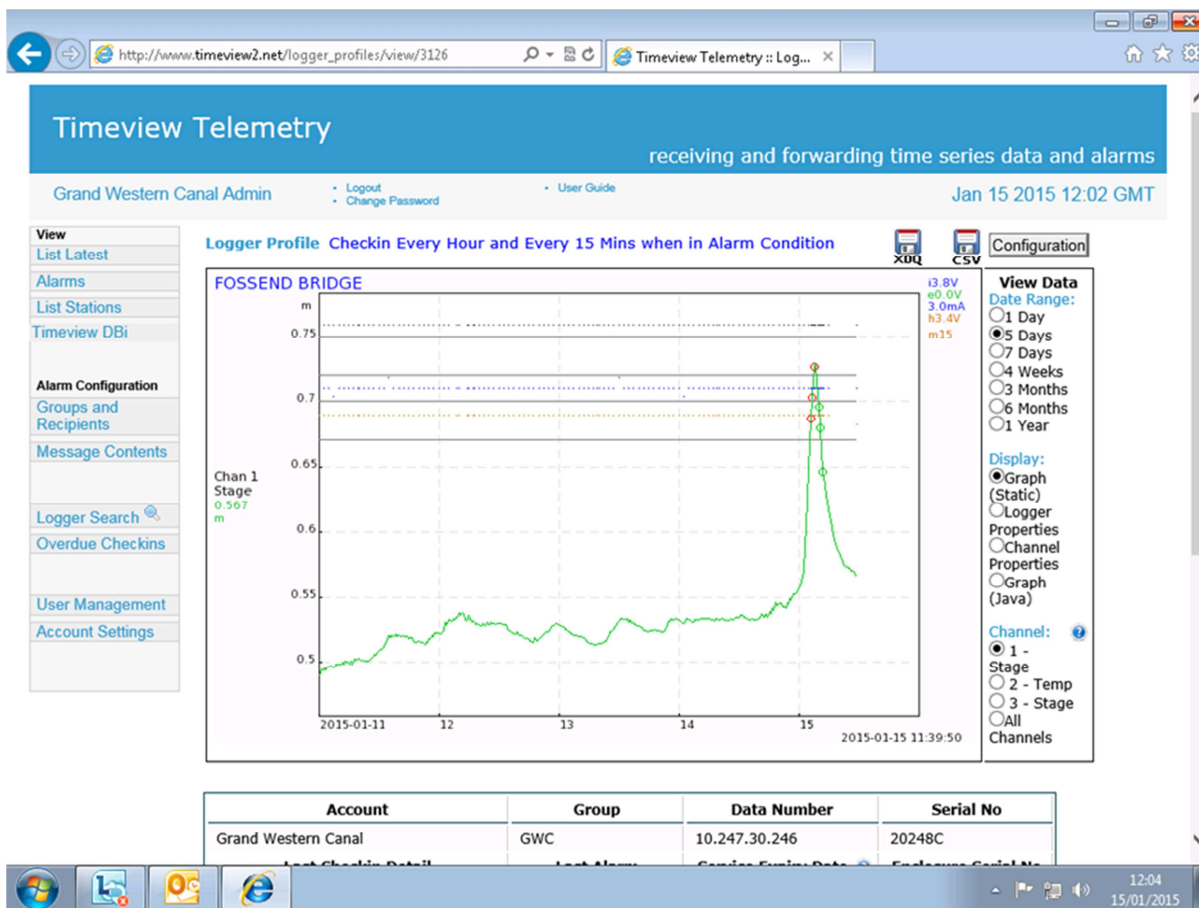


**Progress Report** (Oct 2014 – Feb 2015 inclusive)

## 1. Fenacre Farm flooding issues

Devon County Council continues to be concerned by works undertaken by an adjacent owner beside Fenacre Bridge. Since the last JAC meeting, DCC has undertaken works on Canal land to create a clay bund which blocks off pipes that were previously directing floodwater to the Canal and provides a much greater level of support to prevent failure of the causeway that carries the footpath closest to the canal.

