

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 2 October 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council
Cllr Roger Croad	Devon County Council
Cllr Mrs C P Daw	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C J Eginton	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr L G J Kennedy	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council & Devon County Council
Cllr Ken Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr P Brind	The Tiverton Canal Company
Miss Jean Hall	Inland Waterways Association
Mr J Hampshire	Cycling UK
Mr D Howells	Community Patrol Boat
Mr R Jones	Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society
Mr G Moore	Canal Business Group
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus and Burlescombe Parish Councils
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Unit Sea Cadets 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
Mrs R Mills	Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

Also in attendance:

Chrissy Parker	The Four Villages Environmental Group
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1 Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Cllr C R Slade be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2018/19.

(Proposed by Cllr C J Eginton and seconded by Cllr L G J Kennedy)

2 Election of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Cllr L G J Kennedy be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2018/19.

(Proposed by Cllr C R Slade and seconded by Cllr R F Radford)

3 Apologies

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

- Cllr Mrs Heather Bainbridge (Mid Devon District Council)
- Cllr David Cutts (Sampford Peverell Parish Council)
- Cllr Sue Griggs (Mid Devon District Council)
- Mr Andrew Jarrett (Mid Devon District Council)

4 **Public Question Time**

There were no questions from the members of the public in attendance.

5 **Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 6 March 2018, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

6 **Matters Arising**

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

- The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager provided an update in relation to Aggregate Industries (AI). She had met AI with the County's consultants, Jacobs, as well as one of the planners from the County Council. They had gone through the existing agreement to determine whether it was fulfilling what it was supposed to be doing. County had asked for various things to be included in line with the S106 agreement. She had received the draft recommendations from the planners today and would ask the Canal Manager to go through the issues that related to them to see if they met their aspirations. This would provide an opportunity to influence the resulting agreement.
- Mr Dion Howells provided an update regarding the Community Patrol Boat. So far this year they had achieved 120 voluntary hours on the boat. They had spoken to hundreds of people, including cyclists, pedestrians, dog walkers and litter pickers. He confirmed that it was going well and that they hoped to welcome a few more volunteers to join the team in the future.

7 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman thanked Cllr R F Radford for his Chairmanship of the JAC both during 2016/17 and 2017/18. He stated that he would be relying on Cllr Radford's knowledge over the coming year and seeking his advice.

8 **Cycling UK**

The Committee had requested at the last meeting that contact be made with Cycling UK to see if they could attend this meeting to describe what their organisation was about and whether they would like to replace Sustrans as a representative on the Committee.

Mr John Hampshire informed the Committee that Cycling UK was a national independent body founded in 1878. Its membership included people of all

backgrounds and physical abilities. They were a campaigning organisation. They worked with people in communities to undertake a change in thinking with regard to cyclists, for example, opening car doors differently so that cyclists did not get knocked off their bikes. Another campaign had included the 'big bike revival' encouraging people to get their bikes out of their sheds. They also worked with Halfords providing free bike checks. Funding came from membership fees, grants and legacies. He stated that he was also a Sustrans volunteer ranger for an area that included the canal and that he used it for leisure almost every day.

Mr Hampshire was asked how his organisation differed from Sustrans. He responded by saying that Sustrans did not only represent cyclists but also walkers.

9 **Terms of Reference / Membership Review**

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

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

- a) That Mr Adam Pilgrim, as well as being the representative for Holcombe Rogus Parish Council, also become the representative for Burlescombe Parish Council on a temporary basis until the membership of Burlescombe Parish Council stabilises.
- b) That Cycling UK join the membership of the JAC and that the contact details of the named representative be forwarded to the Clerk.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: * Terms of Understanding previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

10 **Progress report**

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

Arising thereon:

Play Park opening

All agreed that this had proved to be a great success and it had brought a lot of life to the Canal Basin.

Weed clearance

The Canal Ranger Team had spent on average 4 days a week operating the weed boat. They had been able to remove most of the water soldier but there would always be some plants that slipped through. Boat owners had reported an improvement.

Green Flag Award

The park had achieved its highest award following a visit by the judges for a full day. The Canal Manager thanked Mr Philip Brind for spending time with the judges on the day.

Dogs on leads in the Canal Basin

Mr Philip Brind explained that following the new rule requiring dogs to be kept on leads in the Canal Basin this had completely changed this area of the canal. Dog fouling was no longer seen and people were staying for longer period. He felt that this had seriously changed the Basin for the good.

Mowing and Strimming

This was the biggest bulk of the Canal Ranger Team's work but it contributed the most.

Leaks

Some leaks had been straight forward to repair and some had not.

At the time of the 2012 Breach, various leaks were discovered when the canal was drained to effect the major repair. One was sealed by the contractors undertaking the breach repairs. Recently, in order to provide a more effective seal here, a 10m section of bank was dug back and rebuilt using 16 tonnes of clay before being covered over again with soil.

