

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 3 March 2025 at 7.00 pm

Next ordinary meeting
Monday, 6 October 2025 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 – click here](#)

Meeting ID: 374 183 515 824

Passcode: sk4AEx

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 **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 of the Previous Meeting** (*Pages 5 - 10*)
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 1st October 2024.
- 4 **Matters Arising**
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.
- 5 **Chair's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chair may wish to make.
- 6 **Aggregate Industries UK Limited Update**
To receive an update from Aggregate Industries.

- 7 **Tidcombe Hall, Tiverton Planning Inquiry**
To receive an update from the Development Management Manager, MDDC.
- 8 **Canal Progress Report** (*Pages 11 - 22*)
To receive a report summarising the work that has taken place with regard to the canal since the last meeting.
- 9 **Canal House (aka The Moorings)**
To receive an update from the Chair, Cllr Colin Slade.
- 10 **Devolution White Paper**
For discussion.
- 11 **Any Other Business**
To consider any other relevant business.
- 12 **Identification of Items for the Next Meeting**
To identify any issues for discussion at the next meeting.
- 13 **Date of the Next Meeting**
To agree the date of the next meeting scheduled as 6th October 2025.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Friday, 21 February 2025

Guidance notes for meetings of Mid Devon District Council

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 the Council experience technology difficulties at a committee meeting the Chairman may make the decision to continue the meeting 'in-person' only to conclude the business on the agenda.

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at Committee@middevon.gov.uk

They can also be accessed via the council's website [Click Here](#)

Printed agendas can also be viewed in reception at the Council offices at Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, EX16 6PP.

2. Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership.

The Code of Conduct can be [viewed here](#):

3. Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. Minutes of meetings are not verbatim.

4. Public Question Time

Residents, electors or business rate payers of the District wishing to raise a question and/or statement under public question time are asked to provide their written questions to the Democratic Services team by 5pm three clear working days before the meeting to ensure that a response can be provided at the meeting. You will be invited to ask your question and or statement at the meeting and will receive the answer prior to, or as part of, the debate on that item. Alternatively, if you are content to receive an answer after the item has been debated, you can register to speak by emailing your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting. You will be invited to speak at the meeting and will receive a written response within 10 clear working days following the meeting.

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

5. Meeting Etiquette for participants

- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

For those joining the meeting virtually:

- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Switch off your camera if you are not speaking.
- Speak clearly (if you are not using camera then please state your name)
- Switch off your camera and microphone after you have spoken.
- There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called "turn on live captions" which provides subtitles on the screen.

6. Exclusion of Press & Public

When considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act. If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed. They will be invited to return as soon as the meeting returns to open session.

7. Recording of meetings

All media, including radio and TV journalists, and members of the public may attend Council, Cabinet, PDG and Committee meetings (apart from items Media and Social Media Policy - 2023 page 22 where the public is excluded) you can view our Media and Social Media Policy [here](#). They may record, film or use social media before, during or after the meeting, so long as this does not distract from or interfere unduly with the smooth running of the meeting. Anyone proposing to film during the meeting is requested to make this known to the Chairman in advance. The Council also makes audio recordings of meetings which are published on our website [Browse Meetings, 2024 - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#).

8. Fire Drill Procedure

If you hear the fire alarm you should leave the building by the marked fire exits, follow the direction signs and assemble at the master point outside the entrance. Do not use the lifts or the main staircase. You must wait there until directed otherwise by a senior officer. If anybody present is likely to need assistance in exiting the building in the event of an emergency, please ensure you have let a member of Democratic Services know before the meeting begins and arrangements will be made should an emergency occur.

9. WIFI

An open, publicly available Wi-Fi network is normally available for meetings held in the Phoenix Chambers at Phoenix House.

