

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE** held in the Exe Room, Phoenix House, Tiverton on 7 October 2014 at 7.00pm.

Present - Members

Name:	Body Represented
Cllr D P O Hannon	Devon County Council
Cllr K D Wilson	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C J Eginton	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C R Slade	Tiverton Town Council
Mr T White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr P Brind	Tiverton Canal Co.
Mrs P Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Sea Cadets
Miss J Hall	Inland Waterways Association
Mr R Jones	Devon Birds
Mr D Cutts	Sampford Peverell Parish Council
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Cllr L Neville	Burlescombe Parish Council
Mr M Trump	Tiverton & District Angling Club
Mr Z Grochala	Minnows Touring Park
 Officers:	
Mr N Sanderson	Head of Housing and Property Services
Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, Devon County Council
Mrs R Mills	Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, Devon County Council

Mrs S Lees Secretary to the Joint Advisory Committee, Mid Devon District Council

Apologies:

Cllr R Croad Cabinet Member for the Environment and Community, Devon County Council

Mr R Crosbee Sustrans

Mr J Ison Devon Wildlife Trust

Cllr M A Lucas Mid Devon District Council

Cllr R F Radford Devon County Council

1. CHAIRMAN – ELECTION

RESOLVED that Cllr R F Radford be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2014/15.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Cllr C R Slade)

2. VICE CHAIRMAN - ELECTION

RESOLVED that Cllr K D Wilson be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2014/15.

(Proposed by Cllr D P O Hannon and seconded by Mr Z Grochala)

In the absence of Cllr R F Radford, the Vice Chairman took the Chair.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 March 2014, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

5. **MATTERS ARISING**

The Chairman requested that an update be provided regarding the tree and hedge management referred to in Minute 19. There had been a site visit during the summer with several members of the JAC raising concerns regarding encroaching hedges and fencing from private properties on to the edge of the tow path. It was stated that the horse drawn barge had particular problems in certain areas when trying to pass people on the tow path. The Canal Manager stated that it was difficult problem to tackle as often the deeds were unclear as to who owned the land on the boundary edge. There would be a need to contact the landowners where necessary and see if they were willing to trim back their hedges. It was stated that there was a strong case for approaching the owners of all properties with land abutting the public footpath and that the Canal would be within its rights to notify landowners that they would be trimming back overgrown vegetation. Concern was also raised regarding the planting of non-native species such as Leylandii and the damage that could be created by root growth into the Canal. During discussion it was also stated that Rights of Way legislation could be explored as a way of dealing with overgrown sections.

It was **AGREED** that the Canal Manager would update the Committee on this issue at the next meeting in March 2015 as part of the regular Progress Report.

6. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- i. He understood that the Canal Awareness Group had decided to cease its activities and withdraw its membership of the JAC. He wished for the Committee to formally express its sincere thanks and appreciation to members of the group since they had been so proactively instrumental in raising the profile of the Canal and in lobbying the necessary people to ensure the future protection of it. All members of the JAC, who were present, joined in passing on their thanks to the Group's representative, Mr Adam Pilgrim and gave everyone who had been involved with the group a round of applause. Mr Pilgrim highlighted some of the achievements of the group but explained that the Friends of the Grand Western Canal were now undertaking the same role very effectively and there was no benefit in duplication of effort. The Canal Manager informed the Committee that a bench and a plaque would be erected as a mark of appreciation to the Canal Awareness Group in due course and passed the plaque around for members to see.
- ii. He introduced Mr Nick Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services, Mid Devon District Council) to the Committee. He would be taking over the role previously held by Mr Paul Williams in supporting the Committee as the Mid Devon officer with responsibility for this area.

7. **TERMS OF REFERENCE / MEMBERSHIP REVIEW**

Members considered the Terms of Understanding* and Membership of the Committee. It was felt that the membership was working well and the correct organisations were represented on the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Understanding and the Membership of the Committee be **NOTED**.

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

Note: *Terms of Understanding and Membership previously circulated copy attached to signed minutes.

8. **PROGRESS REPORT (MARCH – SEPTEMBER 2014 INCLUSIVE)**

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

Arising thereon:

Canal embankment repairs

Thanks and appreciation were passed on to the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager and her team for ensuring that all works were sufficiently progressed to allow the reopening of the closed section in March.

Stage 2 update

The question was raised as to how certain the funding was for the future programme of practical works. The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager stated that any monies which remained unspent from stage 1 of the £3m allocated after the breach would be carried forward to stage 2. It was confirmed that the County had this amount identified in the budget for the next two years.

Embankments

The Canal Manager listed the various options available to secure the stability of the embankments and remove low points. This might include grouting the voids with a kind of liquid cement, relining the channel; or rebuilding the banks with clay. Meetings were being held to establish the best approach going forwards. Works at Westcott would not be able to proceed until a new tipping weir had been installed at Snakes Wood. The Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager and Canal Manager were keen to progress works to install tipping weirs as soon as possible, but this work would be overseen by Devon County Council's structural engineers and had to fit into their existing work programme.

Tree Works

A more commercial approach would be undertaken regarding selling coppiced wood in order to secure a small income for the canal.

Water supply

Concern was expressed regarding the continuing delay in reaching an agreement with the quarry to secure a scheme that would allow the transfer of water when stream levels were low. This was in the hands of the Planning Department at Devon County Council. A community survey was being conducted to ascertain the impact of increased transport and dust in the local vicinity. Cllr L Neville informed the Committee that there was a Quarry Liaison Group in existence which was chaired by Cllr R F Radford and which was lobbying for progress.

RESOLVED that the relevant Planning Officer from Devon County Council be requested to attend the next meeting of the JAC to update members on what was happening regarding the water transfer scheme near Fenacre Bridge.

