

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

### MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 6 October 2015 at 7.00 pm

#### Present:

Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C Daw	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr N V Davey	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr R Croad	Devon County Council
Cllr D P O Hanon	Devon County Council
Cllr C Slade	Tiverton Town Council
Cllr A Miller	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr Mrs K Collard	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr P Brind	Tiverton Canal Co.
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr J Ison	Devon Wildlife Trust
Mr R Jones	Devon Birds
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Sea Cadets
Mr M Trump	Tiverton & District Angling Club
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim	Inland Waterways Association
Mr Z Grochala	Canal Business Group
Mr T White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal

#### Officers:

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, Devon County Council
Mrs R Mills	Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, Devon County Council
Mr N Sanderson	Head of Housing and Property Services, Mid Devon District Council
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, Mid Devon District Council

#### 1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

**RESOLVED** that Cllr Mrs S Griggs be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2015/16.

(Proposed by Cllr R F Radford and seconded by Cllr Mrs C Daw)

#### 2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

**RESOLVED** that Cllr R F Radford be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2015/16.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs S Griggs and seconded by Cllr N V Davey)

### 3 **APOLOGIES**

The following members of the committee had sent their apologies for the meeting:

- David Cutts (Sampford Peverell Parish Council)
- Mrs Jean Hall (Inland Waterways Association), substituted by Mrs Jane Pilgrim
- Robert Hodgson (Chairman of the Friends of the Grand Western Canal)
- Les Neville (Burlescombe Parish Council), substituted by Cllr Karen Collard
- Cllr Clarissa Slade (Mid Devon District Council)

### 4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the two members of the public who were present.

### 5 **MINUTES**

The Minutes from the meeting held on 3 March 2015, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

### 6 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

### 7 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- She welcomed Cllr Roger Croad to the meeting and reminded those new to the Committee that he was Devon County Council's Cabinet Member for Community and Environmental Services.
- There had been an enjoyable site visit to the canal in the summer. It was a beautiful place to visit and the hard work and professionalism of the canal team was much appreciated.

### 8 **TERMS OF REFERENCE / MEMBERSHIP REVIEW**

Members considered the Terms of Understanding \* and Membership of the Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the Terms of Understanding and the Membership of the Committee be agreed subject to the removal of the Canal Awareness Group which no longer existed.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

## 9 PROGRESS REPORT AND FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORKS

Consideration was given to a report \* of the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager.

### **Arising thereon:**

#### Canal 'Stage2' works and projects

- Two County engineers now provided dedicated support to the progression of stage 2 works and projects.
- The aluminium stop planks had been ordered.
- A lot of work would be required to open up and maintain inspection access to embankments along the canal over the coming years. Coppicing trees along the top of the embankment would continue through the winter.
- County Bridges and Structures Engineers would work with the Canal Manager to draw up an Asset Management Plan next year once the highest priority works had been completed. Discussion took place regarding the need to recognise the canal as an important community asset as well as its fiscal value.
- The old maintenance barge might struggle to pass forthcoming boat regulations. It would be necessary to determine the condition of the metal work by shot blasting it and then a decision would be needed as to whether it was worth spending money on it. In the short term the canal team would be able to start their winter work by adapting the unpowered tub barge to take an outboard motor.

#### New inspection and minor maintenance boat

The Committee wished to record a vote of thanks to the Friends of the Grand Western Canal as, in May 2015, they had donated a new Whaly boat and Honda outboard engine to the Canal Ranger Service.

#### Fenacre Water Transfer System

DCC officers and staff from Aggregate Industries (AI) had met and had agreed an outline design to create a new outfall from the stream below the concrete monitoring weir, flowing into a new ditch which would run diagonally across the AI owned land and then feed into the ditch running parallel to the road that was excavated by an adjacent landowner prior to the 2012 breach. The idea was to keep the water above ground with a structure at the head of it that would allow water 'in' when needed and 'out' when not. There would also need to be some works at the outlet end to protect the canal bank where this ditch joins the canal. The advantage of this layout was that it had the flow of the water largely behind it.

Aggregate Industries were still waiting for a response from the Environment Agency regarding a licence to undertake the work. They would not be able to proceed until they were in receipt of this. It was suggested that the Chairman and Vice Chairman could bring their influence to bear in speeding things up.

