

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 3 October 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C A Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr K Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr L Neville	Burlescombe Parish Council
Cllr K D Wilson	Tiverton Town Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Hireboats and Moorings
Mr P Brind	The Tiverton Canal Company
Mr R Hodgson	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr D Howells	Community Patrol Boat
Mr R Jones	Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim	Inland Waterways Association
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Unit Sea Cadet Corps
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling Club
Mr T White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal

Officers:

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, DCC
Mr A Jarrett	Director of Finance, Assets and Resources, MDDC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr R F Radford be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2017/18.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs C A Collis and seconded by Cllr Mrs S Griggs)

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr C R Slade be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2017/18.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs C A Collis and seconded by Mr P Brind)

3 APOLOGIES

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

- Cllr Roger Croad (Devon County Council)
- Cllr David Cutts (Sampford Peverell Parish Council)

- Cllr Chris Daw (Mid Devon District Council)
- Miss Jean Hall (Inland Waterways Association. Miss Hall was substituted by Mrs J Pilgrim)
- Mr Jeremy Ison (Devon Wildlife Trust)
- Mrs Ros Mills (Devon County Council)
- Cllr Miss Clarissa Slade (Mid Devon District Council)

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Dave Gillings stated that he was a barge owner on the canal and addressed his first question to Devon County Council officers. He stated that the revitalisation of the Canal in 2005, when motor boats had been allowed on, must have been very fulfilling, now 12 years on, how does the County Council view the canal? Is it a beautiful asset or a country park with a large pond? The Canal Manager responded by saying that in some ways it was both. There needed to be balance of focus and attention. Resources were limited and had to be directed so that all users of the canal were accommodated, this included boat owners, users of the horse drawn barge, anglers etc.

Mr Gillings further stated that he found it difficult to proceed from his mooring and had trouble getting to the lift bridge. The reason for this was due to reed ingression. Last year there had been a 37% increase in their licence fee. Could the Canal Manager assure him that the same increase had been passed on to other users of the canal? The Canal Manager stated that it wasn't just narrow boat owners who had to pay for a licence, Kayakers, anglers, the horse drawn barge all had to pay a fee. Potential increases were reviewed every few years not annually. They had always been keen to pitch the fee at a level below that of other waterways nearby so that boats preferred to remain on the Grand Western Canal.

Mr Gillings continued by stating that despite the increase in licence fee boat owners did not receive any services for it. The existing mooring had been provided by businesses and mooring spots were decreasing in number because of reed ingression. The Canal Manager responded by stating that he had not been asked to supply or install any more wooden landing stages since the existing ones were built. Concern was expressed by the Committee that in order for the views of boat owners to be heard they needed to have a representative. It was **AGREED** that Mrs Pat Brind from Mid Devon Moorings should be the conduit through which the concerns of boaters should be channelled. The Canal Manager also informed the Committee that there was a scheduled programme of works to address the reed ingression as exemplified by works in recent years near Ebear Bridge and forthcoming works this year near Ayshford Bridge.

5 MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 7 March 2017, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 22 – final sentence under 'Future programme of works' should read 'The interpretation panel on the bridge was also replaced' and not 'The interpretation panel on the barge was also replaced'.

- Minute 25 – the second sentence should have read ‘...in certain stretches of the canal the water was not visible’ instead of ‘...certain stretches of the canal were now invisible...’

6 MATTERS ARISING

The following matters were raised regarding the minutes of the previous meeting:

- a) Cllr Les Neville informed the Committee that there had not yet been an official opening of the Fossend project due to some dangerous overhanging trees and an unstable industrial arch feature in a stone tower which the Parish Council were seeking advice on as to how to progress. He stated that Aggregate Industries had offered an interpretation board but up till now nothing had been forthcoming. An official opening would happen once these elements had been resolved.
- b) Cllr C R Slade informed the Committee that, in relation the dog bins on the canal, following a query from a local resident he had been told that Mid Devon District Council were still emptying them. The Director of Finance, Assets and Resources also confirmed that MDDC would continue to collect waste from these existing bins. The question was raised as to whether there was enough signage along the canal reminding dog owners of the need to bag dog waste. It was confirmed that every notice board had a reminder and advice to dog owners but ultimately it was their responsibility.
- c) Regarding the Anaerobic Digester at Crown Hill, it was confirmed that a liaison group had been established with the owners of the site, officers from the planning authority, other interested parties and the Chairman of the JAC invited to attend. This had been due to meet every three months, however, the next meeting was already overdue. The Canal Manager expressed some concern about how well screened the boundary had been with the Canal tow path. As a result the Ranger Service was looking at laying a hedge to thicken it and obscure the view. This meant potentially spending quite a lot of money. He requested that the Chairman ask the liaison group whether the landowners could make a contribution towards the cost of thickening the hedge and further requested that he emphasise to the landowner that cutting the hedge short did not help.
- d) At the previous meeting further information had been promised from the Head of Planning and Regeneration regarding the location of digestate at Tidcombe Fen. The Director of Finance, Assets and Resources stated that he would follow this up and report back to the Committee as soon as possible.