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 1 October 2024 at 7.00 pm

JAC Members Present:

Cllr C R Slade Devon County Council (Chair)
Cllr L Cruwys Mid Devon District Council
Mr P Brind Tiverton Canal Company
Mrs P Brind Mid Devon Moorings
Cllr K Browse Halberton Parish Council
Cllr S Bush Tiverton Town Council
Cllr G DuChesne Mid Devon District Council
Cllr B Fish Mid Devon District Council
Mr John Hampshire Cycling UK
Mr R Hodgson Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Cllr J Lock Mid Devon District Council
Cllr A Pilgrim Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim Inland Waterways Association
Cllr R Radford, Devon County Council
Mr P Saupe Tiverton Sea Cadets
Mr M Trump Tiverton and District Angling Club

Also Present:

Mrs J Brind Tiverton Canal Company
Cllr E Buczkowski, Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C Harrower, Mid Devon District Council

Officers:-

Mr R Marsh Director of Place and Economy, MDDC
Mr R Walton Public Rights of Way & Country Parks Manager, DCC (online)
Mr M Baker Country Park Manager, DCC
Mrs A Howell Democratic Services Officer, MDDC

36 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2024/2025

RESOLVED that Cllr C Slade be elected Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025.

(Proposed by Cllr L Cruwys and seconded by Cllr R Radford)

37 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2024/2025

RESOLVED that Cllr L Cruwys be elected Vice Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025.

(Proposed Mr P Saupe and seconded by Cllr A Pilgrim)

38 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr A Davies, Cllr L Kennedy, Cllr D Palmer, Cllr S Taylor and T White.

39 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

40 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes from the meeting held on 23 July 2024 having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record.

41 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

42 **GRAND WESTERN CANAL CONSERVATION AREA CONSULTATION UPDATE**

The Director of Place and Economy gave a verbal update on the Grand Western Canal conservation area consultation and highlighted the following:-

- The consultation had run for an 8 week period from 22 July 2024 until 16 September 2024 and had received a total of 107 responses.
- Two drop in sessions were held one on 23 July 2024 where 60 people attended and another on the evening of 5 September 2024 where 15 people attended.
- The public were encouraged to supply evidence so that the Council could reflect on the proposed changes.
- Out of the responses received, 65% outlined that they were not in favour or raised concerns with regards to the boundaries and 32% responded with concerns around future development in the vicinity of the site.
- Historic England had been consulted although they did not offer any detailed comments on the proposals.
- The work would continue to reflect on the comments received and consider any appropriate amendments. This would then be presented to Cabinet on 12 November 2024 with the adoption of the Management Plan to be recommended to Full Council for approval on 18 December 2024.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- How pleased the Committee was to see that officers were being respectful and how the whole process was being dealt with.
- Whether investigations had been made with regard to the historical connections relating to fields and Tidcombe Hall. It was explained that the Conservation Officer had engaged with the Historical Records Officer at Devon County Council but that there did not appear to be any direct evidence linking the fields of Tidcombe Hall to the canal. However, the Council were

aware that there were hints or suggestions on their relationship and were mindful of this and would consider this for any revisions required.

43 FENACRE WATER TRANSFER SYSTEM UPDATE

The Chair read out an update which had been received via email on 30 September 2024 from Chris Herbert, Planning Manager, Aggregate Industries UK.

“I am writing to advise that due to our previous consultants no longer being in a position to continue on this project due to resourcing issues we have had to re-start our approval process and approach new consultants to take the project forward. Company processes require us to have a minimum of 3 quotes before we can then move forward and we also need to go back through our financial approval process because of this change.

We are currently going through the appointment and financial approval process so that the project can proceed and it is our intention to have this approval process completed by the end of the year so that consultants are in place to move the project forward at the beginning of 2025. Subject to the necessary approvals from the Environment Agency being in place by the middle of next year it is hoped that works can then be undertaken in the second half of 2025 in line with the commitments the company has previously given.

This unfortunately means we have been unable to progress matters as quickly as we had hoped this year but the company remain committed to progressing this project in 2025.”

Discussion took place regarding:-

- That this issue had gone on too long and needed to be resolved as a matter of urgency.
- Cllr J Lock informed the Committee that she had requested a seat on the Quarry Liaison Group and hoped that if accepted she would be able to apply some pressure on Aggregate Industries (AI) to move forward in a more timely manner.
- Mr R Walton, Devon County Council (DCC) explained to the Committee that he had spoken to the Planning Manager at DCC to see if there could be a designated planning officer to help in moving this forward.
- Mr M Baker informed the Committee that letters have been written to AI to apply pressure.

The Committee **AGREED** for the Chair of the GWC JAC to write a letter to AI in response to the above statement expressing the disappointment of the Committee asking for clarification for the future timeline of works to be carried out and to also copy in their parent company Holcim for the attention of the Chief Executive Officer.

