

Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Tuesday, 3 October 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 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

To elect a Chairman for 2017/18 (the Terms of Reference state that the appointment should be made from the Mid Devon District Council representation for 2017/18).

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

To elect a Vice Chairman for 2017/18 (the Terms of Reference state that this appointment should come from the Devon County Council representation for 2017/18).

3 APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

To receive any questions relating to items on the agenda from the members of the public present and replies thereto.

5 MINUTES (*Pages 5 - 12*)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2017 (please find attached).

6 MATTERS ARISING

To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.

8 **COMMUNITY PATROL BOAT**

To introduce representatives from the Community Patrol Boat and to receive information on the significant role the boat now plays in patrolling the canal.

9 **TERMS OF REFERENCE / MEMBERSHIP REVIEW** (*Pages 13 - 16*)

To consider the Terms of Reference and membership of the Committee (please find attached).

10 **PROGRESS REPORT AND FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORKS**
(*Pages 17 - 28*)

Report of the Head of Public Rights of Way and Country Parks (DCC) informing members of the work that has taken place to date and the future programme of works.

11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

To consider any other relevant business.

12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 6 March 2018 at 7.00pm – Exe Room, Phoenix House.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
25 September 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:

Tel: 01884 234310

E-Mail: slees@middevon.gov.uk

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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 7 March 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr R F Radford	Devon County Council
Cllr D P O Hannon	Devon County Council
Cllr Mrs C A Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr K Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr C R Slade	Tiverton Town Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr P Brind	Tiverton Canal Company
Mr D Cutts	Sampford Peverell Parish Council
Miss J Hall	Inland Waterways Association
Mr R Hodgson	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr G Moore	Canal Business Group
Cllr L Neville	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Sea Cadets Corps
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling Club

Officers:

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, DCC
Mrs J Clifford	Head of Planning and Regeneration, MDDC
Mrs R Mills	Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC
Mr N Sanderson	Head of Housing and Property Services, MDDC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

15 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the following:

- Councillor Mrs Heather Bainbridge
- Councillor Roger Croad
- Jeremy Ison
- Ray Jones
- Councillor Miss Clarissa Slade

16 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

17 MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 4 October 2016 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman subject to the following amendments.

- The correct spelling of Cllr D P O Hannon's surname in minute number 1 to include two 'n's' and not one.
- The addition of Mr Peter Saupe as an attendee at the meeting.
- The correct form of address for Jean Hall which should have been 'Miss' and not 'Mrs'.

18 MATTERS ARISING

The issue was raised as to whose responsibility it was to empty the dog bins on the canal following a review by MDDC of its policy. The Chairman had been informed that if the District Council owned them then they would be responsible for emptying them. However it was mentioned that a number had been supplied through the County Councillor's locality budgets and some from Parish Councils. The Head of Housing and Property Services said that he would speak to the Waste and Transport Manager at the District Council to seek some clarification.

19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- a) He welcomed Mr Graham Moore from 'The Globe' at Sampford Peverell to his first meeting. He had replaced Zig Grochala as the representative of the Canal Business Group.
- b) This would be the last meeting attended by Cllr D P O Hannon as he would not be standing in the forthcoming County Council election. The Chairman paid tribute to him by reference to the following:
 - **Funding:** He had been responsible for securing the funding for the new visitor centre and had also helped provide a significant amount of the funding for the new play area which would be built later this year.
 - **Local planning:** He had led the successful bid to get the land beside the canal on the edge of Tiverton allocated as green infrastructure, protecting the canal corridor from encroaching development as part of the Tiverton EUE.
 - **JAC:** He had either been Chairman or Vice Chairman of the JAC since 2006 and had provided a balanced, common-sense approach, giving all members the opportunity to have their say, but taking a lead where necessary. This was particularly the case during the breach in November 2012.

He thanked Cllr Hannon for all that he had achieved for the JAC and on behalf of the Committee wished him well for the future.

Cllr Hannon responded by saying that it had been an pleasure to serve on the JAC for the past 12 years. In his view the JAC had come on leaps and bounds although there was still more to be done. He felt the committee worked as a team sharing a common belief in the value of the canal. He made reference to the breach and the way people had pulled together. He considered that the breach had secured the long term well-being of the canal.

20 ANAEROBIC DIGESTER AT CROWN HILL, HALBERTON

The Head of Planning and Regeneration had been invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on the monitoring situation with the anaerobic digester (AD) at Crown Hill, Halberton.