(Proposed by Cllr D P O Hannon and seconded by Mr M Trump)

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

Aluminium stop planks

It was explained that there had been a delay in ordering the new aluminium boards, whilst Devon County Council engineers looked at alternatives. However an order would shortly be placed for the fabrication of two sets of aluminium boards.

Green Flag Award

It was reported that in addition to receiving this for the 6th consecutive year the Canal had also been awarded a Silver Gilt award from the RHS in the Britain in Bloom competition and a presentation had taken place the previous week.

Bicentenary celebrations

Despite horrendous weather on the Saturday of the National Trailboat Festival in May, thousands of people had attended on the Sunday and Monday and joined in the fun. All were congratulated for their hard work, commitment and sustained good humour during a weekend of exceptionally bad weather. It had provided a useful test of the water level monitoring equipment! It was felt that any loss of income due to the weather could be recouped during the next 12 months.

It was also agreed that the joint anniversary event celebrating the 40th anniversary of the horse-drawn barge operation as well as the Canal's bicentenary had also been successful despite poor weather.

Weed management

There had been many complaints from the public regarding the amount of weed in the canal and from boat users as a result of restrictions to the water flow. The Canal Manager circulated photographs showing various types of weed cutting boats built by two different companies that were being considered for purchase. Further research was being undertaken to reach a decision regarding the best option going forwards. A boat which could be operated by one person rather than two was the preferred option.

Discussion took place regarding the levels of nitrates and phosphates in the water both as a result of the weeds and the water runoff from adjoining land that have received chemical treatment. The Committee were informed that the Environment Agency undertook monthly testing of the water quality at two locations along the canal. Some Committee members felt that this testing ought to be conducted far more regularly and stated that testing kits could be purchased very cheaply. It was suggested that perhaps the volunteers working for the Canal could conduct more regular testing or that particularly interested people (such as University students) may be interested in undertaking a project.

Discussion also took place regarding dog fouling and the effect of this on businesses operating alongside the canal. The Cabinet Member for the Environment at Mid Devon District Council informed the Committee that District Officers had mobile signs which could be located in particular trouble spots, they could also do spot patrols. He requested that the Committee provide feedback regarding problematic areas. There was a suggestion from the Committee that dogs should be kept on a leads whilst being walked on the tow path.

Adam Pilgrim was asked to meet with some interested members of the GWCJAC and relevant County and District Councils' Officers and discuss ways of addressing this issue.

It was further **AGREED** that the Chairman of the JAC contact the Canal Manager outside of the meeting to discuss water testing going forwards and that an update be provided to the next meeting.

Visitor monitoring

The Canal Manager explained how the visitor numbers were calculated stating that they were based on 180,000 car movements with a percentage added on for those visitors not in cars. It was suggested that consideration may need to be given to car parking charges in the future given possible reduced funding.

Funding

The Committee were informed that the District Council's annual grant setting process had commenced and that they had been asked to consider the

impacts of a 33% cut and a 66% cut in funding. The Committee felt very strongly that this should not be referred to as a 'grant' by the District Council. The Council was a core funder of the district's greatest asset bringing economic benefits and tourism to the area. Rather than be seen as an expense or 'debt' to the Council it should be something that they invested in. If funding was cut then it was suggested by the Vice Chairman that the District Council might need to reconsider its position on the JAC. It was pointed out to the Committee however, that no decision regarding the following financial year's funding had yet been made.

Major projects for the next 12 months

The Committee were informed that a review of the Canal Management Plan had been delayed as a result of repairs to the breach and the Bicentenary celebrations but that an extension to the current plan would be put in place as soon as possible. The Chairman requested that the Clerk send an email link to the current plan to all members of the JAC.

9. **MINUTES OF THE WILDLIFE ADVISORY GROUP MEETING**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the minutes * of a meeting held on 8 September 2014 by the Wildlife Advisory Group. The following issues were raised during discussion:

Fish issues

The Environment Agency was to be congratulated on replenishing the Canal with fish following the breach.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman of the JAC write a letter to the Environment Agency on behalf of the JAC thanking them for undertaking to restock the Canal in order to replace the young fish which had been lost during the breach.

Birds and Dragonflies

It was not clear why the numbers of Coots had dwindled so much although there was some suggestion elsewhere in the country that it could be related to blue/green algae. It was confirmed that the Canal was one of the top sites in the region for Moorhens, Dragonflies and Kingfishers, especially during the winter.

Note: *Minutes previously circulated, copy attached to signed minutes.

10. **BREACH REPAIR**

Discussion regarding this matter had taken place earlier in the meeting but it was reiterated that remediation works were now almost complete.

11. **FENACRE FARM WORKS**

Discussions were taking place with the landowners and the Committee would be kept updated.

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Vice Chairman raised the following two items of business:

- i. He requested that Planning Department representation on the JAC be considered as an agenda item at the March 2015 meeting.
- ii. He also wished to thank Mr A Pilgrim on behalf of the Committee for his continued watchful eye on planning applications which may affect the Canal.

It was **AGREED** that a letter of thanks be sent by the Chairman to James Sims, Quarry Operations Manager at Aggregate Industries, for supplying each member of the JAC with a copy of the booklet entitled 'The History of Westleigh Quarry in the County of Devon'.

It was suggested that Committee members consider how they might celebrate 40 years of the existence of the JAC in 2015 and email the group with suggestions.

13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting be held on Tuesday 3 March 2015 at 7pm in the Exe Meeting Room, Phoenix House, Tiverton.

(The meeting closed at 9.20pm)

CHAIRMAN

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