Notes:

- (i) Mr P Saupe declared an interest as he was a member of the Aggregate Industries UK (AI) pension scheme.

44 PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a Progress 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:

- **Tree Works**
Mr P Brind, Tiverton Canal Company wished to formally thank Devon County Council (DCC) for their emergency tree work which was carried out after hours to enable him to get the barge back to the Canal Basin that evening and to continue to trade the following day.
- **Lowdwells Culvert**
Cllr J Lock wished to thank DCC for the work carried out and asked if the work would continue through October. It was explained that work was due to continue this month and the Ranger Team were waiting on Wessex Water to move a water main that lay in the way.
- **Horsedrawn Barge 50th Anniversary Open Day**
Mr P Brind, Tiverton Canal Company wished to formally thank everyone on the Committee especially Mark Baker for all their hard work. It was a spectacular day. Mr Baker also passed on his thanks to all involved and to Mr Brind for doing a great job of MC-ing the event.
- **Green Flag Award**
Cllr C Slade congratulated the Canal Ranger Service on achieving the Green Flag Award for 2024/2025.
 - **Events**
Cllr C Slade was pleased to see the wonderful turnout for the events
 - Mr M Baker also wished to thank all those that attended the Canal summer site visit.
 - Mr R Walton commented on the Review of the Definitive Map and Statement which was included in the Progress Report and hoped to receive representations from the residents of Tiverton. There was an opening meeting on 7 October at the Town Hall, Tiverton.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

Note: * Report previously circulated

45 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following was raised:-

- The occurrence of water leaking at Sampford Peverell down the road and into the canal despite efforts from Devon County Council. Developers were still not complying with regulations. This was affecting the ecology of the water as there were very few fish in that stretch of water. Mark Baker stated that he believed a local resident had referred a lack of planning enforcement with regard to drainage arrangement on the housing development to the Ombudsman.
- Cllr G DuChesne raised the Greenway Planning Application and asked if any members of the JAC wished to attend the DCC Planning Committee Meeting on 23rd October. Cllr A Pilgrim confirmed that he had been asked by Members to draft a response and raise an objection and would be interested to attend. Cllr R Radford would also attend to represent Sampford Peverell.
- Signs for dog fouling as this still continued to be a problem. Mark Baker explained that he had been in touch with Enforcement Officers over the last few weeks. With regard to signs Mark Baker would look into this further but stressed that he did not want to see excessive signage along the towpath and doubted how effective they would be.

46 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

It was requested there be an update on water transfer at the next meeting and to continue to keep this as a standing item on future meetings.

It was **AGREED** that the clerk would contact Aggregate Industries to invite them to the next meeting of the Committee along with their Consultants.

47 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 3rd March 2025 at 7pm.

(The meeting ended at 7.50pm)

CHAIR

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Progress Report (October 2024 to February 2025 inclusive, listed chronologically)

1. Hedgelaying

Volunteer Days have been held on the second Sundays of each month and the task for each one has been hedgelaying. A small group laid a section of hedge near Tidcombe Bridge in October and in November the volunteers continued work at the hedge behind the boat moorings at East Manley Bridge. In December and January work started on laying the hedge on Swing embankment, with several new volunteers joining in and a record length of hedgelaying achieved during the January event. Work continued here during the February event and with 120m completed here that section is finished for now, with the remainder needing to grow on for a year or two until it is ready to lay.



The section of hedge near Tidcombe Bridge laid by volunteers in October



The section of hedge near Swing Bridge after two Volunteer Days in December and January

2. Farmwise

Every year Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts attends the Farmwise Devon event at the County Showground near Exeter. The annual event provides an opportunity for primary school children from around the county to understand more about farming in Devon and how food is produced on Devon's farms. It does this by enabling pupils to have a 'beyond the classroom experience' and be able to engage with demonstrations and displays that can provide a 'touch, feel and smell' experience in a safe environment.

Within the event, there is a countryside and wildlife section with activities provided by staff from several Country Parks, Nature Reserves, National Parks and National Landscapes. Jo (bottom left in the photo) ran a popular tree identification workshop using twigs and leaves gathered along the Canal



3. Duke of Edinburgh Award

In recent years, many 'D of E' students have fulfilled their voluntary service requirement by spending an hour or so a week for several months litter-picking along the towpath. The Canal Ranger Service provides the litter pickers, bag holder, bags and a safety briefing, and students keep a log and photographic evidence of their work. Through the autumn and winter, five such students have been litter-picking, three of whom have also joined in the Volunteer Days through the winter to fulfil the 'Engaging in a new activity' part of the award. Their assistance is much appreciated. Please also see item 12 – 'Visitor Survey'.