The following information was reported to the committee:

- When planning permission at Red Linhay had been granted, the planning authority had looked very closely at the conditions which were multiple and comprehensive. This had included the owner having to provide key pieces of data to the planning authority on a quarterly basis in relation to factors such as weight data, power generation output and vehicle movements.
- The plant was not yet operational, a permit from the Environment Agency was still awaited. This was expected to take 2 weeks and 9 weeks in total to get the plant operational.
- An independent view of the site had been sought at the behest of the Planning Committee which had concluded that in terms of the visual impact a refusal of the AD could not be justified. They had expressed some concerns regarding the colour and the bund but had felt that these could be dealt with by conditions. Since this study, the dome had been painted a deeper shade of green and a new landscaping scheme was underway.
- A liaison group had been established with the owners of the site, officers from the planning authority as well as other interested parties including the Chairman of the JAC. The intention was to hold quarterly meetings where issues of concern could be raised.
- The planning authority had a range of enforcement powers including breach of conditions notices, stop notices and enforcement notices. However, any potential breach would need to match the seriousness of the intervention.
- The source of the feed stocks had been indicated in the transport statement and they had been conditioned. If the applicant wanted to spread digestate over areas of land not previously identified they would need new conditions.

The following concerns were expressed by members of the JAC:

- The fact that it might take years for the effects of the screening to take place.
- Concerns that monitoring controls might lapse.
- Income generation being the key motivation rather than a protection of the landscape and an appreciation of the canal area.
- Whether the enforcement tools available to the planning authority carried enough force.
- A lack of confidence amongst the JAC membership that satisfactory action would be taken should there be a breach of conditions.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration invited the members of the JAC to report any issues of concern to the planning authority since they were likely to be in the vicinity on a more regular basis than officers.

Regarding a question posed about the location of digestate and Tidcombe Fen, she stated that the situation was complicated and that she would look into the matter and report back to the JAC once the Environment Agency had issued its permit. She would then be able to give a fuller response.

21 CHAIRMAN OF TIVERTON SEA CADETS

Wayne Elliott, Chairman of Tiverton Sea Cadets, had been invited to attend the meeting to inform the Committee about proposed improvements to the Sea Cadet building. He informed the committee that the current building was in a very poor state and that although cadet numbers were high some youngsters were being put off by the state of the building. He had visited other Sea Cadet organisations around Devon most of whom had rebuilt their buildings at great expense. The cost of rebuilding would not be something that they could currently afford but hoped to be able to raise enough funds to consider modernising the unit. They target they were working towards would be in the region of £100k. They were currently at the ideas stage and gathering information about what the options were. Tesco's were currently showing some support and an event was planned in Tiverton in April with the HMS Enterprise crew to help raise awareness and funding.

The Chairman stated that the JAC did not actually have a budget therefore could not help financially but suggested that he spoke to Paul Tucker at the District Council who was the Grants and Funding Officer for some advice.

It was also suggested that any decisions regarding the design of future building improvements be communicated to the JAC so that they had an opportunity to comment. It was agreed that there was a need to have a more visually pleasing building for the benefit of the Sea Cadets and visitors to the canal.

22 PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to a report * of the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager.

Arising thereon:

New penstock sluices in Snakes Wood and at Burlescombe

Mr Brind thanked the Canal Manager for the design of the new sluices as other potential designs may have caused some problems for the horses pulling the barge.

It was confirmed that it was not possible to remotely control these particular sluices.

Tree Works

The Ranger Service had been very busy reducing tree cover along the canal. This work had been able to take place due to the availability of DCC capital funding. Whilst the Rangers had been able to do a lot of this themselves large scale works had been undertaken by professional tree surgeons. A new approach to place a chipper being on the barge had helped a great deal to save time and effort in transporting and processing tree debris. The comment was made that management of the trees was vital to the health of the canal. Eco plugs had been used in tree stumps to help stop regrowth with the intention being that the stump would eventually rot. There had also been a significant reduction in the height of some overgrown hedges at a number of locations.

Signage at Manley Bridge in relation to coppicing works was felt to be very helpful to visitors

Burlescombe tilting weir

Once the tilting weir has been installed it would operate automatically to maintain levels within a desired range which could also be controlled manually or remotely via a website.

Canal Basin Play Area

This project had now achieved its funding target thanks to a contribution from Tiverton Town Council and success in the Tesco Bags of Help funding scheme.

Wall moving project

This was a complex project which was taking longer than had been hoped. Trial pits were being dug at the end of this week. There had been a number of road safety audits and consultations, however, works were expected to take place during the summer. It was not possible at this stage to say how the flow of traffic on Canal Hill would be affected. As soon as the wall has been moved, the play area can be installed. The play equipment had already been purchased and was being stored. The MDDC Conservation Officer had been very co-operative.

Lowdwells interpretation panel

The content and designs for a new interpretation panel to be located beside Lowdwells Lock had been finalised. There was general agreement that the provision of information to the public in this format was extremely helpful and made the visitor experience more valuable. The Canal Manager attended the Mid Devon Attractions Association and he stated that the group was currently trying to design a brand for Mid Devon which would influence future information formats.

Volunteers

It was **AGREED** that a letter be sent by the Chairman to the two volunteers mentioned in the report thanking them for their invaluable time, commitment and enthusiasm.