Discussion took place regarding where the water was coming from to fill the channel. It was confirmed that the quarry has a sump with pumps that automatically operate to

pump water out into the Fenacre Water when a certain level in the sump is reached. However, concern was expressed that there may be more than one exit for the water. Members of the committee felt that DCC should adopt a firm negotiating position (with regard to the current review of the quarry's planning permission) by insisting that all available water should be directed to the Fenacre Water and that the upgraded system should be capable of directing as much water to the canal as the EA will allow.

Further concern was expressed at the length of time it was taking to secure the best course of action for the Canal. However, the Public Rights of way and Country Parks Manager said that progress had been made in that there was now a better design which will direct water to the Canal. She stated that she would talk to the Planning Development Manager at the County Council and would also speak to the quarry manager regarding other potential routes of water out of the quarry. She would also continue to involve DCC's hydrological consultants to ensure that the proposed scheme will provide the desired outcomes. Additionally she commented that whilst progress was slow in this area the infrastructure of the canal was constantly improving. It was less 'leaky' than it was. The County Councillors requested that they be copied into any communication with the people she had mentioned so that they were kept informed and could monitor progress.

The question was asked as to whether there had been any significant fluctuation in the water levels. It was confirmed that there hadn't and that the sealing of leaks near Rock Bridge had probably had a significant effect. The levels would be kept slightly lower in the winter with 5cm coming off over the next month.

#### Fenacre Farm – flood risk issue

The canal team had been talking to hydrological adviser about managing risk and liability. It was vital that the team had all evidence in place should something go wrong. There was general agreement that installing the water monitoring system had been very successful.

#### Canal Basin play area

There was general agreement that a play area for children was very much needed in the canal basin. It might be possible, as part of the 'Trim Trail' around Tiverton scheme, that the play area could have one or two pieces of adult equipment installed. Discussions were still taking place.

#### Emergency Response Plan

The Canal Manager had drafted a new Emergency Response Plan for the canal and had been consulting with the relevant key agencies. It was important to link in with Parish Council Emergency Plans. Discussion took place regarding how vital this document was which in a major incident could save lives. Relevant contact details would be included in the event of an emergency. It was **AGREED** that a live copy needed to be available to the public on the website, albeit this needed to be in a redacted version so that personal contact information was not visible.

## Canal Management Plan

The Canal Manager had recently begun the process of reviewing and redrafting this document. The old version had not been an easy document to read so the intention was to create a new document that was much simpler. Examples from around the country would be looked at to get the best possible version for the canal. A draft would be included for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee. It was suggested that it needed to make reference to the fact that Mid Devon District Council was a 'co-sponsor' of the canal.

## Visitor numbers

There had been over 200 responses to the visitor survey and visitor numbers were up. Social media and Tripadvisor in particular had been helpful in bringing visitors to the canal. Reviews on Tripadvisor were consistently very good. It was explained that the Country Park has its own Facebook page but there was also another Facebook group (set up and moderated by Philip Brind) for the general public which it was commented the Ranger Service didn't contribute much to. This group has over 1000 people who have joined. It was suggested that exchange of information between the two pages could be linked. The Canal Manager explained that whilst the Canal Ranger Service did post replies to address some of the issues raised on the group page, it lacked resources to be able to have a regular presence or to get involved in protracted discussions.

The GrandWestern200 twitter account, introduced in 2014, was still being followed and it could be that links could be tweeted here as well as press releases and news. The Canal Manager referred the committee to the Canal Ranger Service's Twitter account which they currently used.

## Events

A recent Age UK event had not been very successful, this might have been due to poor publicity. It was agreed that events needed to be managed well and that ideally somebody from the Ranger Service needed to be present at most of them.

## Volunteers

Volunteers had completed 254 days of work as a result of Community Work Placements. This extra help had proved vital in getting all the necessary works completed.

## Wildlife Advisory Group Minutes – 6 July 2015

The coir rolls at Snakes Wood project was outlined and clarification was given about the plant called 'Pendulous Sedge'. There had been one coot on the canal during a recent wildlife survey. A site visit had taken place where it was noticed that fringed lily had spread and would need to be sprayed and that there were several Flowering Rush plants.

## 10 WATER SOLDIER EXTRACTION

The Ranger Team had been working very hard to remove the weed from large sections of the canal. Without this work the whole canal would have been covered. The old weed boat had been out almost every day but there were still some areas they hadn't managed to get to once the plant had floated to the surface. The new weed boat was very effective at getting weed up from the bottom of the canal bed. Work would continue into the winter months one or two days a week. It was important to get as much as possible off the bed of the canal. It was critical that the canal team off loaded it somewhere nearby usually on the off side banks as travelling a long way to dispose of it would elongate an already lengthy process.

