

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 1 March 2016 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr R F Radford	Devon County Council
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Cllr Mrs C Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Mr Z Grochala	Canal Business Group
Mrs J Hall	Inland Waterways Association
Mr R Jones	Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society
Cllr A Miller	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr L Neville	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Sea Cadets Corps
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling Club
Mr T White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal

Officers:

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

17 APOLOGIES

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

- Philip Brind (Mid Devon Moorings)
- David Cutts (Sampford Peverell Parish Council)
- Roger Croad (Devon County Council)
- Cllr Chris Daw (Mid Devon District Council)
- Cllr Sue Griggs (Mid Devon District Council, Chairman of the Grand Western Canal, Joint Advisory Committee)
- Cllr Des Hannon (Devon County Council)

As the Chairman had sent her apologies, the Vice Chairman, Cllr Ray Radford, took the chair.

18 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Melvyn Lucas stated that he had recently been involved in an incident involving 12 cyclists as he and his wife had approached the Whitnage Road bridge with their dogs. The cyclists had not dismounted and it was only by sheer luck that a serious accident did not occur. He questioned what more could be done to avoid this persistent problem with cyclists refusing to dismount but accepted that it was

extremely difficult to police. He wondered if it would be possible to contact other canal's or tow paths around the country, where cyclists were permitted, to ascertain how they tackled the problem. The Chairman indicated that discussion relating to this item would be dealt with later on in the agenda.

19 **MINUTES**

The minutes from the meeting held on 6 October 2015 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

20 **MATTERS ARISING**

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

21 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

22 **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:

Stop planks

The update in the report regarding the new aluminium stopboards was noted. It was explained that in terms of their life span, they were made of an extremely sturdy metal which should not corrode and should last for a very long time. A licence agreement had been provided by the Canal and Rivers Trust.

Tilting weirs

There had been a delay in starting construction due to a long procurement process and complex technical issues. It was hoped that work would start after the Easter holidays and the intention was to keep the towpath open throughout the works. The ultimate intention was to be able to get the levels down as quickly and easily as possible during persistent wet weather. The question was asked as to why the tilting weirs needed to be powered and could not be automatic. Jacobs had looked at various options including solar powered weirs. The ones chosen had been their recommendation and they had a good history in other locations. They were able to pre-empt a serious situation and could be adjusted even if the canal rangers were not there. They were also able to be manually opened in the unlikely event of a power failure.

Black Bridge culvert

The culvert capacity had been increased although concern remained regarding the potential for flooding of adjacent land and property.

Embankment tree management

A lot of tree coppicing had taken place over the last few years and the rangers were about to start the next big block of work along the embankment between Tiverton Road Car Park and the golf course. A felling licence had been secured and an arboricultural consultant had helped to plan the works. Work has just started and the felling element was due to be completed by mid March but the timing of the extraction of timber would be dependent on the weather.

Embankment scrub removal

The aim was to keep on top of any regrowth from the Sellake embankment. An adjacent farmer would be grazing his sheep there in order to deter the re-emergence of scrubby growth.

Maintenance barge overhaul

The update provided in the report was noted. It was explained that the barge had historic interest having taken people on tours up and down the canal in the 1970's. The repaired barge would be ready to go back on the water in the next week or two.

Gabions under bridges

Stone-filled gabion baskets had been installed underneath Black Bridge in Burescombe. There were a few areas that had been prone to crumbling due to erosion and an absence of vegetation.

Water soldier

At the last meeting there had been an agreement to set up a working party. A lot of work had been done to clear away emergent weed and this was now an integral part of cyclical maintenance. There was a plan to start moving towards Sampford Peverell, this would present a more challenging problem in that the next section was thicker, had more wildlife and was more difficult to access on both sides. It was explained that water soldier was a problem that could not be quickly resolved and would almost certainly end up reaching Tiverton at some point in the next few years but regular removal with the new weed boat should significantly reduce the impact.

Tree works

The rangers were planning to fell a weeping willow at Sampford Peverell Bridge which had been falling over into the canal for a number of years. The root plate is large and could potentially damage adjacent walls therefore intervention at this stage was necessary. A replacement specimen tree with much less potential for creating damage and future expense would be planted in its place with a smaller root plate. It was explained that the rangers planted far more trees than they removed.

MDDC funding

MDDC had written to Devon County Council (DCC) stating that they would like to meet to discuss the funding situation going forwards. DCC were still waiting for a formal invitation. The situation regarding funding for 2016/17 and the following year

had taken up a great deal of the Canal Manager's time and had prevented him from taking forward a number of other projects. Cllr Slade stated that the press had blown the issue up out of all proportion, this had not been the fault of Members as they had been against the proposal to withdraw the grant from the beginning. Thanks were extended to all those involved in securing future funding.

Canal play area

This was one of the projects that had been put in hold as a result of the funding issue, however, a tender would be going out in the following week and it was hoped that the play area could be installed before the summer holidays. It was confirmed that a bow top wall fence would be erected that could not be climbed.

Management Plan

The Canal Manager had now started this and needed to have it completed before the Green Flag judges visited which could be anytime between April and July. The Management Plan would come to the committee in October for comment.

2015 Photo competition

There had been 381 entries, many of which had been excellent and could be added to the increasing library of photo's. Cllrs Hannon and Radford had contributed to the prizes from their locality budgets. The canal team were posting two pictures a week on their Facebook and Twitter accounts so that at least a 100 would be seen by others.

