

Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Tuesday, 7 March 2017 at 7.00 pm

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 5 - 12*)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2016 (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 Anaerobic Digester at Crown Hill, Halberton

To receive a verbal update from the Head of Planning and Regeneration regarding the monitoring and liaison work which is taking place.

7 Chairman of Tiverton Sea Cadets

To receive information regarding proposed improvements to the Sea Cadet Building.

8 Progress report (*Pages 13 - 24*)

To receive a report from the Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager (DCC) informing Members of the work that has taken place to date.

9 **Boating sub group** (*Pages 25 - 26*)

To receive the notes of a meeting which took place on 16th February 2017.

10 **AI update from the Chairman**

To receive an update from the Chairman as to recent discussions with Aggregate Industries.

11 **Water Soldier on the Canal**

To discuss this on-going problem and what can be done by way of resolution.

12 **Any other business**

To consider any other relevant business.

13 **Date of next meeting**

To agree the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 3 October 2017 at 7.00pm in the Exe Room, Phoenix House.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday 27 February 2017

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 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)

Cllr Colin Slade (Mid Devon District Council)
Malcom Trump (Tiverton & District Angling Club)

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

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Progress Report (Oct 2016 – Feb 2017 inclusive)

1. New penstock sluices in Snakes Wood and at Burlescombe

During December 2016, contractors installed several new sluices at Snakes Wood and Fossend Bridge. These will provide a great deal more capacity to let water out of the canal during heavy storms and will enable canal water levels to be safely managed by the Canal Rangers.

At Fossend Bridge in Burlescombe, an old disused sluice has been reopened with a new head wall and 600mm penstock gate fitted out the outlet end of the pipe which runs from the bridge wall. This sluice provides extra emergency outfall capacity and is not likely to be used very often. Some further works are still necessary to make the gate at the inlet end of the culvert (currently fixed in the open position) operable by hand.



In Snakes Wood, two 600mm penstock sluices have been installed above an existing culvert. In recent years, considerable volumes of water have flooded into the Canal at Atherton way in Tiverton. This overflow into the canal has been formalised with open grilles on manhole covers, surrounded by bunds in order to ensure that floodwater is directed into the canal rather than flooding

properties in Atherton Way. The new sluices at Snakes Wood will enable us to let out this floodwater quickly within the same catchment as well as giving us more control of water levels in general. Once the new tilting weir is installed in Burlescombe (see section 3 below) it is very unlikely that both of these penstocks will ever both be fully opened except in the 'once in a lifetime' type storm, but it will be a relief to have the outfall capacity to even deal with the most severe events.



Transporting all of the materials required for the Snakes Wood penstocks by dumper from Manley Bridge made quite a mess of the towpath and so this section was resurfaced in January. The contractors also installed some new gateposts at Tidcombe Bridge and resurfaced the gateway. The Canal Rangers hung a new gate which is a foot wider and is located closer to the road, making it easier to get vehicles on and off the towpath.

2. Tree Works

A combination of JAC requests for greater management effort to reduce tree cover / shading along the canal, and the availability of DCC capital funding to fell / coppice trees that threaten the structural integrity of the canal (principally on embankments and cuttings), has meant that we have continued to undertake markedly more tree coppicing and felling work this winter than was the case prior to last winter.

Throughout the winter the Canal Rangers and volunteers have been working from the maintenance barge cutting back overhanging branches and felling small trees growing from the waters edge. In particular they have focussed on cutting back willows right down to the stump (rather than just trimming back the branches over the water) and then in many cases, where the tree is not in a good location, treating the stump with special eco-friendly herbicide pellets (called Ecoplugs) which seal the herbicide in holes drilled into the stump, in order to prevent any regrowth. At the time of writing this work has been completed between Lowdwells and East Manley Bridge, with the remainder of the canal to be completed before the end of March.