Note: Mr Peter Saupe declared a personal interest as he worked at the Anaerobic Digester Crown Hill site as a sub contractor.

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make other than to state he would be updating the Committee on correspondence relating to the Fenacre Water System later on in the meeting.

8 COMMUNITY PATROL BOAT

Background information relating to the reasoning for setting up the Community Patrol Boat was provided by Phil Brind. This had included persistent instances of dangerous cycling and irresponsible dog owners. Mr Dion Howells, who in his professional life was a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), had developed a keen interest in setting up the Community Patrol Boat to initially operate in his spare time. He had visited several councils to gain information and advice about the best way to do this as well as contacting many Tiverton businesses for support. Many businesses had felt that this would provide a genuine public service. The Tiverton Canal Company had been happy to sponsor one of their old day boats. Following this Mr Howells had managed to secure some additional funding. A separate committee had now been formed to oversee the management of the patrol boat with the Canal Manager and Cllr K D Wilson forming a part of its membership. Positive feedback had been received from users of the Canal regarding this new initiative. This was an independent community led project with many other Canal users nationally watching to see whether this initiative could be replicated elsewhere.

Mr Howells stated that the patrol boat had been up as far as Westleigh and that this took about five and a half hours to navigate. He had noticed people sleeping rough, dog walkers neglecting to pick up dog waste, cyclists not getting off their bike when going under bridges and being on their phones. He kept a log of what he saw every time he took the boat out. At the moment he was only able to get out one day a week due to other commitments, however, it was hoped to be able to train somebody else to assist in the future. He would be able to act in the role as an angling club bailiff within the next couple of weeks and this was viewed by the Committee as a valuable step forward.

Further discussion took place regarding:

- Mr Howells had taken a group of sea cadets out on the boat which they had thoroughly enjoyed.
- It would be nice to extend the patrol of the boat beyond Westleigh.

9 TERMS OF REFERENCE / MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

Member considered the Terms of Understanding * and Membership of the Committee.

It was noted that there had been some difficulty in finding a representative from Sustrans (or the cycling community as a whole) to attend each meeting. It was therefore suggested that the Clerk write to them one more time stating that if no representative was forthcoming they would be removed from the membership.

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

- Mid Devon District Council – ‘Head of Housing and Property Services’ be replaced with ‘Director of Finance, Assets and Resources’ since there had been a change in the management structure of the Council within the previous six months.

- A representative from the Community Patrol Boat be added as a voting member on the Committee.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

10 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:

Tilting weir

A recent heavy rainfall event showed that further fine tuning of the settings was needed to programme the weir to release more water, as on that occasion a ranger had to manually open a sluice to keep levels from rising too high.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The likelihood of the weir opening up accidentally either due to abuse or malfunction. There were concerns that should this happen the Canal would drain very fast. The Canal Manager confirmed that the engineers were confident the weir could not open accidentally. There had been no record of this happening. As regards abuse, vandals would need to know how the system worked and this was a technical piece of equipment. The system worked by measuring the distance from a sensor to the water level of the canal. There were actually three sensors and an email would be sent if there was a fault.
- Stopboards had now been delivered which could be inserted into steel grooves and screwed down.
- Water levels would have to drop by 20cm to trigger the existing low level warning system.
- The supplier confirmed that no regular maintenance was necessary for the tilting weir just visual inspection. The Rangers would just have to keep an eye on the batteries.
- The weir was potentially a fish trap and if a lot of water was released a large number of fish could be lost. However, it was not possible to secure meshing since this would potentially collect a great deal of debris.
- The Canal Manager would be investigating the possibility of installing camera's to both monitor the effectiveness of the system and to detect vandalism.

Canal basin wall-moving project

The following update was provided:

- Good progress was being made.
- The soft Breccia stone wall had been successfully dismantled without the stones being broken.
- No archaeology had been found and no underground services had been affected.

- All was proceeding as planned although the road closure was not popular, however, this had been the only way South West Highways had been able to complete the works safely.
- There had been considerable costs involved with opening up the road at weekends.
- The project had taken up a lot of the Canal Managers time.
- All the parapet fences and hand rails would have the same finish.
- One car parking space would be lost at the entrance as a result of the new arrangements.
- The Conservation Officer at MDDC had insisted that two trial walls be built off site prior to commencement of the project since the wall was historically important.
- The project would be completed within an 8-9 week programme.

Discussion took place regarding:

- How well the project was progressing and the impressive standard of work by the contractors.
- There had been many near accidents with the previous arrangements.
- There was some confusion regarding the signage within the locality and whether the canal itself remained open and not just businesses within and alongside it.
- Pedestrian access had been maintained.
- The potential for a crossing could be explored by the Highway and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) once the works were completed especially in the light of there being a children's play area in the future.

Other walls around the Canal Basin

- An application for DCC corporate funding would be made to address the issue of damage caused by trees planted decades ago along the southern boundary of the Canal Basin car park.
- There was a gradually worsening problem with the wall between the garden of the Moorings and the road. Spray from cars was slowly eroding the soft stone and undermining the wall along the bottom 40cm. Corporate funding had been secured to address the issue and works would be undertaken while the existing road closure was in place.

