

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 6 October 2025 at 7.00 pm

JAC Members Present:-

Cllr L Cruwys, Mid Devon District Council (Chair)
Cllr S Clist, Devon County Council (Vice-Chair)
Cllr N Bradshaw, Mid Devon District Council (online)
Mr P Brind, Tiverton Canal Company Limited
Mrs P Brind, Mid Devon Moorings
Cllr K Browse, Halberton Parish Council
Cllr S Bush, Tiverton Town Council
Cllr G DuChesne, Mid Devon District
Mr J Hampshire, Cycling UK (online)
Mr R Hodgson, Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr R Jones, Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society
Cllr L Kennedy, Mid Devon District Council
Mr S Pidgeon, Canal Business Group
Cllr A Pilgrim, Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim, Inland Waterways Association
Cllr N Raleigh, Devon County Council
Mr P Saupe, Tiverton Sea Cadets
Mr M Trump, Tiverton and District Angling Club
Cllr G Westcott, Mid Devon District Council
Mr T White, Friends of the Grand Western Canal

Also Present:-

Mrs J Brind, Tiverton Canal Company

Officers:-

Mr S Walford, Chief Executive, Mid Devon District Council
Mr R Walton, Public Rights of Way & Country Parks Manager, Devon County Council
Mr M Baker, Country Park Manager, Devon County Council
Mr S Densham, Housing Development Service Manager, Mid Devon District Council (online)
Mrs A Howell, Democratic Services Officer, Mid Devon District Council

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2025/2026

RESOLVED that Cllr L Cruwys be elected Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2025/2026.

(Proposed by Cllr S Clist and seconded by Cllr L Kennedy)

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2025/2026

RESOLVED that Cllr S Clist be elected Vice Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2025/2026.

(Proposed by Cllr G Duchesne and seconded by Cllr L Kennedy)

Cllr N Raleigh was also nominated however that vote was lost.

(Proposed Cllr A Pilgrim and seconded by Mr Malcolm Trump)

3 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors F Box, J Hodgson, J Lock and S Taylor.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Paul Elstone – with regard to Agenda Item 11

The Draft Grand Western Canal Management (GWC) Plan Section 4.7 3 reference Local Landscape Plans says the following.

“The Anaerobic Digester (AD) at Crown Hill has had a considerable detrimental impact on the local landscape. Also “dust smells and noise plus traffic are also an intrusion on the setting”.

When there was a public uproar concerning the removal of Snake Woods from the GWC conservation area protection. Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) officers and others attempted to quell these concerns by saying that the Canal would be protected by the planning process. Given the lack of any substantive enforcement action these words have been shown to have little or no value.

Some real and further concerns for the canal.

Red Linhay Anaerobic Digester (AD)

Should a current planning application be approved, it would permit the AD to operate unconstrained this terms of feedstock amounts, source locations and traffic movements. It would effectively reward the applicant for their gross planning breaches and when operating an AD that is neither green or sustainable unlike the applicant wishes to project.

As a warning there is small print hidden in the application documentation indicating that things could get much worse.

Pelleting Operation

One of the main contributors to the dust and noise levels at Crown Hill is the unapproved industrial straw pelleting operation the Red Linhay site. An operation including the manufacture of cat litter for sale to the likes of Sainsbury's and ASDA. The noise and dust issues requiring workers to use ear defenders and dusk mask.

MDDC have been aware of this planning breach over a long period, but nothing has been done to constrain.

Industrial Storage Unit and Office Building

The application for an industrial storage unit and office building at Crown Hill and in very close proximity to the canal. if approved would be significantly closer to the canal bank than any other industrial unit over its full length. An industrial unit with poor landscape screening and further adding to visual and noise impacts.

An application including a vehicle refuelling station storing 3,500 litres of diesel fuel positioned within 15 meters of the canal bank.

A litre of spilled diesel has the potential to pollute 1 million litres of water. The oil sheen could spread for over 6,000 square meters equivalent to a one-kilometre length of the canal.