4. Bicton College

In October the Canal Manager was once again invited to speak to Bicton College students studying *Land and Wildlife Management*. He gave some background to the canal and then explained the work of the Canal Ranger Service in managing and maintaining the Country

Park. The students will be visiting the canal for a site visit later in 2025 to learn about freshwater habitats and invasive species and see a demonstration of the weedboat.

Two *Land and Wildlife Management* students from Bickton College and one *Countryside Management* student from Bridgwater & Taunton College are undertaking their work experience with the Canal Ranger Service. They generally help out for one day per week, learning new skills and practicing use of a variety of hand tools and grounds maintenance machinery.

5. Public access defibrillator

A new public access defibrillator has been installed in the Canal Basin car park Tiverton. It is located in a cabinet on the wall of the public toilets, and is available to provide emergency support for visitors to the Country Park and for the local community in South East Tiverton.

It can be used by any member of the public in an emergency when someone is having a cardiac arrest (where a person's heart stops beating and they are unresponsive and not breathing).



(Left to right): Devon County Councillor Colin Slade, Kathy Trist (Everyys Solicitors) and Will Vine (Everyys Solicitors).

The defibrillator and cabinet have been provided by Jay's Aim – a charity established with the target of reducing the rate of sudden cardiac death among young people in the region.

The equipment has been funded by Everyys Solicitors, and Councillor Colin Slade allocated part of his locality budget to pay for the installation of the cabinet and its connection to mains power. The Canal Ranger Service will look after and maintain the equipment, carrying out checks, and replacing pads and batteries when necessary.

Dan Osborne, Trustee, Jay's Aim, said: "We were delighted to be able to help provide a public access defibrillator (PAD) in the Grand Western Canal car park in Tiverton, following a real team effort by a number of people and organisations. The PAD was generously fully funded by the team at Every's Solicitors following a pledge made at this year's 'Exeter Property Ball'. Its location was suggested by Tiverton Town Councillor, Jason Lejeune, who helps look after many of the PADs in the Tiverton area, and its installation was funded by DCC Councillor Colin Slade using part of his locality budget. As always, we hope that this defibrillator is never needed, but it's great to know that this area of Tiverton is now that little bit safer should an emergency situation needing a defibrillator ever happen. We hope to provide free training for the local community in the coming months."

Training has been discussed with the Sea Cadets and the Tiverton Bowls Club. Steve Pidgeon (JAC member representing the Canal Businesses Group) who is a qualified first aid trainer, has generously offered to provide a training session for the Sea Cadets.

6. Barge-based work

The Canal Rangers and volunteers have been making good progress with the winter work along the offside banks – trimming back overhanging branches, clearing fallen trees and cutting back brambles around bridges. This takes up the majority of their time over the autumn and winter months.



Photo credit: Darren Batchelor

7. Agri Environment funding

The Country Park is currently benefitting from Countryside Stewardship Capital Works funding for hedgelaying, coppicing bankside trees and installing bird and bat boxes. The Canal Manager has attended a number of webinars and has hosted an advisory visit concerning a possible application for a Sustainable Farming Initiative agreement later this year. This could provide valuable funding towards the maintenance of the Canal's

hedgerows and the standard trees along the hedge line. The mapping of the Canal's hedgerows by the Rural Payments Agency was found to be very inaccurate and so the Canal Manger has annotated and sent in dozens of maps to bring the mapping up to date.

The Canal Manager also has responsibility for two other DCC countryside sites in East Devon and so has been following a similar process there with the aim of applying for a Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreement to succeed the existing agreement when it ends in December.

8. Ditching

The ditch beside the towpath to the north of Burlescombe Bridge has been cleaned out by an excavator contractor. The arisings are usually removed after every second or third ditching operation, once they start to impinge on the width of the towpath.