Tree surgery contractors have been used to achieve a large amount of tree work this winter. They have completed works in the following locations as of 22/2/17:

- Whipcott Bridge (Felling in cutting / crown-lifting beside bridge)
- Fenacre cutting (Felling and crown-lifting)
- Ebear – main sluice offside (felling to create clear access along embankment crest)
- Ebear Bridge (pollarding willow near bridge)
- Holbrook Bridge (coppicing large offside alder / crown-lifting beside bridge)
- Sampford Peverell winding hole (pollarding offside ashes)
- Sampford Peverell Bridge (re-pollarding offside tree near bridge)
- Battens Bridge (crown-lifting beside bridge)
- Battens – Watton offside (coppicing section of overhanging trees on bend)
- Rock Bridge (crown-lifting beside bridge)

- Greenway cutting (felling large trees overhanging towpath / offside coppicing)
- East Manley moorings (crown-lifting trees overhanging road)
- East Manley Bridge (crown-lifting beside bridge)
- East Manley – Manley Bridge (coppicing offside willows – below)



- Manley Bridge (crown-lifting beside bridge)
- Manley Car Park (felling 3 trees in the triangle of land beside the car park for safety reasons)
- Warnicombe Bridge (removing dead wood and snagged branches from large trees overhanging the towpath)
- Wilcombe Primary School (hedge reduction – below)



- Chaves Close steps (crown-lifting)
- Canal Basin car park (felling two trees beside wall)

- Canal Basin car park (hedge reduction near entrance – see section 7 below)
- The Moorings (crown-lifting tree overhanging offices)

A significant quantity of further tree works will be taking place over the coming months, the majority before the end of March. These include:

- Aqueduct to Crownhill Bridge (hedge reduction)
- Swan's Neck near golf course (felling 3 overhanging offside oaks growing from the waters edge – including the one shown right – plus crown lifting some low branches over the water)
- Sellake Bridge (Crown lifting tree beside bridge)
- Winding hole near Boehill Bridge (hedge reduction on towpath side, coppicing trees on offside bank)
- Boehill Bridge (felling large willows beside bridge)
- Holbrook Bridge (hedge reduction and clearance of fallen tree beside towpath)
- Ayshford Bridge to Westcott Bridge (felling of several offside trees on embankment crest)
- Westcott Bridge (felling of several offside trees on embankment crest)
- Whipcott Bridge to Waytown Limekilns (felling several overhanging offside trees)



- Lowdwells stream (coppicing willows and hazels beside stream).

3. Burlescombe tilting weir

Work to install this 3m x 1m tilting weir has begun. A coffer dam has been created beside the main sluice, sealing off the fixed weir which the tilting weir will replace.



The existing sluice will remain operational in case of severe rainfall, but the penstock sluices in Snakes Wood will provide the main method of controlling levels whilst the works take place. Once the tilting weir is installed it will operate automatically to maintain levels within a desired range and can also be controlled remotely via a website (e.g. to let water out in advance of a severe weather event or for maintenance purposes) or manually on site (e.g. if the power or electrical systems failed). The sheet piles will be cut off underwater once the project is complete.

4. Atherton Way stream

A contract to clean out, widen and surface the base of the stream which runs parallel to the canal beside Atherton Way and Francis Crescent is currently out to tender. The designs have been drawn up by DCC engineers and as well as reducing flooding in Atherton way and overtopping into the canal, should also make the clearance of debris that accumulates along the stream bed much easier to remove in future.

5. Canal Basin toilets

A number of works have been completed in the public toilets in the Canal Basin car park in order to make them more pleasant for visitors to use. The paint on the suspended metal grille ceilings which was peeling away has been scrubbed off and the grilles repainted. A number of loose and missing tiles have been replaced and slipped slates on the roof have also been fixed back into place.