Rhode Farm Slurry Lagoon

There is a planning application that could fall below the radar screen, and which could see as many as 16,400 large tractor and tanker movements per year pass the Canal Basin carpark entrance.

This application relates to a 5-million-gallon slurry lagoon to be excavated at the top of Newtes Hill and on Rhode Farm land. A slurry lagoon being constructed as a hub unit to handle the 12.8 million gallons of cow slurry produced every year at the Bycott industrial dairy farm which is located at Lower Town Halberton.

The detailed calculations and based on sound evidence reveal that there could be as many as 16,400 tractors towing slurry tankers travelling either to or from Newtes Hill and passing the Canal Basin entrance each year.

Calculations show that only 3 million gallons a year should be spread on Rhode Farm land with the remainder transported back down Newtes Hill and Canal Hill for spreading on the applicant's other land holdings to the east of Tiverton.

Important to state that weighbridge data shows that many of these tractor/tanker movements will very substantially exceed the legal weight limits adding to road safety concerns.

I would actively encourage this Committee to interrogate this application, given the potential impacts.

Question 1

Will those Members of this Committee and who are involved in making planning decisions do all they can to protect the canal including it seems from Council Officers and their inaction with regards to enforcement?

The Chair explained that a written response would be given within 10 working days.

5 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes from the meeting held on 3 March 2025 having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

6 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

7 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION**

The Chief Executive of Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) gave a verbal update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and highlighted the following:-

- In December 2024 the Government published a White Paper on Devolution and wrote to all Council's to draw attention to it and to consider how they could reorganise themselves to meet the objectives of that White Paper.
- The White Paper set out the Government's vision for how it saw Local Governance across the whole country moving towards Strategic Authorities headed by a Mayor. Beneath that would be a simpler structure of Local Government by removing the two-tier system that operated in the remaining 21 shire areas of the country.
- Since that time all of the 11 Councils in Devon (2 Unitary Councils, 8 District Council and 1 County) had all given time and consideration to how they believed the Council could be reconfigured.
- Initial submissions were submitted to the Government in March 2025 and since then work had continued by all of the 11 Councils.
- Each Council was allowed to submit 1 proposal. It was likely that 4 or 5 different proposals would be submitted by the deadline of 28 November 2025.
- It was expected that around Easter 2026 the Government would consult on all the proposals that they believed were viable using 6 criteria to assess them against.
- Assuming that the options were all credible the Government would then run a public consultation where everyone including Councils, individuals, stakeholders etc would be able to give their views and say which option was preferred.
- The Government would receive all of those comments to consider, and an announcement was likely to be made in summer 2026 on the specific proposal to be implemented.
- All Councils would then be tasked to ensure they were gearing up towards the implementation of the proposal.
- A Shadow Authority would be elected in March 2027 for the new authority which would go live on 1 April 2028.

- All of the 11 Council's proposals would be going through their own democratic process before being submitted to the Government. These would be in the public domain.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- Whether the Shadow Authority would take the place of MDDC elections? It was confirmed that yes that would likely be the case as Councillors would be elected to that incoming Authority.
- What was the meaning of a "Shadow" Authority? It was explained those Councillors would be elected to an Authority that did not exist at the moment in time but they would become the Council on vesting day, 1 April 2028.
- Concerns regarding the role of Town and Parish Councils. It was explained that there would be opportunities and challenges that would arise from the change. All proposals would set out how they maintained the relationship with Town and Parish Councils.
- Cllr G DuChesne further explained that there would be an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to take on assets should they be inclined to do so and that information would be circulated to Town and Parish Councils explaining how to do that.
- Whether housing tenants should be concerned. It was confirmed that there would be no concerns for tenants as responsibilities of the authority would not cease to be in place.
- The ownership of the Grand Western Canal and whether it would be safeguarded. It was explained that the assets of today's Council would automatically become the assets of the new Authority. It would then be for the elected Councillors of the new Authority to decide from there.