A leak beside the aqueduct had led to a pool of water filling the cutting below the structure throughout the summer. A leak had been traced in the offside wall, however once water had found a way through it was difficult to seal with clay. The leak on that side had been stopped but there was now a leak on the opposite side. DCC Bridges and Structures engineers were due to undertake a principal inspection of the aqueduct at the end of September and their recommendations were awaited, it seemed likely that some form of relining would be required.

A question was asked as to whether the aqueduct was listed. It was explained that it was not but the engineers had stated that it could be justified as a 'Brunel structure' and that listing may take place at a later date.

Most recently a leak beside Swing Bridge had been traced and identified as a possible cause of water rising beside properties on the High Street in Halberton. Working with South West Water the team were working hard to find and repair the leak so that properties were protected. It was further explained that the leaks had possibly been caused by the dry weather over the summer but could also be related to the Breach event. Repairing the leaks had understandably been given a high priority but it was also proving to be very costly financially.

Boehill slipway track / boat trailer storage

This work had been funded by developer contributions from the Tiverton EUE and was part of a wider scheme to improve pedestrian access between Sampford

Peeverell, Tiverton Parkway and the Canal. A new boat trailer storage area was also being created in the field halfway along the track. It was confirmed that users of the boat storage area would be issued with a padlock combination when they bought a permit from Minnows.

Horse enclosure

Several posts and rails of the previous enclosure were rotting and so a new, more robust enclosure had been built in its place. Mr Philip Brind commented that the new enclosure had a four bar rest which provided more protection for the horses and public.

Management Plan

Although this had been slightly behind schedule a draft of the new management plan had been posted on line for the JAC to comment upon. This would be presented to the JAC at the next meeting for approval.

Tree work

Two large trees that had fallen into the canal had been winched out and dismantled. There were also plans to clear some trees suffering from ash die back. DCC had a fund for dealing with ash die back.

Proposed housing developments near the Canal

The Canal Manager had been involved in a number of consultations and discussions relating to proposed housing developments in the vicinity of the Canal. With the proposal for 60 houses in Sampford Peeverell the issue had been drainage from the development to the Canal. With another emerging proposal for significant housing development around Tidcombe Hall and Little Tidcombe, the issues had also been drainage and safe access from the development to the towpath and the primary school (possibly via a new bridge).

Apprentice Ranger

Funding had been provided for an Apprentice Ranger at Stover Country Park and the Grand Western Canal Country Park. An appointment had been made and following some final checks the new Apprentice would probably be working at the Canal 1-2 days a week.

Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) workshops

The JAC thanked the Canal Manager for the careful management of the water levels during the long hot summer. He explained that a large part of this had been due to the previous wet winter.

JAC site visit

The Canal visit had begun with a tour around the Canal Basin and had then moved on to Crownhill where they had been given a tour of the Anaerobic Digester.

Mr Peter Saupe, declaring a personal interest as he worked at the plant, stated that money was being spent to improve public perception, make the plant quieter and provide more screening for the long-term benefit of the local community.

Benches

The new style memorial seats had proved popular, others were planned.

It was confirmed that the new style seat with a plaque currently cost £698 and that the benches the Ranger Team constructed themselves cost £350.

Events

A large number of events, walks and talks had taken place since the last meeting. Bat walks had been particularly well attended and the stand-up paddle boarding had also been popular.

The Canal Manager and his team were congratulated for providing events where children and the schools got involved as these were the next generation and involving them at a young age was vital.

Future programme of practical works and management projects to be progressed.

The Canal Manager highlighted the high priority projects to be progressed. A brief discussion took place regarding the impact of badgers on the Canal. The Canal Manager explained that he had taken advice and generally the approach was to monitor the situation. They had done what they could by installing steel rods preventing them from gaining access into the water. The difficulty they had was that the badgers were an urban population without a secondary set. A previous application to have the badgers removed had been rejected and the County Council had to comply with the law in this area and continuing to monitor the situation was all that could be done at the moment.

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

11 **Dangerous incidents on the canal**

Mr Philip Brind had requested that the issue of 'dangerous incidents' on the canal, in particular those involving cyclists, be discussed as an item on the agenda.

He explained that the horse drawn barge had had a record number of near misses this year and he was extremely worried about the future of the barge. The issue had been the signage, with one cyclist, who was a solicitor, informing him that the current signage stated that you needed official permission to cycle at all under a bridge, not, as he saw it, that you couldn't cycle under a bridge. In his opinion signs meant different things to different people. It was impossible to see a horse coming sometimes while going under a bridge. Large numbers of cyclists had encountered the horse on the other side over the past year. Often the cyclists had children riding on the back of the bicycle presenting even more of a danger. He stated that he would be speaking to DCC about the possibility of a horse boat zone to provide an opportunity to inform passengers and users of the canal about the increased risks involved.

Cllr L G J Kennedy stated that he used the Canal daily with his wife and the potential to get knocked over by a cyclist was a serious problem and getting increasingly worse. He circulated an A4 poster showing the international sign, also in the Highway Code, for 'no cycling' and suggested that this simple sign would be more visible and a better alternative. He further suggested that, whilst 'no cycling' under bridges would be impossible to enforce, 85% of people would comply.