However, the level of flood protection currently afforded to the canal is still significantly less than before the section of ridge was removed. During a relatively moderate rainfall event overnight on the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> January 2015, the canal water levels spiked and the alarm was triggered, as shown in the graph below.



The Canal Manager was woken by the alarm and responded quickly to bring levels back down, but witnessed water flowing over the top of the causeways and clay bund and into the canal.

DCC has engaged its hydrological consultants Jacobs to further investigate the issue and update its modelling with a view to strengthening DCC's understanding and evidence ahead of further action to be taken to address the increased threat of flooding to the Canal affected by these works.

## **2. Tree Works**

Regular towpath users will have noticed a significant increase in the quantity of tree works undertaken along the canal this winter. The works have comprised:

- The usual trimming back, crown-lifting and coppicing undertaken annually by the Canal Rangers.
- Targeted felling and removal of trees (through herbicide treatment of stumps) – particularly Willows – undertaken by the Canal Rangers in response to JAC comments about the changing nature of the canal landscape.
- Removal of dead branches from mature towpath-side Oaks between Tiverton and East Manley Bridge, by contractors.
- Coppicing of trees on embankments - undertaken by tree surgeons as part of the DCC 'Stage 2' capital project. The largest blocks of this work have been undertaken in the following areas: East Manley–the aqueduct; Ayshford Bridge-100m NE; Watton Bridge – 300m NE; Westcott Bridge – 100m SW.
- Coppicing and crown-lifting of waterside trees in Snakes Wood undertaken by contractors in order to reduce shading and encourage growth of marginal plants to protect against bankside erosion (see below for further explanation)
- Various other pieces of tree work undertaken by contractors including pollarding Poplars at Coot Hide, Sampford Peverell; coppicing a clump of Sycamores beside Manley Bridge; carrying out small scale works near Boehill Bridge, Fenacre Bridge and Whipcott Bridge; and assisting the Canal Rangers coppice blocks of trees on the offside slope of Greenway cutting.
- The Canal Rangers have also undertaken significant crown-lifting works on Lime trees beside Sampford Peverell picnic site and between Chains Road and Battens Bridge, and have coppiced and felled trees at Lowdwells Lock, Fenacre Bridge, Rock Bridge, Tidcombe Bridge and either side of Boehill Bridge.
- Removal of trees that have fallen into the canal. This winter only one of these – a large poplar near Whipcott Bridge – has required the hiring in of a telehandler with timber grab and operator to remove it from the canal.
- Severing of ivy to reduce the 'sail effect' in a number of the canal's trees – particularly in the cutting between Fenacre Bridge and Waytown Tunnel.
- Works to coppice a large number of willows and alders below Little Tidcombe and opposite Litelbury Road had to be postponed due to the adjacent landowner's insistence that the ground was too wet to bring in the chipper (with in-built winch, that was necessary to do the work), without damaging the field. We will look to undertake this work in early autumn 2015.

## **3. Hedges**

This winter hedges have been laid by rangers and volunteers at the following locations:

- 100m NE of Buckland Bridge
- Immediately SW of Buckland Bridge
- Sampford Peverell Picnic site
- Coot Hide, Sampford Peverell

A contractor laid a section near Wilcombe Primary School, Tiverton. Our final Volunteer Day of the winter (on March 8<sup>th</sup>) will involve laying a section of hedge on our boundary with

adjacent farmland on the offside of the canal near the golf course at the northernmost point of the Swan's Neck.

50m of hedging whips (Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Holly planted at 6 per metre) have been planted at locations along the canal, mostly beside Sampford Peverell picnic site, but also in front of the new fence erected last summer close to Tidcombe Bridge and visited during the JAC site visit.

#### **4. Embankments**

##### **Westcott Bridge – 150m SW**

At the time of writing (17/2/15) work to coppice bankside trees along the offside bank from Westcott Bridge to the culvert which lies 80m to the SW is approaching completion. DCC engineers have not yet determined exactly what method will be used to seal the leaks which run through the embankment in this section, but whatever method is used, the trees would have been in the way and so have been felled.