Ash Dieback

This was a serious problem nationally and had affected both young saplings and older trees along the canal. A consultant would be visiting the site the next day to assess the situation further. There was potentially some corporate funding available for felling diseased trees since the County Council had a duty of care on its land and along highways.

Ramp beside Ebear Bridge

A new ramp and hand rails had been installed which the Committee agreed was visually more pleasing and much safer than before.

Fenacre water transfer system

The following update was provided:

- The Canal Manager had asked the Chairman to follow up on progress with Aggregate Industries (AI) following a lack of communication.
- AI had commissioned a report from AMEC to ascertain future options regarding the water system, these options still needed to be checked for feasibility.
- The Chairman stated that they needed to continue to apply pressure to AI where they could to ensure progress was made but reiterated the fact that discussions were still needed regarding health and safety.
- Jacobs would be analysing the report on behalf of DCC since it was very technical in nature. Attention needed to be focussed on whether or not water could be stored in the quarry but again there were issues about health and safety and geostability. A further meeting with AI, AMEC and the Environment Agency would be needed once the report had been analysed.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- There were a lot of unknowns, especially during long periods of dry weather. Digging down into the quarry so low over a period of decades had reduced water supply to the canal and that was accepted by AI.
- As it currently stood if there was no significant rainfall in the summer months then it was an inevitable fact that the water levels would be very low by the autumn.
- There was much disappointment and frustration that another 6 months had gone by without much progress.
- The quarry had applied for renewal of mining permissions, several issues were holding this up including traffic flow around Burlescombe.
- Pressure to get some progress must be maintained although it was accepted that no leverage could be held over the Environment Agency.

Boat permits

The Canal Manager had met with Adam Pilgrim and Pat Brind after the last meeting to discuss a revised set of terms and conditions. He had been told by DCC that it would be possible for permits to be purchased on line, however, there had been a delay in getting this up and running. There had been broad agreement about a number of changes, however, further feedback was required from the County Solicitors. It was one of the Canal Managers priorities for the autumn to finish this piece of work.

Discussion took place with regard to the following:

- Boaters often use Tiverton Road car park and when questioned some had admitted to not having a permit.
- A change to the by-laws would be needed if boaters were required to just purchase a permit from a pay and display type machine as there was a requirement by law to hold the names and addresses of permit holders.
- New ticket machines would cost thousands of pounds and sufficient income to cover this would never be recouped.

- There was also a problem with canoes in that the BCU had indicated they have a right to go on any waterway.
- A suggestion for the revised terms and conditions to be approved by Adam Pilgrim, Pat Brind and the Canal Manager alone was not supported and it was **AGREED** that the revised wording be circulated to all Committee members and agreed by them as a whole.

Benches

A query was raised as to what happened to benches that through time had decayed and were no longer safe to be sat on? The Canal Manager explained that if they were able to trace who had originally paid and requested the bench then they would be contacted. However, if this was not possible and they were past their natural life they were removed but the plaques were always retained at the workshops.

Wetland bird survey

The Committee wished to pass on their thanks to Ray Jones for over 20 years of dedicated service in undertaking the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Wetland Bird Survey along the Canal once every month and also Andrew Cunningham who assisted him for much of this time. It requested that their thanks be conveyed to them through the Clerk.

It meant that a volunteer was now sought to undertake the survey once a month between the Tiverton and Greenway section of the Canal.

Canal Visitor Guide

It was agreed that the new Visitor Guide looked much more professional especially now that the darker photographs had been removed. A request was made however for anyone with good photographs of the Canal to submit them to the Canal Manager for the next publication.

Events

Praise was requested to be passed on to the team for the large number of events that had taken place since the last meeting. Those who attended had provided very positive feedback and as well as learning a great deal had had great fun.

Future Programme of Works

It was confirmed that the play project was due to go in once the wall project had been finished.

Weed management would also be on-going.

11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following items were raised under this item:

Fenacre Bridge – this was still being looked at by the County Solicitors. It was requested that the Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager be contacted to see if she could provide the Committee with an update.

Items for the next meeting – it was requested that this become a standing item on each agenda in the future.

Marketing of the Canal – Phil Brind informed the Committee that a large article would be appearing in Waterways World next month telling the story of the Canal. He also informed them that he was heavily involved in a project reaching out for funding to brand the Canal as it was the largest attraction in Mid Devon. Other districts were branded but Mid Devon was very much seen as a drive through. A Facebook page had been started entitled 'Mid Devon, What's On'. He stated that he was Chairman of the Mid Devon Attractions Group which was focussing on the branding. This would be especially important if the plans for Junction 27 went ahead as if they did not lead on the branding somebody else would. He strongly believed that in the long run there would be economic benefits to Tiverton.

It was suggested that the Attractions Group put in an application for locality budget funding through the DCC website and that they make sure all Mid Devon County Councillors were aware of this not just the ones on the JAC.

It was also suggested that contact be made with MDDC's Economic Development Officer and the Grants and Funding Officer who might be able to assist.

12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 6 March 2018 at 7pm in the Exe Room.

(The meeting ended at 9.32 pm)

CHAIRMAN