The Canal Manager explained that this issue had been discussed by the JAC on several occasions and agreed that the situation had become serious enough to warrant consideration of alternative signage. The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager stated that legal considerations needed to be born in mind when creating signage but that a version of a simpler more obvious sign might be possible. She also stated that the County worked with organisations that were promoting sustainable travel. They also had social media contacts and perhaps this could be used as a method for encouraging safer cycling on the Canal. She further stated that there were different issues at each end of the Canal and a change in signage would need to accommodate these differences. Changes to signage would need to be managed in a careful and thoughtful way.

A brief discussion took place regarding the Canal now being used for cycle time and track trials which brought a whole new level of potential danger. Some cyclists were very considerate whilst there were an increasing number who were not.

Cllr R F Radford stated that he would be prepared to allocate some of his locality budget to the costs involved of changing signage on the part of the Canal in his area.

It was **RESOLVED** that a Working Group be established to consider changes to the current signage. The Working Group to consist of:

- Philip Brind (The Tiverton Canal Company)
- A representative from Cycling UK
- Dion Howells (Community Patrol Boat)
- Cllr Lance Kennedy (MDDC) who volunteered to chair the group
- Graham Moore (Canal Business Group)
- Chrissy Parker (The Four Villages Environmental Group)
- Mark Baker (Canal Manager)

12 **Installation and collection of litter bins**

Cllr Lance Kennedy had requested that the issue of the installation and collection of litter bins be discussed at this meeting. He stated that, as Ward Member, he was regularly approached by members of the public complaining that litter bins were not being emptied often enough. The Leader of MDDC, who had responsibility for the Environment within his portfolio, responded by stating that careful thought needed to be given to the siting of the litter bins. Emptying would be much easier if they were located in the most used areas, regular emptying along the entire length of the Canal would present some difficulty. He informed the Committee that multipurpose bins were now being installed where the replacement of a bin needed to take place. These could take both dog waste and general litter.

Cllr Kennedy was content that if these 'any bin will do' multipurpose bins could be introduced as part of a replacement programme within their existing locations that was a sensible solution.

13 Enhancement of tourism opportunities as a connected package

Cllr Lance Kennedy had requested that this issue be brought to the attention of the Committee and for discussion to take place. He stated that regarding potential development at J27, Tiverton had a distinct advantage in that it was far enough away from J27 to maintain its own culture but that it was near enough for it to reap the benefits of increased tourism and the resultant positive effects on the local economy. He suggested that an open dialogue commence with the potential developers so that the benefits to the local area could be given as high a priority as possible as soon as possible.

The Chairman explained that the timing was perhaps a little premature in that the outcome from the Inspector regarding the Local Plan had not yet been received. It might be wiser to wait until a planning application had been received and to talk to the potential developer then.

Philip Brind reminded the Committee that he was Chairman of the Mid Devon Attractions Group and that it was vital to form an alliance with interested parties represented interested in promoting tourism. This Committee could work on making Mid Devon great by such initiatives as reintroducing the raft race and the Tiverton Balloon Festival. He felt that that type of Committee was currently missing but if established could ask any potential developer to have a seat at the table. The Chairman responded by stating that this was a sensible and exciting way forward but was not necessarily an issue for the Canal.

The MDDC Leader informed the Committee that he had attended the Local Plan Hearing in the previous week and had heard that tourist spend in Mid Devon was the lowest of all the Devon districts. The MDDC Chief Executive had plans to address this issue and had been working on the wider area, his expertise would be very useful to any future group looking at this issue. He further reiterated that there was no J27 development at the moment but if it came forward it would be vital to work with the developers to put Mid Devon first, ahead of the rest of the county. He stated that he would further discuss the issues raised with the Chief Executive.

14 Any other business

The following issues were raised under this item:

- Clarification was sought as to the role of the representative from The Four Villages Environmental Group (Chrissy Parker) who had attended and contributed to the meeting. The representative explained that she had attended the meeting having spoken to the Canal Manager as she and her group were very interested in the issues being raised and wanted to have an opportunity to comment. The Chairman informed her that, although not a member of the JAC, she was most welcome to attend this and future meetings. Philip Brind thanked Ms Parker for attending the meeting and for working hard to generate interest regarding Canal matters in her locality and on the Canal Facebook page.

- The increasing prevalence of cigarette ends had become an issue on the canal particularly between Fossend Bridge to Ebear. Ms Parker explained that on one particular occasion she had had to extinguish a fire. The Chairman responded by stating that although this was criminal offence regulation was very difficult to enforce.

15 **Identification of items for the next meeting**

The following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting in addition to the usual progress report from the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager:

- An update from the Working Group on cycling signage.

16 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as being Tuesday 5th March 2019 at 7pm in the Exe Room.

(The meeting ended at 8.55 pm)

CHAIRMAN