A ditching contractor has cleaned out the ditch that runs along the foot of the towpath-side embankment in this section in order to make it possible to assess the amount of leakage through the embankment on this side. Previously, areas of standing water in the ditch were potentially hiding leaks. It is now possible to see where leaks are running into the cleaned out ditch. The level of leakage is not great, but water levels are currently being held fairly low, and leakage may increase (and will be monitored) as water levels rise. Engineers will take the levels of leakage on both sides into account before deciding on what course of action to take.

##### **Ebear Bridge – the sluice**

Some sections of the ditches at the feet of these embankments (towpath side and offside) were becoming increasingly overgrown and so a contractor was engaged to cut back the encroaching trees, brambles and other vegetation. This has enabled a complete inspection of the ditches. No major new leaks were discovered but all the small, previously known leaks have been better marked and recorded. The Canal Ranger Service will undertake or organise an annual cutting programme to ensure the ditches remain clear for inspection.

##### **Sellake embankment**

A contractor has undertaken the cutting of the offside embankment (the canal Rangers had done much of this last winter, but the brambles had grown head-high again). The embankment is now several inches deep in short pieces of bramble mulch. The Canal Manager will be leading a team of 2<sup>nd</sup> Tiverton Scouts to rake up this mulch and expose the bare ground underneath. The mulch will be burnt and the regrowth from bramble plants will be treated with herbicide, before the embankment is reseeded with grass. The hope is then for one of the adjacent landowners to graze the embankment with sheep (both have indicated this may be possible) in order to prevent the recolonization by brambles and thorn trees.

At the time of writing, the contractor should shortly be back to cut the towpath side embankment. Future management here will focus on preventing scrubby growth by annual cutting with brushcutters / loppers.

## **5. Towpath works**

### **Gullies in towpath-side banks:**

The Canal Manager has been becoming increasingly concerned about the proliferation of eroded gullies in the towpath-side banks, many of which are eating in towards the surfaced section of towpath and could become a safety hazard for towpath users. Whilst a small number of these have probably been dug by fishermen, the majority have been caused either by dogs climbing in and out of the water, or by water running across the towpath and into the canal.

The worst cases were between Burlescombe and Waytown Tunnel, and in one case was preventing safe maintenance vehicle access along the towpath. A large number to the north of Fenacre Bridge have been caused by water running down from the road above. All of the gullies in this area have now been filled in by contractors using stone-filled gabion baskets or gabion mattresses, meaning that even if the water continues to run through, the bank will not be eroded. Whilst the contractors had an excavator on site to help with the work, it was also deployed to scrape off loose mud along the edge of the towpath and to do some small-scale ditching work.

Elsewhere along the canal, where the cause of erosion is dogs or anglers rather than running water, large loose rocks retained by posts and covered with soil will be installed by the canal rangers.

### **Towpath widening:**

A section of the towpath on the Swan's Neck to the NE of the wooded area opposite the golf course is becoming increasingly narrow as vegetation encroaches and mud is pressed over by maintenance vehicle tyres. Not only is this a problem for towpath users – who are squeezed into an ever narrower space – but also for the Canal rangers and contractors, with only 4WD vehicles now able to access this section.

Recently the PROW and Country Parks Manager has been able to access some cycleway improvement capital funding to be used for widening the towpath around the Swans Neck (from the golf course to Greenway Bridge). A contractor is due to start and complete this work before the end of March.