Future programme of works

The reed bed project was not high on the list of priorities at the current time. The urgency attached to this had fallen away due to improvements at Lower Whipcott Farm and there was not the same problem of run off as had existed before.

Cllr Les Neville informed the committee that Burlescombe Parish Council had purchased a piece of land for £1 at Fossend going east towards the railway track. The project was almost at its conclusion. New steps had been installed, there were views towards the new sluice and 2 new picnic benches. The area was now much more attractive and it was hoped that there would be an official opening in the spring. The interpretation panel on the barge was also replaced.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

23 **BOATING SUB GROUP**

The Committee had before it notes * of a meeting of the boating sub group held on 16th February 2017. There was a feeling amongst the sub group that licences needed to be simplified and brought up to date with the safety of the canal as the main priority. The Canal Manager had been tasked with looking into the legalities, regulations and bylaws and he was currently awaiting a response from colleagues at County Hall. The group had considered a restriction on outboard motor size and a power to length ratio had been proposed. It was reported that there had been cases recently where some boats that were suitable for use in the canal had been unable to due to current regulations. It was felt that the most important issue was how the boat was steered and most people steered responsibly.

The Canal Manager informed the committee that DCC were looking to provide an online purchasing system for unpowered boat permits in the future which was seen as a positive step forward.

The sub group would discuss the feedback from DCC officers and circulate a set of draft Terms and Conditions to the JAC members which could be agreed by email rather than wait till the next meeting.

Note: * Notes previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

24 **AI UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman provided an update regarding recent discussions with Aggregate Industries (AI) concerning Fenacre Water. An email from the Senior Estate Surveyor at AI had recently been received and this had been copied to the JAC members. It was confirmed that AI were still awaiting a response from the Environment Agency and their consultants.

The following concerns were expressed:

- There had still been no senior management decision to store water in the quarry.
- AI's response since the site visit last July had been extremely slow.
- An adequate supply of water was crucial to the canal's future.
- A succession of hot summers and the evaporation of large volumes of water could prove disastrous.
- The amount of water needing to be stored to overcome this would be phenomenal.

It was **AGREED** that:

- Officers would check with Mike Deaton at DCC what the precise situation was and a meeting would be arranged to which the JAC Chairman would be invited.
- This issue would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

- The Chairman needed to contact the South West Regional Manager for AI and not the local manager to get a more senior response.

25 **WATER SOLDIER ON THE CANAL**

Mr Malcolm Trump had requested that this item be placed on the agenda following discussions at the previous meeting and complaints made to him by anglers through the Angling Club Committee. He stated that it had got to the stage where certain stretches of the canal were now invisible due to the weed especially where the weed boat was unable to penetrate, meaning that in these areas it was impossible to fish. This was leading to frustration given that an annual fee was paid entitling anglers to fish the entire length of the canal. He further stated that the contractors used a few years ago were much quicker than the Rangers were. The Canal Manager explained that that had indeed been the case. However, the reason for this was that they had used a type of boat with an excavator boom arm and a rake, whereas at that time the Ranger Service was using the old weed boat with the conveyor system. They had noted how effective those boats were and that had informed their request for a new boat and the type of boat that was eventually selected.

The Canal Manger explained that weed clearance was now taking up to 4 days a week especially in the summer. An offer was made to specifically target particular fishing spots if the Angling Club notified the Ranger Service where these areas were.

26 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No items were raised under this item.

27 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 3 October 2017 at 7.00pm.

(The meeting ended at 9.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

The Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee (GWCJAC) supports and encourages an active partnership between all the bodies involved in and co-ordinating management across all activities of the Grand Western Canal (GWC). The management of the GWC is co-ordinated by the Senior Public Rights of Way Officer on behalf of Devon County Council.

The Joint Advisory Committee represents the main mechanism for the co-ordination of advice and the collation of local views relating to the management and maintenance of the canal.

The aim of the County Council is “to conserve for the future the integrity of the Grand Western Canal in its setting as a wildlife, historic, recreation and education resource”.

The principle functions of the GWCJAC are to:

- Promote and act as champion for the canal;
- Support the aims of the County Council for the GWC which are to:
 - Preserve and maintain the canal as a civil engineering asset;
 - Develop, conserve and interpret the biodiversity in the surrounding area;
 - Promote the canal for amongst other things – tourism purposes.
- Provide a forum for discussion and information exchange between the different interested parties;
- Provide advice for the County Council on issues of management of the GWC

This will be achieved through providing advice

- To assist the implementation of the Management that supports the County Council's aims for the GWC;
- To inform a review of the Management Plan at appropriate intervals;
- To permit the monitoring of the success and achievement of the GWC Team and the use of the Canal;
- To inform the County Council on the impacts of existing or proposed uses of the Canal;
- To inform the commissioning of special studies of issues if necessary, utilising appropriate forums;
- To inform the local planning authorities about developments which are likely to affect significantly the GWC, its environs and landscape character;
- On the likely resources necessary for effective management;
- on the dissemination of information and by undertaking this through appropriate organisations;
- On the accommodation of new requirements due to changes in legislation affecting the GWC

It should be noted that the GWCJAC does not have executive powers over the funding partners, but acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to the funding partners and others as required.

TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

- The GWCJAC will meet twice a year;
- The Chairman and Vice Chairman will be elected annually;
- The position of Chairman and Vice Chairman will rotate between the main funding partners of Mid Devon District Council and Devon County Council;
- The secretariat for the GWCJAC will be Mid Devon District Council and the Committee will be run under MDDC standing orders;
- The GWCJAC will be considered quorate when eight representatives are present of whom 3 should be County or District Councillors with 1 being a County Councillor;
- Representatives will be expected to attend all meetings or to send a suitable replacement with prior notice;
- If a representative fails to attend two GWCJAC meetings within the year, without reasonable cause, then their eligibility to attend any future meetings will be terminated with immediate effect;
- Meetings will be open to the press and public with opportunities for the items to be brought in by the public for part of the meeting with prior notice;
- Suggested agenda items and questions should be presented 3 weeks before any meeting;
- Press and publicity must be channelled through Devon Media Services having initially been authorised by the Chairman or Vice Chairman or the Senior Public Rights of Way Officer;
- The membership of the GWCJAC will be reviewed once during each financial year to ensure there is a wide and balanced representation of canal interests;
- New members may be co-opted onto the GWCJAC with the agreement of the GWCJAC following a presentation to the Committee outlining the reasons why they should have representation;
- These Terms of Understanding will be reviewed by the GWCJAC following the agreement of the Chairman with recommendations for change being made to the funding partners;
- All organisations will have equal voting rights should the occasion dictate, with the Chairman having the casting vote;
- The GWCJAC will report to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Communities who will be the County Council's representative on the advisory committee.

GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP

Group Represented	Votes
Members	
Devon County Council - Executive Member for Environment and Communities	1
Devon County Council – Member for Tiverton East	1
Devon County Council – Member for Willand and Uffculme	1
Mid Devon District Council – Portfolio Holder for Environment	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Cranmore (3 councillors)	3
Mid Devon District Council – Member for Halberton	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Canonsleigh (2 councillors)	2
Tiverton Town Council	1
Halberton Parish Council	1
Sampford Peverell Parish Council	1
Burlescombe Parish Council	1
Holcombe Rogus Parish Council	1
Friends of the Grand Western Canal	1
Devon Wildlife Trust	1
Wildlife Advisory Group	1
Inland Waterways Association	1
Tiverton and District Angling Club	1
Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society - Devon Branch	1
Tiverton Sea Cadets	1
Sustrans	1
The Tiverton Canal Company	1
Mid Devon Hireboats and Moorings	1
Canal Businesses Group	1
Officers	
Devon County Council – Senior Public Rights of Way Officer (DCC)	0
Devon County Council – Canal Manager	0
Mid Devon District Council – Head of Housing and Property Services	0
Mid Devon District Council – Member Services Officer	0
Total	26

Each organisation may register a deputy to their representative, which must be approved by the GWJAC in advance.

The GWCJAC will be advised by the Senior Public Rights of Way Officer and Canal Manager and other officers as required.

We endorse the above Terms of Understanding for the GWCJAC and hereby agree to represent, to the best of our ability, the interests of the GWC. We understand our role is to act as an ambassador for the GWCJAC and further its aim to conserve, for the future, the integrity of the Grand Western Canal in its setting as a wildlife, historic, recreation and education resource and to be supportive of sustainable economic activity and tourism in the area.

Organisation.....

Named representative.....

Position.....

Date.....

Signature.....

Contact Details

Address.....
.....

Tel..... Fax.....
.....

Email.....

Named Deputy.....

Date.....

Signature.....

Contact Details.....

Address.....

Tel.....

Fax.....

Email.....

Progress Report (March 2017 - September 2017 inclusive)

1. Tilting weir

The new tilting weir beside the old main sluice in Burlescombe has been operational since the spring and during the summer had metal gantries fitted to provide safe access for staff. The Canal Manager and the DCC engineer who oversaw the installation of the tilting weir have both received training on the use and maintenance of the weir and the control system.



Members of the JAC attending the summer site visit saw the tilting weir and were impressed. Some sought assurances regarding the safety of the structure. The Canal Manager raised these queries with the suppliers during the training session and the following was confirmed:

- The tilting weir cannot accidentally open due to a power surge or failure.
- In the event of an artificial surface being placed below the sensors, the system would not be fooled into thinking the canal levels were suddenly very high and it would instead, just report a fault.
- There are no previous instances of one of this company's tilting weirs or automated systems malfunctioning.
- The stop boards which provide a safety back up in case the weir gets stuck in an open position have now been received by the contractor and are due for delivery before the end of September.