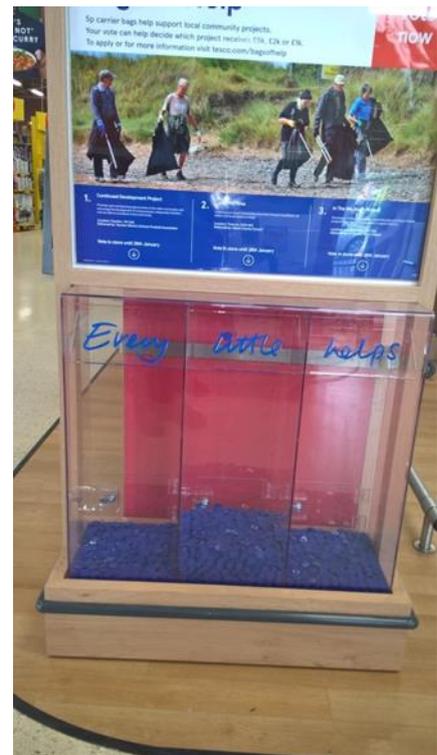
6. Canal Basin Play Area

This project has now achieved its funding target thanks to a contribution from Tiverton Town Council and success in the Tesco Bags of Help funding scheme. Throughout January, customers in an area of the South West spanning Barnstaple, Glastonbury and Honiton had the opportunity to vote for their favourite of three projects, including the canal play area. The play area proved to be the most popular and so will receive a grant of £5000 towards the play equipment. The play equipment has now been delivered and is in storage awaiting installation, but this has been delayed by the wall-moving project outlined below.

7. Wall-moving project

As reported in the last Progress Report, the opportunity to set this wall back by 1-2m in order to improve visibility for cars leaving the car park has presented itself. DCC's consultants Jacobs are currently designing the new wall and preparing the procurement documents and it is anticipated that the work will be undertaken in the spring.

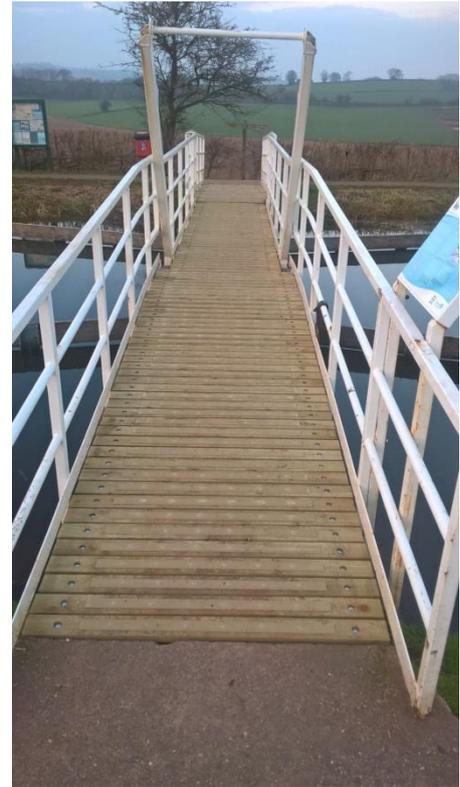
As part of the design and planning process, a number of cores have been drilled and trial pits will be dug. In order to assess the stability of the wall on the car park side of the land, the trees and bushes beside the wall have been coppiced, the hedge reduced in height and the ivy removed from the wall.



8. Dudley Weatherley Jubilee Bridge

A number of the planks decking this lift bridge had recently snapped and the weldmesh which had been fitted a few years ago to reduce the slip hazard was also breaking and so the decision was made to replace the decking. Incised and pressure treated planks have been used topped with anti slip strips which are more pet-friendly (a number of dog-owners had complained about the weldmesh) and easy to replace if necessary.

Although the planks are of the same dimensions as those they replaced, they weigh considerably more due to higher moisture content and at present the bridge is very difficult to open. Stoneman Engineering of Willand, who built the bridge, are currently making up some new counterbalance weights to make the bridge much easier to open.