### **Towpath drainage:**

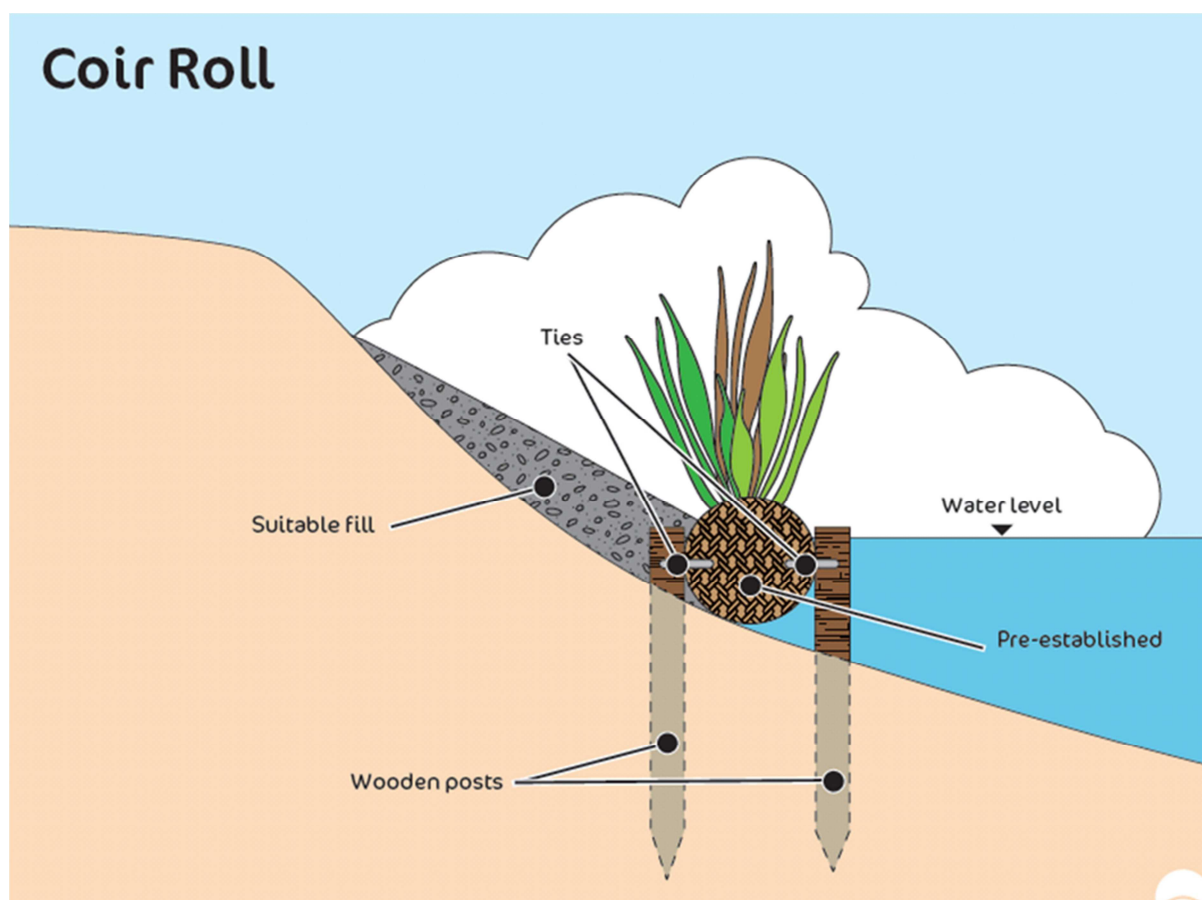
With its main focus this winter having been on organising and delivering the major programme of tree works, the Canal Ranger Service has not been able to keep such a close eye on the condition of the towpath and in some areas - such as the section near Tidcombe Primary school - large puddles formed because drainage channels had become blocked. Once made aware of the problem, works was quickly undertaken to re-open the drainage channels. The Canal Manager requests that the formation of any large puddles along the towpath is reported so that Rangers can swiftly respond.

## **6. Snakes Wood**

For a number of years the towpath-side bank in Snake's Wood has been slowly worn away by a combination of the drawdown and return of water as the horse-drawn barge passes several times a day, and by the action of dogs climbing in and out of the water. The reason that this has become a problem here is due to the heavy shading by trees. The canopy had

closed over the canal and as a result bankside vegetation had died off leaving bare soil which is easily eroded.