8 FENACRE WATER TRANSFER SYSTEM UPDATE

Mr Clive Tompkins gave a verbal update to the Committee on behalf of Mr John Penny, Regional Estates Manager for Aggregate Industries regarding the water transfer scheme and highlighted the following:-

- A technical briefing note had been sent to Mark Baker, the Country Park Manager and Devon County Council's Hydrological Consultant for their input to ensure everyone was signed up to the principles of the same scheme in obtaining planning consent from the Environment Agency (EA) to ensure there was a top-up water supply to the Grand Western Canal during the most challenging of conditions.
- A pre-application under the Water Resources Act for the transfer licence and discharge licence was submitted in May 2025 to the EA.
- The EA confirmed they could provide the pre-application advice requested.
- However, there was a significant backlog with the EA dealing with applications leading to a longer wait than usual before the application was submitted to a Permitting Officer.
- On the 20 August 2025 a Declaration Form had been received from the EA which was immediately completed and returned agreeing to the pre-application service requirement.

- The EA gave an expected cost to progress the enhanced pre-application of £100 per hour. They usually allocated 30 hours to provide the bespoke site-specific technical advice.
- The EA were contacted one month ago as they had confirmed the consultation had been completed. However, the Permitting Officer needed to clarify several points. This feedback was expected shortly.
- In terms of the current queue with the application, the Permitting Officer would be assigned for 6 weeks and it was hoped that a response would be received within the next 2 weeks.
- Once the information had been received this would be shared immediately with the Country Park Manager.
- With regard to Black Bridge located in Burlescombe – the bridge formed part of a permissive footpath which had been closed for 12 months due to health and safety concerns.
- Essential repair work had started in August 2025 and had been successfully reopened to the public on the 19 September 2025.
- The bridge had originally included a cage over the top, however following feedback the cage had not been reinstated as it was both unsightly and a potential hazard for wildlife.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- The length of time in dealing with the water transfer scheme.
- How water was discharged at the moment? It was clarified that a Discharge Consent Form gave permission for the dewatering operation at Westly Quarry into Fenacre, which had helped with the drought during the summer months to keep the water flowing into the canal.
- Whether a letter to the MP would help to lend support to encourage the EA to respond in a timelier manner.

Action: It was agreed that Cllr S Clist, Devon County Councillor would contact Rachel Gilmour MP.

The Chair thanked Mr Tompkins for the update.

9 **TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP REVIEW**

Members considered the Terms of Reference * and Membership* of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference and membership of the Committee be agreed.

(Proposed by Cllr L Kennedy and seconded by Mr P Saupe)

*Terms of Reference and Membership previously circulated.

10 SALE OF THE HORSE-DRAWN BARGE

Mr Philip Brind, owner of the Horse Drawn Barge Company informed the Committee of the following:-

- At a previous meeting he has stated that he would be prepared to move the barge subject to a housing proposal due to concerns of planning creep if that planning application had gone ahead. However, this was not the reason for moving on and retiring.
- Having celebrated the 50th anniversary of the horse drawn barge last year it was felt best to leave on a high. The barge was very successful, not just as a business but for the canal, Tiverton and Mid Devon as a whole.
- He took on a tremendous responsibility in finding the right person to continue with the business as it was one of the very last of its kind.
- He was excited to share publicly that there was a possibility that his daughter and son-in-law may continue with the business. However, funds would need to be raised, and it was still very early days at the moment.

Richard Walton, Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC on behalf of the Committee thanked Mr Brind for the service he provided to the canal.