9. Bank and hedge trimming

The annual programme of winter hedge and bank trimming has been completed. At the request of anglers, only the plants growing on the banks have been cut – not the stems of the reeds growing from the water. This will reduce the quantity of floating fragments in the water, which can cause annoyance to anglers as they drift around and surround their floats. The main reason for annually cutting the banks is to prevent the development of brambles and given that brambles don't grow from the water, this change should not affect the bankside vegetation.

In early February, there were a couple of instances of vegetable-based hydraulic oil dripping on the towpath from the contractor's tractor. This was cleaned up by the contractor and the Canal Rangers the following day (having been reported on Facebook the evening before).



10. Proposed sale of The Moorings

During the autumn and winter, Devon County Council's estates team have been working up proposals with senior officers to 'dispose' of The Moorings with the aim of avoiding repair and maintenance costs and securing a capital receipt for the Council.

The Moorings has been the home of Devon County Council's Canal Wardens and Rangers for over 50 years, and nowadays provides offices, document storage, a meeting room, welfare facilities and two classrooms, whilst in the garden there are moorings for workboats and Sea Cadet boats and three purpose-built pond-dipping ponds.



The Canal Ranger Service were extremely concerned about the potential impact on the services they provide but liaised with these colleagues to work out what the least worst option would be if the sale were to take place, prior to any proposals being made public. Following discussions, the workshops were withdrawn from the proposed disposal and the Visitor Centre was identified as the likely location to provide alternative offices, with one third of the building to be partitioned off with a new internal wall.

In the absence of the space, cover, welfare facilities and pond-dipping resources provided by The Moorings, there would have been an unavoidable reduction in the Canal Ranger Service's engagement with local communities through events and ranger-led school visits if the sale were to proceed, as well as more general impacts on the Service's efficiency.

However, at the DCC Land and Property Committee meeting held at the end of January, Cllr Colin Slade (being a member of that committee) put forward an amendment to remove The Moorings from the disposal list, due to the impacts on management and maintenance of the Country Park and engagement with local communities. Other members of the committee also acknowledged these concerns, the result being that the committee voted in favour of this amendment.

Letters and emails from members of the Canal Joint Advisory Committee who had written ahead of the meeting were also crucial in demonstrating a widespread opposition to the proposal from Canal stakeholders. The Chairman of the committee, Cllr Richard Chesterton

(Tiverton West), recommended to the officers present that they should consult with the JAC on matters that affect the Canal. This decision means that the Canal Ranger Service can now continue to plan their annual events and education programme for the year.

11. Memorial benches

During this reporting period, two new memorial seats have been installed – both replacements for old benches that were no longer serviceable and had to be removed, and both are located between William Authers footbridge and Tidcombe Bridge.

A bench has been built to replace the seat near Crownhill Bridge that was vandalised last year and is currently awaiting a plaque before it is installed. The legs of a memorial seat between Manley and East Manley Bridges have rotted and replacement legs are currently on order. An order has also been placed for a new memorial seat to be located beside the landing stage in Sampford Peverell.

12. Visitor Survey

A visitor survey is being conducted by a student from Wellington School as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award. The survey largely replicates the questions asked in the last Visitor Survey (2015) and so will show any trends in responses, but has been updated to reflect changes in activities and services available to visitors since then. There is also a question specifically about the new noticeboards, in order to provide evidence in support of the Mid Devon Prosperity Fund award that paid for five of these noticeboards.

The survey responses will help to inform a review of the Canal Management Plan being undertaken later this year.

13. Tree works

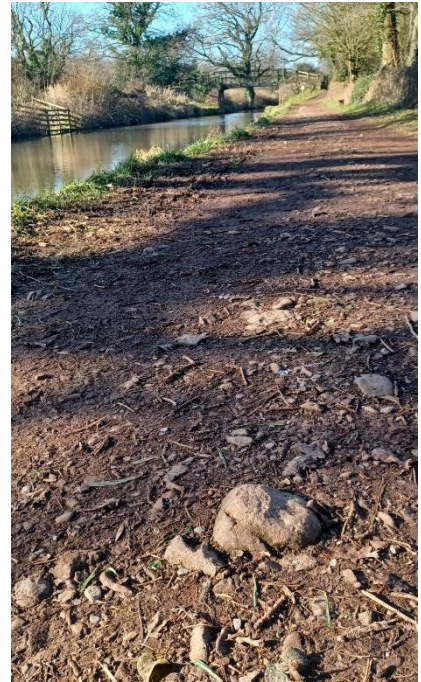
In addition to the usual small-scale, barge-based tree working being undertaken by the Canal Rangers, storms during December and January led to a number of tree and branch failures which tree surgery contractors have been clearing up. At the time of writing all of the safety-related works have been completed, however, there is a considerable backlog of non-urgent clear-up works, as well as works recommended in the most recent tree safety survey report received at the end of January.