The long term solution to this problem is to re-establish marginal vegetation along the waters edge. The roots of the plants will help to bind the bank together and the leaves will help to buffer the impacts of boat wash and drawdown. In order to enable plants to establish, a number of offside trees (mostly alders) have been coppiced to let more light in (this also being the southern side of the canal). The towpath side trees have also been crown-lifted to maximise light penetration. The next stage will be to install approximately 100m of coir rolls (nets stuffed tightly with coconut husk) planted up with suitable marginal plants (most likely to be pendulous sedge – a native marginal plant which does well in shady conditions) along the waters edge.



The aim is to complete this work before horse-drawn barge trips commence on April 1<sup>st</sup>, but this is subject to the availability of the coir rolls and the contractor to install them (we are currently awaiting quotes). Once installed, the coir will rot down within 5 years, and we can trim off any protruding posts, just leaving the established plants behind.

## 7. Lowdells Lock

On the day of the breach in Nov 2012, the canal overtopped the lock and flooded the area of dry canal bed behind, creating a 2m deep pond which held a substantial volume of water. We noticed that some of this water was seeping through the bank that was retaining it. Concerned that it may fail, we called in DCC engineers to inspect it. They advised that they

did not consider that it was about to fail at that point in time, but that measures should be taken in the medium term to address the problem.

In December, contractors used a substantial quantity of clay which had previously been deposited beside the lock (for an abandoned lock restoration project) to reline the bank through which the water had been seeping. Prior to this, Rangers had cleared a number of willows that were growing in the bank. The stumps of those to be covered in clay had been treated with herbicide. The intention is to keep the dry canal bed behind the lock clear and open with regular mowing. A new interpretation panel is being prepared, which will be installed beside the lock and which will explain to visitors the history of the lock, and will also describe a circular walk that can be undertaken from that point incorporating the old towpath along the disused section of canal heading towards Wellington.

## **8. 2015 Photo Competition**

The Canal Rangers have recently launched a photo competition which will run until the end of November 2015. The competition will help promote the canal, encourage visits, and will also generate a large number of photos which DCC will have rights to use in future publicity and promotion. The prize fund of £450 of Photo Lesk vouchers has been generated through contributions by County Cllrs Radford and Hannon through their locality budgets, and from the competition sponsors Photo Lesk of Gold Street, Tiverton.

## **9. New weedboat**

A proportion of the DCC 'Stage 2' capital budget has been earmarked for the purchase of a new weedboat. The Friends of the Grand Western Canal have also pledge a few thousand pounds toward the purchase. Our intention is to purchase a weedboat which cuts and then collects (such as shown below) rather than a weed harvesting boat.



At the time of writing, the invitation to tender is due to be released this week and the expectation is that the boat will be supplied by early summer 2015. In the meantime our existing weed harvesting boat remains useable and it is envisaged that both boats will be used until such time as the weed harvester becomes uneconomic to maintain.

## **10. Canal Basin play area**

The ambition to create a children's play area in the under-used grassed area between the towpath, Canal Hill and the ramp from the public toilets, looks likely to be realised as the



funding target of £50k is close to being reached. The funding has been raised through money left over from the visitor centre construction, Tiverton Town Council contributions, and most recently by a generous pledge of £10k by County Cllr Hannon, from his Investing in Devon budget.

In the coming weeks a press release will be issued to mark the start of a consultation period, within which we will be consulting local families, child-minders, and early years groups on what equipment they would most appreciate. We would also appreciate any comments from JAC members, with regard to the potential impact on the canal landscape and businesses.

## **11. Visitor Centre**

In order to make the purpose of the visitor centre building clear to visitors and to encourage greater use, a new oak panel has been designed and built to be installed beside the towpath. The design has been sandblasted onto a large block of oak and then painted white.

A steel frame has been made up to support the panel in the ground and this is currently being galvanised. The panel will be installed in mid March. The project has been funded by a £2k contribution by County Cllr Hannon from his locality budget.

Inside the visitor centre, repairs have been made to one of the retrosopes which had been damaged by misuse. The addition of a ratchet should prevent the misuse (rapidly winding the handle backwards) from occurring in future. The other retroscope is currently having the same alterations made.