The Canal Manager is working with the supplier of the automated control system to fine tune the automated response to rapidly rising canal levels. During the storms on September 16th the canal levels spiked and although the tilting weir did open automatically, further manual opening was also required. Experience will enable further fine tuning, but vigilance on the part of the Canal Ranger Service (supported by the remote monitoring and alarm system) will always be needed during severe weather.

2. Canal Basin wall-moving project

Work has commenced on the project to improve visibility for drivers leaving the Canal Basin car park and to improve safety for pedestrians crossing Canal Hill to and from the towpath. This will be achieved by moving the wall back between the car park and the towpath by 2m and creating a pavement below. Throughout the summer the Canal Manager has been

liaising with the designers and planners developing the scheme which is funded by developer contributions relating to the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension.



It is expected to take nine weeks to remove the existing wall, dig out the tons of earth behind it, build a new retaining wall, and to create the new pavement. A temporary telegraph pole has been installed to preserve the power supply to the Duck's Ditty floating café-bar whilst the underground cables are disconnected. The new concrete wall will be faced with stone from the existing wall so that the historic

appearance of this location is preserved.

To enable contractors to complete the work safely, the section of Canal Hill near the entrance to the car park will be closed, with diversions in place for light vehicles via Tidcombe Lane and Blundells Road, and via the M5 and A361 for heavy goods vehicles. Access at weekends will be open whenever possible, with traffic management. A short section of the towpath beside the road will be closed during the works, with a diversion route available along the ramp beside the public toilets.

Once planning permission for the project was secured and a programme had been confirmed, letters were sent to local residents explaining the plans. Whilst there was understandably some frustration at the length of the road closure, some useful feedback was received regarding implications of the closure and diversion route which has been acted on (e.g. parking restrictions on Tidcombe Lane near the primary school to reduce congestion in this area).

Once the wall-moving project has been completed a play area will be installed on the land above. This is currently scheduled to take place in January and February 2018.

Prior to these wall-moving works taking place, the wall which runs from Canal Hill towards the public toilets was repointed and had new coping added, in order to ensure it was in good condition prior to the extra weighting and disturbance that the main works would entail.



3. Other walls around the Canal Basin

The growth of trees planted some decades ago along the southern boundary of the Canal Basin car park has begun to cause some damage to the adjacent retaining walls. Concern was expressed by the bowls club and homeowners below, and following an inspection by a DCC Bridges and Structures engineer, two trees have been felled on his advice. Further work is required to repair and repoint the damaged sections of wall and we are presently awaiting the outcome of an application for DCC corporate funding.



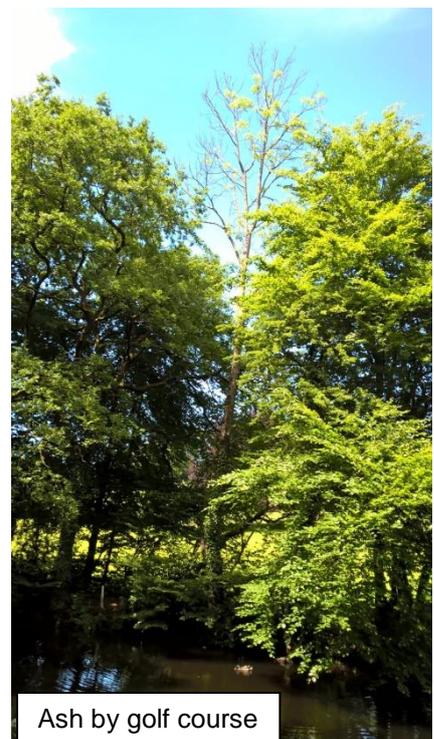
There is also a gradually worsening problem with the wall between the garden of The Moorings and the road. Spray from cars is slowly eroding the soft breccia stone and undermining the wall along the bottom 40cm. Corporate funding has been secured to address this issue by installing a kerb and adding a shoulder of cement to protect the bottom courses of the wall from further erosion. This work will be undertaken whilst the current road closure is in effect in order to avoid further disruption.

4. Ash Dieback

Most JAC members will be aware of this fungal disease which has been predicted to have a devastating impact on the country's Ash tree population. After attracting a lot of media attention a couple of years ago when it was first discovered in the East of England, it has become apparent that it has been present in that part of the country for many years, maybe a decade or more, but had gone unnoticed.

The importation of diseased saplings from the continent has certainly accelerated the disease's spread around the UK, with an early outbreak at Bickleigh, being an example of this. The disease is now present all around Mid Devon and it is clear that many Ashes along the canal are suffering.

We are seeing classic signs of the disease in saplings and coppice regrowth – which are supposed to be the most susceptible – and also a rapid decline in several mature trees, such as those located at Greenway car park,



Tidcombe Bridge, beside the golf course on the Swan's Neck, opposite The Globe Inn in Sampford Peverell and opposite the offside pond between Holbrook and Ayshford Bridges.

