

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 4 October 2016 at 7.00 pm**

#### **Present:**

Cllr R F Radford	Devon County Council
Cllr Mrs C Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr N V Davey	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr D P O Hannon	Devon County Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr P Brind	Tiverton Canal Company
Mr D Cutts	Sampford Peverell Parish Council
Mrs J Hall	Inland Waterways Association
Mr Z Grochala	Canal Business Group
Mr R Jones	Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society
Mr L Neville	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
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 R F Radford be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2016/17.

(Proposed by Cllr D P O Hanon and seconded by A Pilgrim)

## **2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr Mrs S Griggs be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2016/17.

(Proposed by A Pilgrim and seconded by Z Grochala)

## **3 APOLOGIES**

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

Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge (Mid Devon District Council)  
Cllr Ken Browse (Halberton Parish Council)  
Jeremy Ison (Devon Wildlife Trust)  
Cllr Clarissa Slade (Mid Devon District Council)

#### 4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

#### 5 **MINUTES**

The minutes from the meeting held on 1 March 2016, 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 no announcements to make.

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

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

Mr Zig Grochala informed the Committee that he had two announcements to make. Firstly, Nigel Cuthbert who had been his nominated deputy on the Committee, had recently sold his business and therefore Zig had asked that Mr Graham Moore, the landlord of The Globe in Sampford Peverell, be his nominated deputy in the future which Mr Moore had agreed to.

His second announcement related to the fact that he was in the final stages of selling his business and did not feel that it would be appropriate for him to be a representative on the Committee going forwards. In the short term, he had asked if Graham Moore would be the representative of the Canal Business Group. He considered that Mr Moore would be a knowledgeable and worthy replacement and hoped that he would be welcomed by the JAC. He stated that it had been a privilege to serve on the Committee and he wished it well.

The Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager stated that Sustrans no longer had a Devon representative and the current nominated representative was not able to make the meetings. A suggestion was made that a more local representative be sought as it was vital to have representation from someone in the cycling community. It was **AGREED** that the Committee follow this up and notify the Committee when a replacement had been found.

**RESOLVED** that the Terms of Understanding and the Membership of the Committee be agreed subject to the following amendments:

- a) The Canal Business Group be represented by Mr Graham Moore, landlord of The Globe public house in Sampford Peverell in the future;

- b) An alternative representative be sought from Sustrans or the cycling community to represent the interests of cyclists on the Committee.

(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:**

#### Weed management

The Ranger team had been clearing water soldier since March with the new weedboat. It had been a difficult task given that the water becomes brown very quickly making it difficult to see. However, they had managed to stop it from completely covering the canal. A great deal of the team's time was spent doing this but they were getting good results by starting earlier and finishing later in the year.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Tiverton Canal Company had been unable to operate the motorised boat side of their business this year because of the worsening problem with weed. This needed to be dealt with for the long term future of the canal.
- The Mid Devon Mooring company stated that their customers were suffering as a result of the weed which was underneath the landing stages and they had lost one of their regular boats. Blanket weed was a particular problem on this stretch of the canal. Boat propellers needed to be strong enough to cut through.
- More movement by resident boats or visiting boats was needed to dislodge the weed.
- Less weed was found in the shady areas, increased light levels exacerbated the problem.
- Large inputs of silt washed off adjacent roads containing nutrients was helping the weeds to grow. This was very difficult to control.
- Recent mild winters had not helped, a cold winter might lead to a lessening of the problem.
- A large number of farm field beside the canal have land drains that drain to the canal. A reed bed project to reduce nutrient inputs would be undertaken as part of the stage two works, however, the installation of the tilting weirs was a priority at the moment in order to ensure the future safety of the canal. The engineer leading on this was tied up with other projects meaning that there would be some delay.
- Climate change was also a factor in the increased growth of weed.
- A well researched answer needed to be found.

Further discussion took place regarding capacity of the Ranger Service to spend the majority of their time clearing weed. The question was asked as to whether there was any opportunity for volunteers to operate the weedboat. Checks would have to be made with the Devon County Council Health and Safety team. Operating the boat would require skilled training in order to avoid damage and breakage. It was

suggested that there were individuals in the Friends Group who, having had the appropriate training, would give up their time freely for the good of the canal. This was something that needed to be explored.

The Canal Manager also stated that he would ask Jeremy Ison, an expert botanist and member of the Committee whether anything could be done in addition to the current works to address the problem. He also stated that he would ask him if anybody at Exeter University could offer a solution.

#### Depot embankment tree project

The Ranger team were thanked for dealing with some fallen trees in the spring so promptly. Over the winter a lot of cutting back of overarching branches would take place and a chipper would help reduce the manual handling and speed up progress.

#### Canal basin play area / wall

The Canal Manager thanked Phil Brind for providing the ideas and art work for the 'Play Barge'.

Funding looked likely to become available to move back the wall between the play area site and Canal Hill by approximately 1.5m. This would make the Canal Basin much safer both for drivers and pedestrians. However, the wall project would take many months to design, tender and execute before the play area could then be installed.