11 DRAFT GRAND WESTERN CANAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Committee had before it a draft of the Grand Western Canal Management Plan for 2026-2030*. The Country Park Manager presented the Plan and highlighted the following:-

- The aim of the Management Plan was to set out the aims, objectives and a Work Plan for the Grand Western Canal.
- It was an important document and was particularly useful for Green Flag award applications.
- There had been no real change in the overall aims and objectives and the vision for the canal.
- There had been some minor updates with photographs added at the request of Green Flag award judges.
- Additional health and safety legislation had been added.
- The biggest change was in the national and local strategic context with regard to Government guidelines on parks, access guidance and the importance of green spaces for people's health and wellbeing.
- There was a section on national biodiversity policy and a tourism policy.
- There were updates regarding the Devon County Strategic Plan and the Mid Devon Corporate Plan.
- A section had also been included on the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- The main objective for the next 5 years was to continue the ongoing improvements as and when funding was available.
- There was a greater focus on improving accessibility and encouraging people of all abilities out into the countryside.
- More work was required in terms of wildlife and water quality monitoring, ideally with volunteers.

- The Plan looked at the best outcomes for the canal within the Local Government Reorganisation.
- The importance over the next 5 years in the development of the Countryside Park associated with activity in the Eastern Urban Extension. Discussions with Mid Devon District Council Planning Officers were taking place with regard to the role that could be taken in managing and maintaining the canal if extra resources were secured.
- It was hoped that following feedback and comments received that the Management Plan could then be endorsed by the Joint Advisory Committee.

The Committee congratulated and thanked the Country Park Manager for all his hard work in putting the Management Plan together.

The Committee **AGREED** that the Canal Management Plan for 2026-2030 be endorsed.

(Proposed by Cllr G DuChesne and seconded by Cllr S Clist)

Note: * Report previously circulated.

12 **GRAND WESTERN CANAL 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:

- Cllr G DuChesne thanked the Country Park Manager for his talk to the WI (Womens Institute) which was greatly appreciated.
- Mrs Pat Brind informed the Committee that the lease for her business, Mid Devon Moorings, had been transferred to her son and his wife. The Country Park Manager thanked Mrs Brind for running such a great business on the canal and wished her all the best for the future.
- Mr Brind wished to thank the Country Park Manager for his work on the Canal and the Management Plan and expressed how much the JAC appreciated all his hard work.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

13 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following was raised under this item:-

- The Chair wished to congratulate Mr Peter Saupe as he had received an award from the Lord Lieutenant for Meritorious Service with TS Hermes and the wider Sea Cadet Corps.
- The Chair asked the Committee to give some thought to the removal or reduction of the hedge to widen the junction to the car park at Halberton Bridge. Due to the size of the hedge, it was difficult to see around the hedge to exit the car park safely when driving. Devon County Council did not wish to put mirrors up.

Cllr G DuChesne mentioned that some time ago the Parish Council had talked about having a pathway down the side from the Golf Club to the canal.

There had been talks in the past with the Golf Club having a footpath through their land – however the owners were not interested at the time.

Action: The Country Park Manager agreed to investigate this further.

- Cllr Natasha Bradshaw, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Mid Devon District Council wished to bring the Committee's attention to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to consider options through the strategy to strengthen biodiversity protection around the canal. She explained that the consultation was now live and felt it was important that Members of the JAC had a voice and reviewed the mapping around the canal. It was suggested that a Working Group be set up as the consultation process would end before the next meeting of the GWC JAC to increase and maximise protection for the Canal and the surrounding area.

The Committee **AGREED** that a Working Group be set up and would include the following members of the Committee:- Cllr Natasha Bradshaw, Mark Baker, Richard Walton, Cllr L Cruwys, Cllr S Clist, Steve Pideon, Cllr Gwen DuChesne, Cllr S Bush, Cllr K Browse. Additional officers of MDDC would be Tristan Peat, Forward Planning Team Leader and an invite would be sent to a member of DCC's Ecology Team to attend.

14 IDENTIFICATION OF ANY ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT MEETING

The following items were requested to be on the agenda of the next meeting in addition to the usual progress report from the Country Park Manager.

- An update from the Working Group.
- An update on the Fenacre Water Transfer System.
- An update from Mid Devon District Council's Enforcement Team regarding an overview of planning enforcement activities close to the canal.

15 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 2nd March 2026 at 7pm.

(The meeting ended at 8.50 pm)

CHAIR