9. Minnows landing stage

The wooden landing stages along the canal were all built around the same time and it seems that they are all starting to fail at the same time. After repairing and re-decking the East Manley landing stage last year, we now need to repair the landing stage beside Minnows Touring Park. Some structural beams and posts need to be replaced and then a new deck installed on top. The timber has been delivered, and the Ranger Service plan to do the in early March prior to Minnows opening on March 6th.

10. Crownhill gateway and ramp

Following the failure of the gate hanging post on the northern side of Crownhill Bridge, an excavator contractor and the Canal Rangers spent a day scraping out the grass along the edge of the ramp to widen the path and installing a new hanging post. They also re-surfaced the gateway area to remove the step which had formed beside the road tarmac.



11. Sampford Peverell Wharf

The wharf at Sampford Peverell is regularly used by the Canal Rangers for loading and unloading and mooring the maintenance barges and the weedboat, and it is also used by adjacent residents for parking. The grass verges had become very wide and muddy and potholes has also formed in places. An excavator contractor was engaged to scrape back the edges and resurface the area with road planings.



12. Lowdwells interpretation panel

The content and designs for a new interpretation panel to be located beside Lowdwells Lock have been finalised. The panel achieves several tasks: It provides visitors with an interesting insight into the history of the canal and the lock; it explains what can be found along the disused section of the Grand Western Canal beyond the lock, including historic remains and local businesses; and it marks the end of the Country Park (previously there was nothing to mark the end of the Country Park for those who followed the towpath as far as Lowdwells).

The idea of a canal across the South West peninsula was conceived by a group of Taunton businessmen in 1768. Canals were new and proving highly successful and such a route would create the hazardous voyage around Land's End and enable cheap and efficient distribution of bulky cargoes like coal and limestone. Eventually a route proposed by John Reeve from Topham to Taunton was approved by the proprietors and an Act of Parliament was obtained in 1776. However, the Licensing Napoleonic Wars delayed the start of construction and it was not until 1803 that work commenced.

The decision to start cutting the Taunton branch first proved unfortunate as unexpected engineering problems consumed all the money raised for the whole project. The project came to a halt at Lowdwells in 1812 but the suspension bridge between there and Taunton was built then and used to transport coal for the lime kilns and domestic coal used to be brought in by horse and cart to the end of the Canal.

This situation continued until the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal was completed in 1827 and a decision was made to join the two waterways. James Green, who had already built the Maidenhead Railway in Devon, put forward an idea for a tub boat canal which would include seven locks and an inclined plane in order to descend 54ft from the summit level at Lowdwells Lock to the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal at Taunton. This was accepted and the canal finally opened through to Taunton in June 1838.

The tub boats were designed so that four would fit in the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal locks at the same time and could carry eight tons each. The Company ruled that a maximum of four boats should be towed in line at any time. The size of this lock at Lowdwells was determined by the size of the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal locks.

Lowdwells Lock

You are standing beside the remains of Lowdwells Lock.
Nowadays a bund across the centre of the lock marks the end of the in-water section of the Grand Western Canal, but once this was just a staging point on the journey to or from Taunton, where the Grand Western connected to the Bridgewater and Taunton Canal.

Two artist's impressions of Lowdwells Lock by Tony Probert.

Lowdwells Lock is situated near the location where John Reeve's broad canal changed to James Green's tub boat canal. The broad canal probably ended at the Maidenhead Lock about 700m (800m) from Taunton near the lock. It was probably Green who cut the mixed gauge section through the Weymouth Trench to the point, where he then built the 41ft x 8ft lock with a 30ft rise capable of passing four tub boats at once.

From here the route to Taunton then crossed an aqueduct over the nearby road. The road marks the end of Devon County Council's Grand Western Canal ownership and from here on the canal lock into the ownership of adjacent landowners once the tub boat canal became abandoned in the 1840s.

From this point you can trace the former route of the tub boat canal for 3.5 miles to the remains of Maidenhead Lock near the aqueduct along a public footpath that follows the original towpath. The remains of the lift have been well studied and interpretation panels are provided.