There was general agreement that this was a good decision but it was requested that, if possible, any works take place outside of the summer months so that businesses were not adversely affected.

#### Ranger Service Training

The Ranger team had performed very well in a Health and Safety review which the County Council took very seriously.

#### Green Flag Award

The Country Park has, once again, been successful in retaining its Green Flag Award.

#### Tilting Weirs

The project had been delayed due to the bridges and structures engineers having to be involved with major works in Exeter necessitating their efforts elsewhere. The Committee felt very strongly however, that work should commence on the tilting weirs prior to Christmas. The County Councillors present stated that they would be happy to bring some political pressure to bear if necessary in order to avoid the smallest chance of another breach occurring. The consensus of feeling was that there needed to be change of priority and that the works should take place before the next Committee meeting in March 2017.

### Tiverton Road bridge car park works / issues

A number of the planks decking the Dudley Weatherley Jubilee Bridge were cracking or becoming uneven and the Canal Ranger Service planned to fit new decking this autumn.

### Towpath mowing

Rangers and volunteers had done another good job this year in keeping the towpath clear.

### Land beside William Authers Footbridge

The Committee were reminded that planning permission had been granted for a new bungalow to be built beside 41 Spurway Road. It was explained that some of the land adjacent to the canal would be rented under a garden agreement and the landowner had been made aware that if ever the land was needed for dredging this land would be needed. This had been explicitly stated in the Terms and Conditions signed with the landowner. However, a view was expressed that once a landowner had planted in the area next to the canal they were often very reluctant to give it up. Realistically it could be difficult.

Discussion took place regarding the amount being charged per year as rental income for this land. This led to a wider discussion about the current rental rate for garden Agreements and the fact that they had not been increased in a number of years. The Canal manager said that this was not planned at present due to the amount of work it would take to renegotiate each agreement.

### Events

The Committee were encouraged and delighted by the number of children visiting the canal. They were the future and this was a move in the right direction.

### Future programme

There would be a sharing and testing of the Emergency Response Plan and a desk based scenario would be used as a training exercise.

There would be interpretation panel improvements in Canal Basin and Lowdwells.

The revamped Visitor Guide would be in a glossier format. A request was made that when the guide was reprinted the voucher for The Globe public house in Sampford Panel not be printed on the back of the canal map.

## **10 SUMMER SITE VISIT AND MEETING WITH AGGREGATE INDUSTRIES?**

The Canal Manager provided a brief summary of the events that had taken place at the summer site visit and the meeting with Aggregate Industries (AI). AI had told the Committee that they were awaiting the response of the Environment Agency before moving forwards. The Committee had not been satisfied with this explanation as to why the process was being held up. A summary of the conversation that had taken

place with AI and the actions agreed had been circulated to the Committee but the Canal Manager had yet to hear back from AI.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman, who was also the Chairman of the Westleigh Quarry Liaison Group and was also the Ward Member, personally undertake a specific interest in this issue and pursue the necessary parties where possible for a successful outcome. The Committee requested that they receive a report from the Chairman at the next meeting as to any progress. The Chairman stated that he would contact Laurie Quinn at AI as a first step.

## 11 **REVIEW OF BOAT PERMIT DISCOUNTS**

The Canal Manager informed the Committee that he had received a communication from a concerned member of the public enquiring why there were no boat permit discounts for senior citizens. The consensus view amongst the Committee was that the charges were currently very reasonable and they were not contemplating introducing any discounts at the current time.

A brief discussion took place regarding the use of the canal by inflatable canoes and whether all of them paid for a permit. It was explained that it was possible to download a form on line to pay for a permit but that it was not possible to actually pay on line. The County Council software system was being developed to hopefully allow this in the future. The Committee felt that this was vital if more people were to be encouraged to pay and visit the canal.

## 12 **REVISION AND UPDATE OF THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR BOATING ON THE GRAND WESTERN CANAL**

This item had been requested to be on the agenda by Adam Pilgrim who stated that in order to apply for a permit to use a power boat certain criteria had to be satisfied. This was a standard procedure around the country and made good sense. However he referred to what was in his view historically odd criteria in the Terms and Conditions which stated that 'Only outboard motors that are no more than two and a half horsepower per metre length of boat are permitted. Devon County Council reserves the right to refuse to issue permits for high powered inboard engines (please contact the Canal manager regarding in board engines).'

The consensus view amongst the Committee was that the condition should not be about the horse power of the boat but about the responsibility of the helmsman. It was **AGREED** that a re-drafted condition be brought back to the Committee with the removal of the above wording.

A further brief discussion took place regarding some of the terminology used within the permit document specifically whether the word 'licence' would be a better word to use than 'permit' with the inference being it may imply more responsibility was expected. The Canal Manager felt that the word 'permits' may be easier for members of the public to understand. This was a grey area where further discussion was needed. It was therefore **AGREED** that a sub group be formed with interested parties to agree a preferred set of wording for the Terms and Conditions and that the sub group report back to the next meeting.

**13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No items were raised under this item.

**14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 7 March 2017 at 7.00pm.

(The meeting ended at 9.15 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**