The timeline display is also being extended to incorporate the 2012 breach and the 2014 bicentenary celebrations. In order to facilitate this, the last two panels will need to be taken down and will be 'missing' for about a week so that the printers can precisely match colours on the replacement panels.

Later in the year some updates and corrections to the touchscreen system will also be made.



## **12. Green Flag Award**

The application for a 2015/16 Green Flag Award has been submitted and we are awaiting details of judging dates. This year we also plan to invest more effort in gaining a good RHS South West in Bloom, Country Parks Category award.

## **13. Canal Basin car park**

The hedge above the disabled parking bays near the Canal Tea Rooms and Garden is beyond the reach of a tractor-mounted flail and as a result has been growing out away from

the wall for many years. In order to bring it back under control and make this part of the car park tidier, a telehandler with a work platform was hired, which enabled the Canal Rangers to trim back the hedge. Ivy growth on the roof of the public toilets was also removed.

#### **14. Canal Awareness Group finale**

Following CAG's announcement last year that the group would be ceasing its activities, the canal Ranger Service have now installed a bench with a plaque, which states DCC's gratitude for their valuable efforts in support of the canal since 1997. The group met recently for the unveiling of this new bench and the event was also attended by Cllr Hannon, representing DCC. The group also met on a separate occasion along with Cllr Radford and members of Dudley Weatherley's family, to unveil a new replacement plaque to go on 'Dudley's rocks' in the Canal Basin car park. The last act of the group was to give its remaining funds (in the form of a cheque for £387) to the Friends of the Grand Western Canal.

#### **15. Benches**

The Canal Rangers have built and installed oak memorial benches at the following locations since Oct 2014:

- Warnicombe Bridge\*
- Embankment by Wilcombe Primary School
- Opposite the sluice near Burlescombe\*
- Between Wilcombe Primary School and William Authers Footbridge\*

Those marked with an asterisk\* replaced existing softwood benches.

#### **16. Mink**

Since 2009, a number of water mammal monitoring rafts have been located along the canal and checked monthly by a volunteer. Usually he finds prints left by Otters, rats and other small rodents, but for the first time, he is reasonably confident that mink prints have been left on the clay marker pads of several rafts.

The Canal Manager has had discussions with EA wildlife staff and has informed Wildlife Advisory Group members. There is no intention to undertake any mink trapping at present and this is unlikely to happen unless part of a catchment-wide programme promoted by the EA, or the GWC is agreed to be a receptor site for a Water Vole translocation project (not something presently being discussed/considered).

#### **17. LDV Convoy replacement**

The Canal Ranger Service's LDV Convoy double-cab tipper van has been becoming increasingly expensive to maintain in recent years and according to the manager of the SWH vehicle workshop where it is serviced, is approaching the point where it becomes uneconomic to repair it any more. The Convoy is a real workhorse for the Canal Rangers and is crucial both for the day to day maintenance of the canal, the generation of income (through log sales) for emergency response, and all-round asset management. .



Consequently, following an assessment of the available replacement vehicles an order has been placed for a Nissan Cabstar double-cab tipper. The Cabstar has the same wheelbase as the Convoy which means it will be able to access the towpath at all the same access points as the Convoy, and it is slightly narrower which will be an advantage in terms of keeping the tyres on the surfaced part of the towpath. It is due to be delivered in late June.

## **18. Events**

19 people attended and enjoyed a Christmas Wreath and decoration workshop.

Age UK have been liaising with the Canal Ranger Service and the Tiverton Canal Co regarding a fundraising event they wish to hold in the Canal Basin on Sat 25<sup>th</sup> April. The event is summarised in the Appendix 1 of this report. Agreement has been given in principle, subject to any alterations thought necessary by the JAC. Age UK's intention is to make this an annual event.

## **19. Walk and talk**

Two 'walk and talk' events have been led by Canal Rangers since October. The walk on the 19<sup>th</sup> Nov attracted 15 walkers and the walk on 18<sup>th</sup> February attracted 19 walkers.