14. Towpath resurfacing planning

The condition of the towpath surface between Tidcombe Bridge and Snakes Wood has deteriorated in recent years and now has lots of rocks protruding from the surface creating trip hazards (especially near Warnicombe Bridge, as shown in the photo) and many deepening puddles throughout. This has led to a number of reports / complaints from regular users, many of whom are elderly and have limited mobility and/or impaired sight, and for whom the protruding rocks are a real hazard.

Funding has been allocated from the DCC PRoW capital budget to resurface this very popular 1300m section. The Canal Manager has conducted site visits with contractors and sourced quotes and work is due to take place during March. As with previous resurfacing works, the plan will be to keep the towpath open, with banksmen managing safe access through the areas being worked on.



15. Wildlife monitoring

The BTO Wetland Bird Survey is a monthly count of wetland birds held at a wide range of waterways around the UK and has been conducted at the Canal by volunteers (and the Canal Manager in recent years) for several decades. Last year one of the volunteers decided to step down and the vacancy was advertised on the Canal Facebook Group. There was a strong response with six people offering to help. In order to make the most of the interest the Canal Manager has passed on the section he covered to a second new volunteer and will now just cover for the five volunteers if and when they cannot complete their count due to illness or holiday. One of the potential volunteers that could not be offered a section at the canal was referred to a vacancy at a reservoir in the Blackdown Hills.

The WeBS volunteers and the Canal Manager had their annual Christmas get together in December, where mince pies and hot drinks were shared in the Ranger's meeting room at the end of the day. The guest of honour was the WeBS Local Organiser for Devon Peter Reay and his wife.

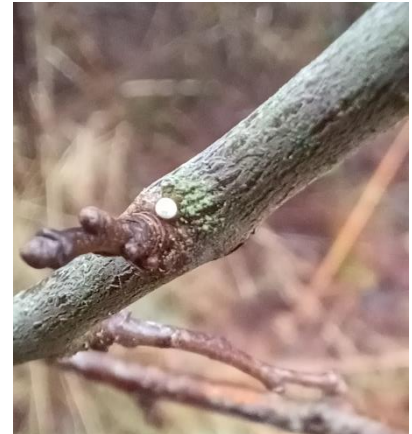
The Canal Ranger Service plans to capitalise on the interest in wildlife monitoring by providing some training sessions on dragonfly and damselfly monitoring for volunteers in the summer. Stover Country Park ran some of these sessions last year and one of the trainers has agreed to help out at the canal this year. The opportunities will be promoted in the spring.

In February a new volunteer that expressed an interest in wildlife monitoring as well as practical work, has spent some time surveying for Harvest Mice and Brown Hairstreak butterfly eggs at the field beside Beech car park,



Burlescombe. The Canal Ranger team had previously found Harvest Mice nests here in 2020 as part of a training session run by the Devon Mammal Group.

The Canal Manager had also recently completed a training session in Exeter on surveying for Brown Hairstreak butterfly eggs (which are laid on young Blackthorn bushes) and so he visited the site with the volunteer and showed him what to look for. After a few hours searching through the tussocks in the field, the volunteer found two harvest mouse nests (which are unoccupied during the autumn and winter months) and will submit the results of his survey to the Devon Harvest Mouse Project. No Brown Hairstreak eggs were found, but this 'none found' result will still be shared with the Devon Biodiversity Record Centre, who are co-ordinating the county-wide citizen science project to build up a better picture of where this threatened butterfly can still be found.



16. Fenacre water transfer system

In early December 2024, the Canal Manager received an email from Aggregate Industries new hydrological consultants, SLR Consulting Ltd, stating that they had been engaged to progress the water transfer system application to the EA and were keen to liaise on the proposals. This welcome news was somewhat tempered by the fact that DCC's hydrological consultant, Marcus Francis, was just about to head to Australia for a two-month holiday. Despite this, information was shared and an online meeting was held involving the PRoW and Country Parks Manager, the Canal Manager, an Aggregate Industries estates officer and the respective consultants in early January. The meeting was positive. The SLR consultant is utilising information previously collated and has a significant amount of work to complete before a draft application can be shared with DCC. However, all are confident that an agreed application can be submitted to the EA in the coming months.

