

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 2 March 2021 at 7.00 pm

JAC Members Present:

Cllr C R Slade	Devon County Council (Chairman)
Cllr R Croad	Devon County Council
Cllr R F Radford	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr L