

Public Document Pack

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Tuesday, 1 March 2016 at 7.00 pm
Exe Room, Phoenix House

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**
- 3 **MINUTES** (*Pages 3 - 10*)
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Meeting held on 6 October 2015 (please find attached).
- 4 **MATTERS ARISING**
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 5 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**
To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.
- 6 **PROGRESS REPORT AND FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORKS**
(*Pages 11 - 20*)
Report of the Head of Public Rights of Way and Country Parks (DCC) informing Members of the work that has taken place to date.
- 7 **CYCLISTS ON THE TOWPATH**
To discuss a recent incident on the towpath involving a number of cyclists and to consider the most appropriate way of dealing with this going forwards.
- 8 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**
To consider any other relevant business.
- 9 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
Tuesday 4 October 2016 at 7.00pm – Exe Room, Phoenix House.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday 22 February 2016

Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so, as directed by the Chairman. Any filming must be done as unobtrusively as possible from a single fixed position without the use of any additional lighting; focusing only on those actively participating in the meeting and having regard also to the wishes of any member of the public present who may not wish to be filmed. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairman or the Member Services Officer in attendance so that all those present may be made aware that is happening.

Members of the public may also use other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to discussion. Lift access to the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions.

An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, or if you would like a copy of the Agenda in another format (for example in large print) please contact Sarah Lees on:

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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

Progress Report (Oct 2015 – Feb 2016 inclusive)

1. Stage 2 works

- **Stop planks** – Last autumn, the Canal Ranger Service took delivery of two sets of aluminium stopboards. It is intended that these will be used instead of the wooden stopboards for damming the canal in both maintenance and emergency situations from now on.

Given the high value of the aluminium, a 24ft shipping container was sourced (generously provided by the DCC PRow team) and installed behind the workshops at The Moorings, in order to securely store the stopboards and some other equipment.

The Youngman boards (staging which bridges the canal at the point where the stopboards are installed, providing safe access for staff, and eliminating the need to enter the water) have also been delivered and the last item required for the operation of the new system – chain-hemmed tarpaulins – are due for delivery on 12th April. This day will be a training day with DCC rangers and engineers installing the new stopboards with a contractor experienced in using the system, in order to familiarise themselves with the installation and extraction procedure.



- **Tilting weirs** – Engineers from the DCC Bridges and Structures Team continue to manage this project. A number of complex technical issues relating to the automatic operation and powering of the tilting weir to be located next to the Burlescombe sluice have slowed progress, as have issues at the Holbrook culvert (see item 11 below), but the engineers expect construction work to start in the early spring.

- **Black Bridge culvert** – A stream runs parallel to the canal, within the canal holding, for some 500m in Burlescombe. During times of high rainfall, water often backed up in the section upstream of the culverts below Black Bridge, due to their limited capacity, causing flooding of adjacent land and property and overtopping into the canal. In order to reduce these problems, the secondary culvert has been significantly increased in size, the culvert under Fossend Bridge has been cleaned out and the ditch has been dredged.



The work has necessitated the removal of a large ash tree and the construction of a new length of post and rail fence.

- **Embankment tree management** – Over the last two years a great deal of coppicing of bankside trees has been undertaken to reduce the risk of leaks and breaches being caused by bankside trees being wind-thrown. This work has continued this winter with rangers and contractors coppicing bankside trees at several points along the canal.

A felling licence has been secured and tendering has recently been undertaken for a large block of work along the embankment between Tiverton Road car park and the golf course, on the Swan's Neck. A woodland management plan has been developed for this compartment with the assistance of an arboricultural consultant. Work will involve the coppicing of all canopy trees along the waters edge and the coppicing of less stable/reliable trees on the downslope of the embankment.

Understorey trees will be retained along the waters edge to soften the visual impact. Work will happen outside of the main bird nesting season between before the end of March 2017. Some of the work along the toe of the embankment has already been completed under a separate contract.

- **Embankment scrub removal** – Last winter, scrubby trees and brambles were removed from Sellake embankment. The boundary of the embankment was fenced and it was seeded with grass to enable an adjacent landowner to maintain grass cover and deter the re-emergence of scrubby growth by sheep grazing.

This winter, the same approach is being followed at Swing embankment. A contractor has cut and burnt all of the hawthorns and brambles that were growing on the offside of the embankment, and has treated the tree stumps with herbicide, preventing their re-growth. Rangers will treat any bramble regrowth in the spring with herbicide and will also spread grass seed, to encourage grazing and the retention of grassy slopes rather than scrubby slopes.



- **Embankment levels** – Engineers from the DCC Bridges and Structures team have continued to work with consultants Jacobs to identify low points and weaker areas along the Canal's embankments and to plan works to top these up / reinforce them. Initial investigations by Jacobs did not highlight any critically low or weak sections, but they did make recommendations for further investigation or for repair / topping up works on a number of embankments in the medium term. This work is likely to become the main focus once the tilting weirs are installed.

2. Maintenance barge overhaul

October 2015 Progress Report stated that the Canal Ranger Service's maintenance barge had been taken out of the water and was awaiting repair works by the Tiverton Canal Co. Since then, the boat has been thoroughly shot blasted inside and out, revealing a large number of holes in the boat's hull. Thankfully the majority of the hull still has a good thickness of metal and so by cutting out and replacing the worst sections and filling in the small holes with weld, the integrity of the hull has been re-established.



Following the welding work, the hull has been coated with a thick layer of rust inhibitive paint and then has had a further four coats inside and five coats outside of a high performance paint that should protect the hull for many decades to come. In order to keep costs down, Canal Rangers and volunteers have done much of the painting work and have also helped with pumping out rainwater and sweeping out shot.



A the time of writing preparations are being made to enable a new timber deck to be installed, and it is hoped the boat will be back in the water and ready to use within a month. The Canal Ranger Service wishes to thank the Tiverton Canal Co. for their excellent advice, hard work and efforts made to keep down costs.

3. Gabions under bridges

Stone-filled gabion baskets have been installed underneath Black Bridge in Burlescombe, to shore up the bank which was collapsing into the canal. This is an important location for maintenance vehicles turning onto the towpath, but the shading caused by the bridge above meant that vegetation was not growing well on the bank and knitting it together, as is the case elsewhere.

Gabion baskets have also been installed to fill gaps in the bank on either side of Ayshford Bridge, where the bank was being eroded back towards the towpath.

4. Water soldier

At the October 2015 JAC meeting, it was agreed that a small working group be set up to discuss approaches to removing the invasive Water Soldier from the Canal. The group has conducted email discussions about works being undertaken this winter, and is pleased with progress made by contractors and Canal Rangers.

In order to make clearance of water soldier plants by hand along the edges of the canal, the marginal reed growth has been dug out by an excavator, with the arisings being spread down the adjacent embankment. This work has been completed along the entire offside section between Black Bridge and Ebear Bridge, and along a significant amount of the towpath side within the same section.



This project has been supported by Cllr Radford who has helped to fund the work by making a £1000 contribution from his Locality Budget.

The Canal Ranger Service intends to start using the new weedboat to remove Water Soldier much earlier than usual this year (probably around mid-March rather than late April), as the new boat is able to reach it even when it is on the bottom of the canal.

5. Tree works

In addition to the embankment tree works mentioned outlined above, a number of other tree works have been undertaken this winter:

- **Canal Basin** – The Canal Ranger Service and their arboricultural consultant agreed that a number of trees growing in the garden of The Moorings were either impacting on the structural integrity of the Canal Basin's offside walls; were of poor form and were best removed to allow a better formed tree to succeed it; or were having a negative impact on the local landscape and giving the impression that The Moorings was being screened off and hidden away. As a result, several conifers, a horse chestnut and a cherry have been felled. An excavator contractor will shortly be removing stumps and preparing the ground so as to smarten up this prominent location by returning much of it to lawn, with a few specimen trees dotted around.
- **William Authers footbridge** – similar work has been undertaken on the offside land to the east of William Authers Bridge. Conifers and laurels have been felled, leaving some mature Ashes to grow on, and efforts will be made to kill off the bamboo which is growing along the bank and to establish grass on the previously overgrown litter-strewn land behind. If Water Soldier continues to spread into the Tiverton stretch, as is possible, this land is likely to become a key unloading point for the weedboat.

- **Cutting back offside branches / crown-lifting** – The Canal Rangers and volunteers have been undertaking the regular winter tasks of cutting back overhanging offside branches and pruning low branches above the towpath. In order to allow us to do this work whilst our maintenance barge was being overhauled, The Tiverton Canal Co arranged for a frame to be bolted onto the stern of the previously unpowered tub barge, enabling an outboard motor to be fitted. This has worked well as an interim solution.

Whilst it is anticipated that all of the branches with the potential to cause obstructions will have been removed, it should be stated that not as much progress has been made in removing sections of Willow along offside banks as had been hoped. The main reasons for this are that the Canal Rangers and volunteers have spent a lot of time painting and helping out with the overhaul of the maintenance barge in order to keep costs down; and a considerable amount of time has been spent responding to weather (opening/closing sluices and clearing culvert grilles).

- **Other tree works** – Contractors have felled a large pine tree near East Manley Bridge (on the advice of our arboricultural consultant) and have completed the crown reduction of two offside trees opposite Wilcombe Primary School. A small number of trees have been blown down in the storms this winter and all have been cleared away by the Canal Rangers.

6. Hedge laying and planting

Throughout the winter, Volunteer Days have been led by the Canal Ranger Service with the November, December, January and (forthcoming March) events focussing on hedgelaying. Hedges have been laid near Crownhill Bridge, Sellake Bridge, Watton Bridge, and Sampford Peverell picnic site. 300 hedge trees have been planted to gap up or thicken up existing hedges beside the towpath.

7. MDDC funding

JAC members will be aware that in the autumn of 2015, MDDC made DCC aware of proposals to halve their revenue funding for the canal in 2016/17 and then remove it completely in 2017/18. Such a cut would have had a crippling effect on the ability of the Canal Ranger Service to manage and maintain the Canal, but thankfully MDDC members decided not to adopt the proposed cuts and found alternative arrangements for the funding of the canal, which meant that no cuts would be made in 2016/17.

Several JAC members played key roles in speaking against the proposed cuts in the media and at public meetings, or in making the decision not to enact the proposed cuts and agreeing the alternative funding arrangements - their input was greatly appreciated.

MDDC has written to DCC outlining its intention to arrange a meeting to discuss future funding arrangements later this year. A stronger partnership between the two councils in their funding of the canal would be beneficial for the Canal and the Canal Ranger Service. A great deal of the Canal Manager's time was diverted to

responding to the proposed cuts, at the expense of other important work, such as progressing the new management plan, and some projects were delayed.

8. Canal Play Area

One of the projects that has been delayed as a result of the proposed funding cuts was the Canal Basin play area. In the event of the proposed cuts being made, it was possible that some of the funding earmarked for the play area may have had to be used to make up the revenue funding shortfall in the first year and buy some time to plan a way forward. As a result all work on developing the tender was put on hold until early January at which point MDDC wrote to confirm that funding would not be cut in 2016/17.

At the time of writing the tender documents are now almost complete, and it is anticipated that the play area will be installed in late spring / early summer.

9. Management Plan

The Canal Manager has made good progress in drafting a new management plan. The plan will have a completely different format from the previous plan, with much of it being based around the Green Flag Award criteria. In general it will be less dense, less repetitive and exhaustive (in its explanation of how broad objectives are translated into specific targets and actions) and more focussed on delivering the widely accepted aims of the Green Flag Award.

However it will not be ready for the March JAC meeting as the Canal Manager has had his time diverted onto other pressing issues. A draft must be completed to show Green Flag Award judges when they visit the site sometime between late April and late June, and this will also be shared with JAC members, so that comments can be received and incorporated. The plan will be discussed at the October JAC meeting and will hopefully be endorsed, subject to any amendments that are agreed.

10. 2015 Photo Competition

Last year's photo competition was very successful. 381 entries were received, providing the Canal Ranger Service and DCC with a wealth of great photos to use in promoting the canal for years to come. The competition also received excellent publicity in the local press. Thanks to Cllrs Hannon and Radford for contributing to the prize fund from their Locality Budgets.



11. Holbrook culvert

In early December 2015 Canal Rangers discovered that this siphon culvert had become blocked with stony debris. This was most unexpected as the culvert was cleaned and repaired only a few years ago. After some initial work by the Canal Ranger Service and

the DCC Bridges and Structures engineers to establish the extent of the problem, specialist contractors were engaged to clean out the culvert. This work has now been completed and interim measures have been undertaken to reduce the movement of stone along the watercourse that leads to the culvert, prior to the proposed installation of a new silt trap to be constructed in front of the culvert inlet in the summer, once ground conditions have improved.

12. Fenacre Farm

DCC's Deputy County Solicitor has been advising on the ongoing issue at Fenacre Farm. The PROW / CP Manager and the Canal Manager are working with the legal team in advance of further action. County Councillors and the JAC members will be kept informed on progress.

13. Fenacre water transfer system

The Aggregate Industries Estate Manager responsible for this project suffered a close family bereavement late last year and was off work for a period of time. Although we understand he is now back at work, the Canal Manager has been unable to get an update on the situation regarding the application to the EA for the proposed scheme. He will continue to seek an update and hopes to be able to provide a verbal report on the current situation at the meeting.

14. Atherton Way

A multi-agency meeting was held in early February to look at the continuing issues at Atherton Way. A programme and partnership funding is being worked up to help resolve the matter being led by DCC's Flood and Coastal risk management group. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

15. Bank and hedge cutting

Our regular hedge and bank cutting contractor has completed the winter cut and Canal Rangers have followed along afterwards tidying up the bits that he can't get to.

16. Greenway cutting

A small landslip occurred on the towpath side in this cutting following heavy rain in February. An excavator contractor will shortly be assisting the Canal Rangers to remove the slumped soil and re-profile the bank around the slip.

Annual work to coppice a few small sections on the offside slope of the cutting will be undertaken in late February. Work to coppice some of the larger trees on the towpath side will continue after bird nesting, later in the year.

17. Manley car park

The surface around the entrance and gate at Manley car park was becoming very uneven and muddy, and cars wheels were spinning on their uphill exit from the car park,

further increasing the problem. The car park has been resurfaced with another layer of road planings, and is much improved.

18. Re-designed Visitor Guide

Having had more or less the same format and photos in the Visitor Information Guide for the last 6 years, the Canal Manager felt it was time to refresh it as a more modern visitor attraction promotional guide.

There have been three stages in this process. Firstly the Canal Manager has edited out all of the superfluous text which doesn't have to be in guide. Secondly, the professional copywriter from Devon Wildlife Enterprises who researched and wrote all of the text in the visitor centre displays has edited / rewritten this remaining text to make it more engaging and simpler to read. He has also given advice on changes in layout. Finally a DCC graphic designer is currently redesigning the guide, adopting a photo-based front cover and using several of the photos from the recent photo competition throughout.

The new Visitor Guide has several new advertisers (including Knighthayes, Tiverton Museum and Coldharbour Mill) enabling the guide to continue to cover its costs despite the improvements and a larger print run, and will be printed and distributed in the week before Easter.

19. Canal Basin car park

The grassy area beside the limekilns until recently had a line of wooden posts around the perimeter to prevent cars from driving on the grass. In the last year many of these wooden posts have been rotting and snapping off at the base. A new solution has been to remove all of these wooden posts and replace them with some larger posts and lengths of chain between. This approach has two main advantages: the larger posts should last much longer and grass cutting along this strip beside the car park, will be much quicker with fewer posts to negotiate.

20. New website

DCC is in the process of moving all of its webpages onto WordPress – a significantly better website system than the one previously used. The Canal Ranger Service has liaised with IT staff to edit and move over the Canal's webpages. The new site went live in early February and the old URL – www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal - continues to work and will continue to be the one that is promoted.



21. Benches

Two new oak benches have been installed since October 2015. One is located near

Tidcombe Bridge and the other is due to be installed on the Swan's Neck opposite the Canal depot.

22. Events

- Tuesday 13th October 2015 - **Farmwise** event at Westpoint. Jo Roberts spent the day doing activities with visiting school groups looking at tree ID.
- Sunday 1st November 2015 - **Halberton Scout Hut opening day**. Jo Roberts represented the Canal Ranger Service at this event celebrating the completion of extensive refurbishment of the Scout Hut at Greenway.
- Sunday 8th November – **Volunteer Day**. Mark Baker led 8 volunteers hedgelaying at Crownhill picnic site.
- Wednesday 11th November – Jo Roberts led 18 participants on a **Walk and Talk** near Holcombe Rogus.
- Thursday 3rd December – **Christmas Wreath Workshop**. Jo Roberts led an event for 15 scouts from the Halberton branch of 2nd Tiverton Scouts
- Sunday 6th December – **Christmas Wreath Workshop**. Jo Roberts led an event for 14 members of the public.
- Sunday 13th December – **Volunteer Day**. Craig Saunderson led 10 volunteers hedgelaying near Sellake Bridge.
- Sunday 10th January – **Volunteer Day**. Mark Baker led 9 volunteers hedgelaying near Watton Bridge.
- Wednesday 20th January – Jo Roberts led 28 participants on a **Walk and Talk** near Sampford Peverell.
- Sunday 7th February – **Volunteer Day**. Craig Saunderson led 9 volunteers scrub bashing at Whipcott Wharf (south side).

23. Talks

The Canal Manager has given evening talks to Thorverton History Society and the Bampton Society.

24. Schools / community groups

Eight Scouts from 2nd Tiverton (Halberton) plus parents / leaders spent a day with the Canal Rangers laying a section of hedge, planting hedge plants and three Silver Birch trees at Sampford Peverell picnic site on Tuesday 16th February.



25. Volunteers

In addition to the Volunteer Days listed in the Events section above, midweek volunteers have contributed 183 days work during this period.

26. Staff

A significant milestone was passed on 18th December, as on this day Craig Saunderson clocked up 20 years service for Devon County Council at the Grand Western Canal. The Canal Manager led a small presentation ceremony and thanked Craig for all his hard work and commitment during this time.

Future programme of works

- Complete tree and hedge works ahead of bird nesting season
- Commence Water Soldier removal in mid March
- Refurbishment works to public toilet block, including repairs to timber facias and new doors and locking systems.
- Herbicide treatment of bramble regrowth and grass seeding of Swing embankment and land beside William Authers footbridge.
- Felling of the prominent Weeping Willow growing on the offside bank near Sampford Peverell Bridge. Over many years this tree has been slowly tipping over towards the canal, and the Canal Ranger Service have undertaken considerable pruning to reduce the weight and slow down this process. However, the tree is now at a point where it must be felled before it falls into the canal and damages the bank and adjacent wall with the upheaval of its rootplate. The Parish Council and the adjacent owner were informed of this planned work late in the autumn of 2015.
- Investigation of potential leakage from Canal into gardens at Chilcott Close, near Tidcombe Bridge. Sealing of leaks if any found.
- Coppicing of offside willows between Manley Bridge and East Manley Bridge. This work will begin after bird nesting, later in the year.
- Patching of potholes forming at Tiverton Road car park
- Burning of brash at Greenway car park and field near Watton Bridge.
- All usual sign / noticeboard / fence / gate repairs and maintenance
- All usual weed-cutting, mowing and strimming