Holbrook culvert

Due to some severe storms the culvert had become blocked with rocks and water had been backing up and flowing into the canal. The flood defence team were looking at installing a grill upstream and more work will be done to cut all the debris before it reaches the culvert.

Fenacre Farm

Solicitors had given advice regarding the necessity for a robust legal challenge. The committee would be kept informed as to progress via the clerk.

Fenacre water transfer system

Due to a close family bereavement it had been difficult to get any feedback from the Estate Manager since the autumn. However, there were now signs that Aggregate Industries are keen to progress the proposed scheme. The Environment Agency would need to give approval for any scheme. It was hoped that a meeting would be held in the next two to three weeks. It was **AGREED** that the Chairman of the Joint Advisory Committee write to the AI Estate Manager re-emphasising the committee's wish, in the strongest terms possible, that the scheme be progressed as soon as possible.

Atherton Way

It was explained that whilst water run-off from the hills into the drains of Atherton Way had several times overwhelmed the drainage system, had lifted man holes and uncontrolled water had entered the canal and people's houses. A meeting had organised by DCC's Flood risk management team, with officers from South West Water, DCC Bridges team, Highways, the canal team, MDDC and neighbours to determine what could be achieved as a group working together. One of the complicating factors related to the ownership of the pipe work including underneath people's gardens, once known a survey would be required. Possible solutions included sorting out the settlement pond, cleaning out pipe work, straightening up a right angled turn and building a controlled overflow into the canal in tandem with the installation of a tilting weir. The flood team at Devon County Council would lead but there was an issue as to where the funding would come from.

Re-designed Visitor Guide

There were a few different options for the front cover but the number of suitable photographs was limited. The final version would be available for the Easter holidays and would be distributed to all local outlets. Devon County Council's design team would be finalising it. It was not possible to include a section on all the various wildlife, there just wasn't room. It was confirmed that there was a page on fishing within the main guide.

Canal basin car park

Wooden posts had been rotting and snapping off at the base, replacement posts had been installed which were fewer in number but were larger and had a chain link between them.

New website

DCC's website system has been updated and as well as being more attractive visually was also much easier to update by the canal team.

Volunteers

Volunteers had contributed 183 days of work since the last meeting. The Chairman wished for the committee's thanks to be passed on to the people concerned.

Staff

Craig Saunderson had recently completed 20 years service for Devon County Council at the Grand Western Canal. It was **AGREED** that the Chairman write to him on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee congratulating him and thanking him for his continued hard work and dedication.

Future programme of works

Discussion took place regarding:

- The reed bed project which had not been listed in the programme of future works as it was dependent on how much funding was available. It was not a priority at the moment.
- The sluice at Fossend Bridge – following recent severe rain fall, there had been a significant rise in water levels. Rangers had tried to open the sluice but had been unable to as the hatch had become siezed. The installation of tilting weirs would mean that opening the hatch was unlikely to ever be necessary.
- Mr Melvyn Lucas thanked the canal team, firstly for improvements at Battens Bridge which had been praised by people in Sampford Peverell and secondly for undertaking to repair the steps and hand rail at Buckland Bridge.

23 CYCLISTS ON THE TOWPATH

The question was asked as to how the towpath was defined in law. The response was that it was a public footpath and Devon County Council, as the landowners, had given permission for cyclists to use it. The rise in cycling as a hobby had been phenomenal. In the past it had mainly been used for leisure cycling but there was now evidence of more cycling as a sport with the canal towpath being used as a practice route. However, it was extremely difficult to police and impossible to insist that cyclists dismount when going under bridges. The only way to stop it would be to introduce a chicane but there were laws governing pathways needing to be wheelchair accessible.

There was an additional problem in that some mopeds had been spotted driving along the canal, especially in the Swans Neck area. This was particularly difficult to enforce as these bikes did not have registration plates. If the individuals riding the bikes were known attempts could be made to reason with them as to the safety issues along the canal.

Signs were currently displayed instructing cyclists to dismount, however, perhaps consideration needed to be given to additional signs stating that pedestrians had the right of way.

24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following issues were brought up under this item:

- The trader selling refreshments at the Tiverton Road Car Park had ceased trading at the canal.
- A site visit would be organised for an evening in early July so that the committee could see the sections where water soldier had been removed and the new sluices in situ. It was suggested that this could also be used as an opportunity to meet with Aggregate Industries if there had been no progress with the Fenacre water transfer system.
- The Angling Club would be celebrating its 40th anniversary in November and Mr Malcom Trump had represented them on the Joint Advisory Committee for the duration of that time.
- Adam Pilgrim, speaking on behalf of Holcombe Rogus Parish Council, firstly congratulated the canal ranger service on the excellent way they maintain the canal and secondly to express the Parish Council's concern at the way the Red Lingham application had been managed and the length of time it was taking to reach a decision.

- The Canal Manager referred to a report that day in the Tiverton Gazette regarding a project to place decorated models of the Tivvy Bumper around Tiverton and the surrounding area. He informed the committee that models would be located outside the visitor centre and also The Globe in Sampford Peverell with the latter being sponsored by the pub itself. There would also be one located at the start of the disused railway line.

25 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 4 October at 7.00pm.

(The meeting ended at 9.04 pm)

CHAIRMAN