A shorter circular walk taking in several historic features of the tub boat canal, some of the countryside and a public footpath is shown on the map above. If you have a mobile phone you could take a photo of the map to help follow the route, or you can find it on the canal website at www.gwcanal.co.uk along with the extended public route, taking in Weymouth Lock which is 3.5 miles long.

7 x 35.88 in

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The panel is currently in production and should be installed before Easter. Many thanks to Cllr Ray Radford for providing the funding from his Locality Budget and to Robert Hodgson and Denis Dodd of the Friends of the Grand Western Canal for providing the historic detail and the circular route.

13. Weedcutting

The Canal Rangers have continued to use the weedboat on most Mondays during the winter, removing blanket weed and water soldier from the bed of the canal. The number of days the boat is used will increase during March as the focus shifts away from tree and hedge management work.

14. Picnic benches

There are two picnic benches with concrete bases located on tarmacked areas in the Canal Basin and one at Tiverton Road Car Park. These benches are easier for people in wheelchairs to use. However all three were starting to rot and needed replacing. Three new timber kits have been purchased and installed.

15. Hedgelaying

Volunteers and rangers have laid several sections of hedge this winter. These have included a hedge beside the pond on the offside at Ebear (pictured below), a section between Battens Bridge and Watton Bridge and a section near Manley Bridge. Another section near Manley Bridge is also likely to be laid in early March.



16. Bank and hedge cutting

All of the banks and hedges have now been trimmed by a contractor using a tractor-mounted flail. In some areas the tyres of the tractor have squashed mud out onto the

towpath and work has already started in clearing this off in order to leave the path more presentable and accessible and to reduce the problem in future years.

17. Car park signs

None of the outlying car parks along the canal had name signs at the entrances and this was proving confusing for some visitors trying to find them or establish which one they were at. Also there was a need to publicly state some of the byelaws relating to litter and overnight camping. New signs have been produced and installed at the entrances to all of the outlying car parks.



18. Vegetation around bridges

In order to keep views of the canal's bridges clear, and prevent damage to the pointing, the ivy which continually grows on them is periodically cleared off. The Canal Rangers and a specialist herbicide contractor have focussed on this during the autumn and winter and will continue to remove the dead ivy during the coming months. In addition, tree surgeons have undertaken crown lifting works on trees beside several bridges (as listed under section 2 above) to remove low branches which were obscuring views of the bridges.

19. Ranger Service training

In the autumn 2016, the Canal Ranger Service staff all completed a two-day boat-handling course on the Kennet and Avon Canal near Bath. Although all very experienced in using the Canal's maintenance boats, their successful completion of the RYA Inland Waterways Helmsman's Certificate (advised to be the most appropriate for our



circumstances by the Marine and Coastguard Agency) means they now have the paperwork to back that up. They also gained some new knowledge and experience relating to the use of narrowboats and the proper procedures for navigating through structures not found on the Grand Western Canal, such as locks and swing bridges.

They also completed a chainsaw refresher course as required every three years according to DCC policy. The course was tailored for the Canal Ranger Service and focussed mainly on safe use of chainsaws and the chipper when working on the maintenance barge.

20. Mid Devon Attractions Association

The Canal Manager continues to attend the meetings of this group, currently chaired by Philip Brind, which is currently focussing on creating a brand for tourist attractions in Mid Devon. Consultants have been engaged to help with this and the Country Park will seek to play its part in developing and communicating the new brand over the coming months.

21. Volunteers

The Canal Ranger Service continues to be strongly supported by volunteers, in particular Lee and Craig, who usually work 3-4 days a week and have been with us for over a year. They are invaluable as they are such hard workers and now have a great deal of experience. There are also several work experience placements from Bicton and Petroc Colleges working one or two days per week. Weekday volunteers have worked a total of 177 days between October and February (inclusive).