## **20. Talks**

Since October, the Canal Manager has given talks about the canal to North Devon U3A, Sandford WI, the Woodbury Friends and Neighbours Group and the MDDC Community Wellbeing Policy Development Group.

## **21. School visits**

There has been one ranger-led school visit since October, with Wilcombe Primary School bringing 44 pupils over two days in early October to do pond-dipping.

## **22. Volunteers**

163 volunteer days have been completed during the October – Feb period. This number is down somewhat as one of our regular weekday volunteers is recuperating for several months following a routine operation.

## **Future programme of practical works**

- Complete tree and hedge works before bird nesting season
- Install coir rolls in Snake's Wood
- Towpath improvements on Swan's Neck
- Gully filling along canal banks
- Installation of panel outside visitor centre
- Sellake embankment raking, spraying and seeding
- Landscaping / removal of dredgings piled up near Rock Bridge
- All usual sign / noticeboard / fence / gate repairs and maintenance
- All usual weed-cutting, mowing and strimming

## **Appendix 1 – Summary of Canal Basin event provided by Age UK**

### **Canal family fun day, and 10k event, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2015.**

#### Event Summary

The event comprises two elements. Firstly a family fun day, taking place at the Tiverton Canal Basin. Secondly, a sponsored 10k walk/run/cycle starting at lower town car Park, Sampford Peverall .Ending at the canal basin.

The event is in aid of Age UK Mid Devon, a locally funded charity providing a range of vital services to those over the age of 50, living in the Mid Devon area.

#### Event Date

Saturday April 25<sup>th</sup> 2015

#### Event Time

The Family fun day will be open from 1000-1700, There will be some additional noise etc at the canal basin before and after the event as traders will be able to set up from 0730, and packing away will take until 1900.

Cyclists will set off from Sampford Peverall (SP) at 0900, based on average cycling speed of 10km/h arrive at Canal basin at 1000

Runners will set off from SP at 0915, based on average running speed of 7kph arriving at Canal Basin at 1045.

Walkers at 0930, based on average walking speed of 4.98km/h arriving at Canal Basin at 1130-1200.

The staggered start minimises risk to those taking part, and other canal/site users.

#### Risk Assessment

The event manager Mr Julian Chidgey, is qualified to Level 3 in Risk Assessment Principles and Practise by The Chartered Institute for Environmental Health. A full risk assessment of the areas being utilised will take place before the event. Stallholders/traders will be required to do likewise, before being allowed onto the site.

#### Insurance

Age UK Mid Devon hold public liability insurance (£5,000,000) issued by Zurich Insurance PLC, policy number CHMIA1000543. A copy of which is enclosed. Stallholders/traders attending will be required to provide a copy of their own PLI before being allowed onto the site.

#### First aid

We are currently working with The St John's ambulance to ensure correct level of first aid cover is provided. Either by themselves or others. A First Aid station which will be clearly sign posted, and positioned at the finish line (as marked on the annotated map).

### Lost children

A lost children station will be clearly sign posted, staffed by DBS cleared staff. A safe process will be in place for the return of children, involving identification of parents/guardians.

### Marshalling/Management

Age UK Mid Devon have a volunteer force of over 100, we are currently assessing interest to see how many 'in-house' volunteers we can mobilise for the event. If we fall short on required numbers, we will look at involving other groups such as The Sea Cadets and Street Pastors.

Full training and briefing will be provided to all volunteers in the run up to the event. All required equipment will be issued to those marshalling in advance of the event. Marshalls will be located at key points around the canal basin site.

### Rubbish

After the event, any rubbish will be removed during a litter picking session. Traders/stall holders will be expected to remove any rubbish from their pitch when they leave.

### Cycle storage

To reduce risk of bicycles being stolen or becoming a trip hazard a cycle area will be in place, as marked on the annotated map. Mark Baker, mentioned the possibility of the council providing one?

### Outcomes

- Opportunity to raise a large sum of money, for a great cause working in the local community.
- Increased awareness and usage of the Canal Country Park.
- Encourages social cohesion through an annual community event.