17. Lowdwells culvert

Following completion of the works last year to clean and repair the culvert from Lock Cottage to the road at Lowdwells, the second phase of work to increase the capacity of the channel beside the road and culvert that takes the water under the road has now been completed. The work has been complicated due to a variety of pipes, drains and a water main which either had to feed into the new system or, in the case of the water main under the road, had to be lowered to accommodate the box culvert. The car park at Lowdwells which served as a works depot has been made good and the access track has also been resurfaced with road planings.



18. Events

The highlights in this reporting period have been the ever-popular Christmas wreath and decoration workshops run by Canal Ranger Jo Roberts, using natural materials collected along the Canal and from Stover Country Park (the Canal's 'sister' park, which has more conifer). Jo ran four two-hour wreath-making workshops over the weekend of the 7th and 8th December, and all were fully booked for months beforehand, although stormy weather on the 7th reduced the number that actually attended.



On Sunday 15th December, Jo ran two Christmas decoration workshops for children, which were also fully booked. The feedback from participants was great so a big thank you to Jo for all her hard work preparing and running these events.



- 13th Nov - Walk & Talk - Swans Neck - 14 people
- 7th Dec - Christmas Wreath - 12 people
- 8th Dec - Christmas Wreath - 37 people
- 15th Dec - Children's Christmas Workshop - 18 children
- 26th Feb - Walk & Talk - Canal Basin – attendee figures tbc.

19. Volunteers

There are several new volunteers that are helping the Canal Rangers with practical tasks on weekdays. There are currently nine regular weekday volunteers, comprising work experience students, retired people, part time workers filling a spare day and people not currently in work. In total during the reporting period they have contributed 57 weekdays of voluntary work.

In addition, the following weekend volunteer days have been held:

- 13th Oct - Volunteer Day - 4 volunteers
- 10th Nov - Volunteer Day - 10 volunteers
- 8th Dec - Volunteer Day - 8 volunteers
- 12th Jan - Volunteer Day - 14 volunteers
- 9th Feb - Volunteer Day - 11 volunteers

Total = 47 weekend days of voluntary work

Overall total = 104 days of voluntary work

20. Engagement with schools and youth groups

- 16 Dec - Wilcombe Primary School, Tiverton – Pond-dipping - 42 children

21. Talks

The Canal Manager gave a talk to students at Bicton College on 23/10/24, as per Item 4.

Future programme of practical works

- Towpath resurfacing between Tidcombe Bridge and Snakes Wood
- Spot dredging at Manley Bridge
- Completion of hedgelaying beside East Manley boat moorings
- Completion of annual barge-based tree works
- Completion of tree safety works as specified by tree safety inspection
- Ongoing small-scale bank erosion repairs
- Repairs to Canal Basin and East Manley landing stages
- Possible replacement of Holbrook landing stage
- Re-excavation of Boehill Pond (postponed from last year due to ground conditions)
- 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
- Pressure washing site infrastructure (signs, benches, bins etc.)
- All usual mowing, strimming and weed-cutting work

Future programme of management works (* = ongoing / already in progress)

- Organisation of all works listed above*
- Organise treatment of Fringed Lily and Water Primrose to take place in late summer
- Ongoing work with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan (delayed due to lack of capacity amongst DCC engineers)*
- Organise programme of events
- Fenacre water transfer system*
- Organise update and reprint of Canal Visitor Guide
- Liaise with tenants and DCC legal team / consultants on changes to leases
- Complete update of boating regulations and procedures and design/printing of new permits book*
- Organise update and replacement of the Ebear dragonfly panel
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all relevant H&S policies / guidelines*
- External funding applications and budget management*
- Commission Disability Access Audit
- Planning application for the model swan *Rosie* to be reinstalled beside the gift shop and design of panel to go on the gift shop wall behind
- Reviewing Garden and Gateway access agreements and responding to non-payments
- Liaising with DCC staff / partner organisations and contractors in relation to premises repairs and upgrades
- Review of Canal Management Plan (targeting JAC endorsement at Oct 2025 meeting)*