Volunteer Days continue to be held on the second Sunday of each month between November and March and in the 4 days held so far there have been a total of 37 volunteer days spent undertaking hedgelaying and pond restoration.

22. Events

On 11/10/16 Jo Roberts attended the Farmwise event at Westpoint, providing a display about the Canal and leading a tree identification activity

On 4/12/16 Jo led a successful Christmas Wreath event which 18 people attended.

23. School visits

21/10/16 – Sampford Peverell Primary School – 30 children – The children cycled along the towpath doing activities along the way then met Jo at the Canal Basin to do some pond - dipping before cycling back to school.

27/2/17 – Blundells School Activity Day – 12 students undertaking hedgelaying and hedge planting with the Canal Rangers near Manley Bridge.

Future programme of works

- Tree works to be undertaken by contractors as listed in section 2 above
- Completion of cutting back offside branches by Canal Rangers
- Re-decking Minnows landing stage
- Ongoing ivy removal from bridges
- Ongoing mud scraping along edges of towpath
- Installation of tilting weir at Burlescombe
- Atherton Way stream widening/deepening
- Canal Hill wall moving project
- Installation of new play area equipment / surfacing / fencing

- Replacement of rock-mounted interpretation panels at top and bottom of Canal Basin steps with updated ones.
- Production and distribution of updated Canal Visitor Guide
- Running events and leading healthy walks
- Leading school visits
- All usual sign / noticeboard / fence / gate repairs and maintenance
- All usual mowing, strimming and weedcutting.

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Notes from Boating Sub Group meeting held on 16th February 2017

Present: Pat Brind, Jacquie Brind, Philip Brind, Adam Pilgrim and Mark Baker

After a wide-ranging discussion the following general points were agreed:

- There was a strong preference on the part of PB and AP to refer to boat 'licenses' rather than 'permits', particularly in the case of powered boats. MB will check if the DCC legal team would be happy with the change.
- There was consensus that it would be good to further simplify the unpowered boat permit purchasing process so that there is no need for any form-filling and it becomes purely a financial transaction. MB is supportive of this in principal but pointed out that the current byelaws require some basic details to be recorded. MB will check with the DCC legal team to see if there is any scope to avoid form-filling.

There was also consensus that making it possible to pay for unpowered permits / licenses online would be beneficial. MB agreed to look into this with the DCC web team. If this is possible, one decision that will need to be made is whether it is essential for the purchaser to then print off a permit / licence badge and carry it with them, or whether just being able to show it on their phone is acceptable.

- A range of changes to the layout and wording of the terms and conditions for motorised boat permits/licences were agreed in order to make them clearer. MB will amalgamate the lists of amendments provided by PB and AP.
- One key change put forward by AP and agreed by the group is to relax the 'Maximum of 2.5hp per metre length of boat' rule which previously applied. AP explained that this unfairly excluded many boats that should be welcomed onto the canal. In order to exclude very high-powered boats that are inappropriate for the canal, the limit will be changed to a maximum of approx. 30hp for outboard engines (PB to check and report back on standard outboard sizes). Boats propelled by jet-ski type pumps will also be banned as will twin prop inboard engines (which are likely to damage the channel).
- It was agreed that permit / licence holders for powered boats must be 18 or over and that the value of 3rd party insurance ought to be increased to £3m (MB to check with DCC insurance team).
- It was agreed that the phrase 'non-towpath' should be used instead of 'offside'.
- It was proposed that fishing should be allowed from boats but only if moored on the towpath side and if a T&DAC fishing permit is also purchased. MB agreed to check with the Angling Club to see how they felt about this.
- Reference must be made to procedures that will be undertaken in the event of a boat not holding a valid licence/permit.

Once feedback from various DCC departments has been obtained and the amendments have been drafted, the sub group will approve the changes and a new permit/licence book will be designed and printed and then distributed to sales outlets. It is envisaged this will happen during spring 2017.

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