Recently, members of the Angling Club had volunteered to spend a morning clearing Water Soldier near Ebear Bridge and were thanked for their work.

Photographs were circulated by Mr Malcom Trump showing how invasive the weed can become on standing enclosed waters elsewhere. He suggested that a policy was needed whereby all margin weed was cut out thereby exposing the water soldier underneath and allowing for its removal. Ray Jones agreed with the need to control fringing reeds, but argued that a relatively short section between Ebear Bridge and Westcott Bridge needed to be handled particularly sensitively due to its dragonfly populations.

Looking to the future it was commented that a number of things could be done such as focussing on particular areas, having a year on year rolling programme so that the work was spread fairly across all those using and working on the canal. This could include representatives from the angling fraternity and those with waterways and environmental interests. The Canal Manager stated that it should be possible to organise for a contractor to make a start on the Sluice to Double Culvert section later this year.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) A sub group be formed to discuss and agree a way forward. This group to be comprised of the Canal Manager, Malcolm Trump, Mrs Pat Brind and Ray Jones.
- b) The sub group to report back to the next meeting of the Committee.

## 11 CANAL SITE VISIT

A site visit had taken place in June and the following had been noted:

- There were a lot of trees with the potential to cause danger. The comment was made that trees suck up vast amounts of water which then evaporates into the air leaving water levels in the canal reduced. The canal had been abandoned for so many decades it would probably take that length of time again to manage the trees around the canal to an acceptable level.
- They had visited Snakes Wood and the East Manley landing stage.
- Puddles had been noticed under some of the bridges and discussion had taken place as to what could be done to correct this.
- This towpath was probably one of the best canal tow paths in the country.

- The canal also had very good accessibility.

## 12 PLANNING ISSUES

This item had been requested to be on the agenda by Mr Adam Pilgrim. He stated that he had monitored planning applications on behalf of the canal for some time on a voluntary basis. He had not wanted the Committee to miss an opportunity for commenting on any application that might affect the canal. However, he was often away and was concerned that something significant might be missed. Mr Pilgrim made reference to the previous meeting when the Head of Planning and Regeneration had been present. The Committee had requested that it become an automatic consultee for any planning application which had the potential to impact upon the canal. There had been a guarded reply in terms of the feasibility of doing this especially in terms of the criteria needed to trigger an automatic action to notify the Committee.

**RECOMMENDED** that as part of their monthly review of planning applications in their area, the Parish Clerks in the parishes adjoining the canal, notify the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Mr Pilgrim of any applications that could have an effect upon the canal within that parish.

Note: Councillors Mrs H Bainbridge and R F Radford declared personal interests as they were members of the Mid Devon District Council Planning Committee.

## 13 CANINE ETIQUETTE GROUP

Progress with the work of the group was described as being a 'slow burn'. The problem of dog fouling affected the entire canal corridor. The Group had spoken to the Visitor Services Manager at Knightshayes which also endured the same problem. A 'pink poo spray day' would be organised for some time in the spring, hopefully incorporating all of the main dog-walking areas around Tiverton.

There needed to be a co-ordinated approach involving the parishes. There would be a count up on the spraying day and then a return visit a week later to clear up and monitor the extent of the problem. It would be a case of shaming dog owners who did not pick up and encouraging responsible dog owners to take a stand against irresponsible ones. A possible reward system was discussed with the suggestion of free poo bags and/or thank you stickers on the dog bins, this would need further investigation. All of these activities would involve a cost. It might be possible to approach a County Councillor regarding their locality budget or get a local vets practice to sponsor some stickers.

The problem of unleashed dogs in general was discussed and reference was made to recent incident involving somebody being knocked over and breaking some bones in their foot.

## 14 TOWPATH CODE OF CONDUCT

It was **AGREED** that the wording on the leaflet needed to be 'punchier' and that only the words in bold should be included from now on. It was suggested that a detailed version still be made available on the website.

15 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that the canal had recently received the South West in Bloom Award for Country Parks. It had also had its Country Parks Accreditation renewed by Natural England.

16 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 1 March 2016 at 7pm in Phoenix House.

(The meeting ended at 9.57pm)

**CHAIRMAN**