It is likely that most, if not all, of these trees will need to be felled as they die in order to avoid the safety risk they will pose, and to offset the higher cost of hauling them out of the canal if they fall or break up into the water. Fortunately it seems likely that the Country Park will be able to access the funding that DCC is setting aside for dealing with this burgeoning problem.

The Canal has a large stock of Ash trees, particularly between Halberton and Lowdwells, and as many trees will have to be felled when they die and become a safety hazard, the character of the Canal landscape and the habitat value for wildlife will undoubtedly be affected, particularly in the short to medium term. The Canal is not a planted landscape and the majority of trees along the canal are likely to be self-seeded. This process will continue and so over time many of the gaps left by Ashes will be filled by other species. However, it is with great regret that many of these landmark and wildlife-rich trees will need to be felled.



Ash in Greenway car park

5. Ramp beside Ebear Bridge

Access to and from the towpath beside Ebear Bridge was previously provided by a narrow and uneven combination of ramps and steps and was not accessible to wheelchairs or mobility buggies. Following the same approach that was used last year at Battens Bridge, a new ramp with handrails has been installed to provide better access at this point.



6. Fenacre water transfer system

Whilst the intention to provide an improved water transfer system for the Canal was reiterated in a recent planning application to extend mineral extraction at Westleigh Quarry, there has been little apparent progress in bringing this to fruition. A meeting with the AI Estate Manager fell through due to an apparent misunderstanding of timings. When the

promised re-arrangement of the meeting failed to materialise, Councillor Radford was asked to use his influence to engage with AI at a more senior level in order to raise the priority of this project within AI. It is anticipated that Councillor Radford will be able to provide an update at the meeting.

7. Lowdwells interpretation panel

JAC members were shown a proof of the design for this panel at the March 2017 meeting. The finished panel has now been installed and has attracted lots of positive comments. Thanks to Councillor Radford for providing Locality Budget funding and the Friends Group for their help.



8. Weed management

Water Soldier: Once again, the Canal Ranger Service has spent a great deal of time this year operating the weedboat, and has succeeded in keeping the canal largely clear of weed. A key to their greater success in removing Water Soldier has been the development of a new technique using the boats trailing blades (the boat has one set, similar to the two sets shown in the photo). These disturb and release the plants when they are on the bed of the canal but are at the point in their lifecycle during the summer when they are naturally buoyant.



The plants are very lightly rooted in the silt and the cutting and disturbance caused by the blades being towed behind the boat is enough to cause the vast majority of plants to rise to the surface at once, forming a thick carpet on the water's surface. The plants are then easily seen and collected up using the boat's rake as shown in the after-blading (left) and after-raking (right) photos below:



Azolla: Amongst the range of alien invasive plant species that are colonising the UK's waterways is one called *Azolla filiculoides* (also known as Water Fern or Fairy Fern, but commonly just referred to as Azolla). Originating in the Americas, it was first recorded in

the UK in around 1840 and has been continually arriving ever since as a popular garden aquatic.

Azolla has a remarkable ability to multiply; fronds grow rapidly and elongate until fragments finally break off to form new plants. The mats that form on the water's surface can be 30cm thick, and during hot weather, can double in size in just 4 or 5 days. These mats:

- block out light, killing our rich and diverse aquatic flora
- reduce the oxygen availability which can lead to the death of fish and invertebrates
- can hamper water-based recreation including angling and boating

On the Grand Western Canal the plant is present in most years along the margins in sections of the canal, where it causes few problems. Occasionally however, climatic conditions are just right enable the population to explode and cover sections of the canal. This year we have seen this in Snakes Wood, where the plant covered the whole channel along a 200m stretch in just a couple weeks. Shelter from the wind has also helped it to happen at this location.



There are no organisms native to the UK that feed on Azolla and the imported plant has not brought all the native American natural enemies with it that keep it in check. Removal by mechanical means is almost impossible and control using herbicide is also difficult, time consuming and contentious.

Research has shown the tiny 2mm long North American weevil *Stenopelmus rufinasus* (right) to be one of Azolla's main natural enemies. The weevil has already been used to control the weed very successfully in South Africa, where after extensive host range testing and climatic matching, it was released as a biocontrol agent. As they can only feed on Azolla species, they won't harm other plants. They can also consume large quantities of the weed.



The weevil is already present in parts of the UK (first recorded in 1921), most likely hitching a ride on Azolla plants imported by garden centres and aquarists. In recent years the government has approved the use of these weevils as biocontrol agents and having been released around the country they are now becoming quite widespread and naturalised.

The Canal Manager was investigating the possibility of releasing weevils to control the outbreak at Snakes Wood, but on closer investigation discovered that the weevils were already present. The infestation at Snakes Wood had completely disappeared within a few weeks due to the population of weevils expanding naturally.

The likelihood is that in most years a small population of weevils is surviving the winter and is on hand to keep the Azolla in check, but when winter or spring weather conditions favour

the Azolla and/or hinder the weevils, the Azolla for a short time can expand rapidly and for a month or so keep ahead of the grazing pressure applied by the weevils until their population catches up.

9. Landing stages

This year the Canal Ranger Service has repaired and re-decked two landing stages along the canal beside Minnows Touring Park (left) and beside The Globe Inn (right).



In the case of the one beside The Globe Inn, the Rangers were assisted by members of the East Devon District Council Countryside Team. A joint work day is held twice each year at the Canal and Knapp Copse LNR or White Cross Picnic Site (two DCC-owned sites in East Devon for which the Canal Manager has responsibility, but where the day to day management is undertaken by the EDDC rangers).

10. Community Patrol Boat

The Community Patrol Boat was officially launched on 27th June. The Canal Ranger Service is supportive of this initiative and the Canal Manager attended the launch and also attended the first steering group meeting held in early September. It is anticipated that Dion Howells (the driving force behind the scheme) will attend the forthcoming JAC meeting to provide members with an introduction to his work on the boat and to answer any questions.



11. Boat permits

As reported at the last meeting, a review is being undertaken of boat permit processes, terms and conditions. The Canal Manager has had meetings with Pat Brind, Adam Pilgrim and the DCC Assistant County Solicitor to discuss the necessary changes. Examples of processes for dealing with 'problem' boats have also been obtained from the Basingstoke Canal Authority. The Canal Manager is in the process of combining the procedures and suggested changes provided by these various sources to draft the new processes and boating regulations for the Grand Western Canal, with the intention of completing this during the autumn.

12. Bridge cleaning

During the spring, the Canal Rangers continued the task of clearing ivy from the Canal's bridges and also removing soil and plants growing beside the walls on the bridge decks. This work will continue during the autumn and winter initially focussing on the bridges which do not require traffic control in order to undertake the work safely.

13. Flag pole repairs

The flag pole in the Canal Basin which flies the Green Flag Award flag was damaged in the spring during a storm. The flag pole suppliers offer maintenance and repair service and so they were engaged to undertake the necessary work. The banner arm now stands at 90° to the pole rather than drooping (as it had done before), and the broken halliard hatch has been replaced.



14. Public toilet repairs

The Canal Ranger Service is working with the cleaning company that looks after the toilet block to try and improve standards of cleanliness and presentation in the public toilets as for many visitors this is their first impression of the Country Park. Following ongoing problems in the accessible toilet, a new cistern and flush mechanism has been installed.

15. Thistle control on Swing Embankment

The works to repair the breach, install the plastic liner and standardise the offside crest level at Swing Embankment left a lot of bare ground, and whilst most of this was sown with a grass mix that took well, there is ongoing issue with creeping thistles which managed to colonise the bare ground. At the request of adjacent landowners, the Canal Manager (who holds the necessary pesticides certificates) has spent a couple of days spot-spraying thistle rosettes with a thistle-specific herbicide and used a propane torch to burn off thistle down before it was blown away, in order to reduce the numbers of thistles and to stop them spreading.

16. Benches

There has been a flurry of demand for new memorial benches along the Canal, with one recently installed and six more on order. Once an appropriate location is agreed with the Canal Manager, they are built to a standard design by Canal Ranger Craig Saunderson at a cost of £350 with any plaque to be provided by the person ordering the bench. The new benches will be spread along the Canal between The Basin and Ebear Bridge.



17. Wetland Bird Survey

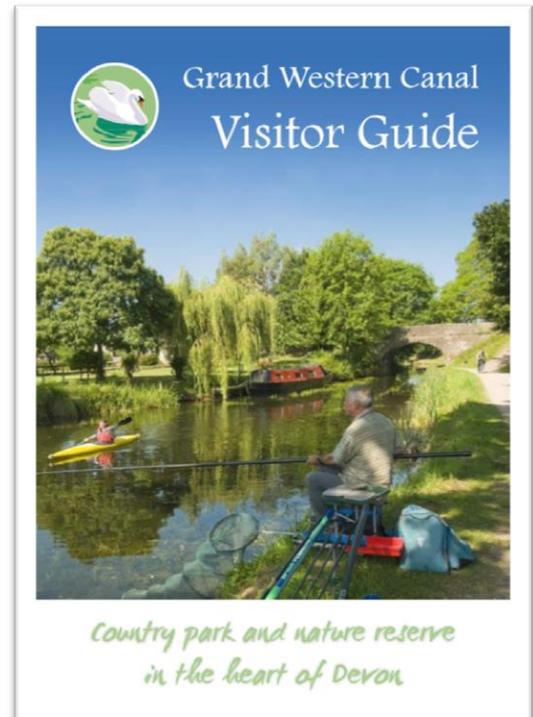
For over 20 years, Ray Jones has been undertaking the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Wetland Bird Survey along the Canal once every month. For much of this time he has been assisted by Andrew Cunningham. Earlier this year the two decided that they were no longer able to keep up this commitment and needed to pass on this work to some new volunteers. The Canal Ranger Service wishes to pass on its sincere thanks to Ray and Andrew for all their work in undertaking these surveys. Their records provide a valuable long term data set which is useful for spotting immediate issues and long term trends and it is very much hoped that new volunteers will be found to continue this important work.

