - 30 children
- 16 August - Tremendous Trees - 9 children
- 23 August - Marvellous Minibeasts - 21 children
- 30 August - Nature Crafts - 15 children

The Canal Manager is due to lead a Bat Walk on the evening of 22 September, with all 35 spaces booked.



23. Ranger-led school and youth / community group visits

- 10 May - Castle Primary - pond dipping - 45 children
- 16 May - St Andrews Primary, Cullompton - pond dipping - 54 children
- 18 May - Home Educators - pond dipping - 12 children
- 22 May - Blundells Prep - pond dipping - 36 children



- 7 June - Castle Primary - pond dipping - 41 children
- 14 June - Tiverton ACE pond dipping - 19 children
- 19 June - Trefoil group - pond dipping - 10 ladies
- 29 June - Beavers - pond dipping - 12 children
- 25 Sept - Brownies - pond dipping - ? children

Future programme of works

Practical works

- All usual trimming back of overhanging branches and crown-lifting of low branches
- Tree safety works as specified following tree safety inspection (being carried out by arboriculture consultant in autumn 2023)
- Various hedge laying / planting, coppicing and tree planting works
- Ongoing small-scale bank erosion repairs

- Annual strimming of bridge abutments and trimming of the banks and hedges which the flailing contractor cannot access
- Mowing Swing and Sellake embankments
- Reed clearance (on towpath side by excavator) between Manley Bridge and East Manley Bridge
- Installing three new noticeboards (recently delivered) and relocating two of the old ones to two new locations (opposite Ebear layby near dragonfly panel and below Beech car park on ramp to towpath)
- Installing new nameplate on Buckland Bridge
- Repairs to Holbrook landing stage
- Repairs to Canal Basin landing stage
- Ongoing painting of Canal Basin railings and handrails
- Cutting and raking of wildflower meadows
- Re-staining benches
- Building and installing new memorial benches as and when ordered
- Severing and removing worst of ivy growth on bridges
- Raising towpath level above large roots near Waytown Tunnel (Lowdwells side) and filling in gullies to remove trip hazards

Management tasks

- Organisation of all works listed above
- Ongoing work with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan (delayed due to lack of capacity amongst DCC engineers)
- Scenario-based test of Emergency Plan
- Fenacre water transfer system
- Apply for Countryside Stewardship capital grants funding
- Apply for MDDC Prosperity Programme funding for new Visitor Centre displays
- Organise an update and reprint of the Canal Visitor Guide
- Finalise production and installation of 11 A2 information panels to go in noticeboards,
- Complete update of boating regulations and procedures and design/printing of new permits book (stocks of old permit books now almost used up)
- Organise update and replacement of the Ebear dragonfly panel
- Organise ongoing Ash Dieback felling works and a range of tree management works
- Organise annual cutting of hedges and banks
- Green Flag award application
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all relevant H&S policies / guidelines

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Grand Western Canal



Memorial bench policy

Introduction

Devon County Council (the Council) owns the Grand Western Canal Country Park (the Country Park) and employs a Canal Ranger Service to manage and maintain it. The Council receives requests from members of the public who wish to commemorate loved ones and or events by placing plaques on a bench within the Country Park.

This policy sets out how requests will be considered and the terms and conditions where requests are approved.

There is no legislative requirement for the provision of public or memorial benches although it is accepted that they provide a useful and valued public amenity and are also valued by the individuals and families who make the requests.

This policy recognises the need for a consistent approach to the provision of memorial requests to be placed in the Country Park. It also acknowledges that the demands for memorials may be far greater than some parts of the Country Park can accommodate and that the attractiveness and atmosphere of the historic canal landscape can be adversely affected by inconsistency in design of benches and inappropriate decoration by flowers, plants and other adornments.

The policy therefore continues to welcome requests, but provides controls on the locations, designs and decorations that are acceptable.

Policy principles:

The following principles will be applied in considering requests and making decisions for memorials and will also set out the principles of the type of memorial to be approved, the location, future maintenance and replacement.

1. The type of memorial bench is limited to two designs, provided and installed by the Canal Ranger Service.

One is a simple oak bench (as shown in the photo to the right) built by the Canal Ranger Service to a standard design, with any memorial plaque to be provided by the donor, but fitted by the Canal Ranger Service.



The second design is an oak seat with back rest as shown in the photo to the right. This one has a factory-fitted stainless steel plaque and wording provided by the donor.



2. Requests for memorial benches will only be considered where these can be reasonably accommodated. A number of factors will be considered by the Canal Ranger Service when assessing a potential location for a new memorial bench, including:
 - Sensible spacing – are there already other benches nearby?
 - Sufficient width – would the tractor that trims the banks and hedges be able to safely get past?
 - Tree safety – new memorial benches are not usually placed under large mature trees due to the risk of falling branches.
 - Any potential negative impacts on other users or Canal wildlife / heritage?

Prospective donors of memorial benches need to contact the Canal Ranger Service to discuss potential locations. The decision of the Canal Ranger Service on the acceptability of a proposed location will be final.

At the time of writing (2023) there are virtually no new spaces available for memorial benches in the South-western half of the Canal between Tiverton and Sampford Peverell. There are still several new potential locations for memorial benches between Sampford Peverell and Lowdells.

3. The current price of a memorial bench of either design will be available from the Canal Ranger Service upon request. The price is based on the cost to the Council of providing and installing a new memorial bench (and plaque in the case of the oak seats) and is not seen as an opportunity for the Council to generate income.
4. In the case of the simple oak benches, the donor will provide the memorial plaque to a pre agreed design, size and text.
5. The donor will have no claim of ownership to the bench (which will remain the property of the Council) and will not be permitted to make any changes to it after installation.

6. The donor will not be allowed to place any additional mementoes or memorials at the site whether temporary or permanent. This is to prevent the Country Park taking on the ambience of a dedicated memorial garden which may compromise the enjoyment of the space for general recreational activities.

An exception to this rule will be an allowance to place flowers on or beside the bench to mark up to two significant dates each year. These must not be left wrapped in plastic and must be collected within one week. Failure to follow these conditions may lead to the removal of the bench or the plaque.

The Canal Ranger Service reserves the right to remove any items fixed to or left on or beside the bench, in line with this policy.

7. Using its discretion, the Canal Ranger Service will maintain the bench as part of the Country Park's visitor infrastructure, as time and resources allow.
8. The Council will not be responsible for replacing the bench where it has reached the end of its natural life or as a result of damage whether accidental or wilful. However, once a bench is deemed by the Canal Ranger Service to be in need of replacement, they will endeavour to offer the donor (if they can be traced) the opportunity to pay for a replacement.
9. Any donor that proceeds with an order for a memorial bench will be deemed to have agreed to the conditions set out in this policy.

Canal Ranger Service contact details:

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