18. Canal Visitor Guide

The Canal Manager and the DCC design team liaised to provide an updated version of the Canal Visitor Guide which was distributed ahead of the Easter holidays. The annual print run now stands at 8000 and the cost of printing is covered by the advertising inside the guide.

19. Fencing repairs

As part of the Canal's Countryside Stewardship Scheme which ran from 2003 to 2013, much of the canal's offside boundary was fenced. In the last few years many fence posts have been found to be rotting at the base. As a result the Canal Ranger Service is replacing rotten posts and fencing contractors are replacing box strainers and gate posts where necessary.



20. Events

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 12.3.17 | Volunteer Day – Hedge laying and planting: 8 volunteers + MB |
| 10.5.17 | Walk & Talk – Swans Neck: 29 walkers + JR |
| 13.5.17 | Fun on the Water Day – Paddle boarding taster sessions, model boats, canoeing: well attended +JR & CS |
| 16.5.17 | Devon Recovery Learning Community (providing courses for the wellbeing of people in Devon who have mental health difficulties) - Tiverton to Manley Bridge: 6 walkers + JR |
| 20.6.17 | Devon Recovery Learning Community - Sampford Peverell to Ayshford Chapel: 6 walkers + JR |
| 28.6.17 | Walk & Talk – Holcombe Rogus: 25 walkers + JR |
| 18.7.17 | Devon Recovery Learning Community – Bat Walk – Cancelled due to |

bad weather

- 21.7.17 Bat Walk – Tidcombe to Snakes Wood: 17 people (12 adults + 5 children) + MB
- 22.7.17 Mid Devon Show – stall with Canal displays and craft activities
- 2.8.17 Wild Wednesdays – Bird Box Making: 30 people (11 adults + 19 children) + MB, CS & volunteer Lizzie
- 9.8.17 Wild Wednesdays – Pond dipping: 41 people (14 adults + 27 children) + MB & Lizzie
- 16.8.17 Wild Wednesdays – Forest Crafts: 35 people (13 adults + 22 children) + JR & Lizzie
- 23.8.17 Wild Wednesdays – Pond dipping: 32 people (12 adults + 20 children) + JR
- 30.8.17 Wild Wednesdays – Insect Box Making: 39 people (15 adults + 24 children) + JR, CS & Lizzie
- 6.9.17 Walk & Talk – Tiverton to Manley: 17 walkers + JR
- 13.9.17 DCC Stars Guided Walk – Swans Neck Circular Route: 9 participants + MB
- 19.9.17 Devon Recovery Learning Community – Swans Neck: 6 participants
- 20.9.17 Insight Dynamics Ltd (Tiverton-based company, offering a day service for adults with learning disabilities including activities within the community): 11 service users with learning disabilities + 5 staff to support them & JR



21. School and community group visits – all led by Joanne Roberts

22.5.17	Bampton (Reception & Year 1) – Pond dipping: 31 children
23.5.17	Blundell's Prep – Tree Walk from TRB to Basin + Pond dipping: 31 children
8.6.17	Tiverton Brownies – Pond dipping: 29 girls
15.6.17	Tiverton Beavers – Pond dipping: 15 boys & girls
25.9.17	Culmstock Brownies – Pond dipping: 20 girls + 4 adult leaders & 1 young leader

22. Volunteers

Weekday volunteers - 245 man-days (mainly two long-term volunteers working with the Canal Rangers 3 – 4 days per week).

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORKS (October 2017 – February 2018)

- Repair Canal Basin landing stage
- Replace broken gate post at Ayshford Bridge
- Replace interpretation panels on rocks in Canal Basin
- Usual trimming / coppicing of overhanging offside trees
- Works to fell Ash Dieback trees as necessary
- Crown-lifting and formative pruning of trees along the towpath
- Laying tall hedge between Aqueduct and Crownhill Bridge to thicken base and screen views of Anaerobic Digester. (This may increase views initially but will provide better screening after a year or two)
- Hedgelaying and planting at various locations as required
- Oversee installation of play area and Ranger Service to receive training for play area inspection (programmed for Jan/Feb)
- Oversee project to deepen, surface and regulate width of Atherton Way / Francis Crescent water channel running parallel to Canal (programmed for Jan / Feb)
- Canal Manager to finish drafting new management plan
- Canal Manager to finish Boat permit / regulations / procedures review
- Construction of new material bins and landing stage at Post Hill depot.
- Liaise with owners of Minnows Touring Park to create new gateway / gap-up old one when their new house is built.
- Repair damaged fishing platforms
- Finish off fencing and surfacing works beside tilting weir

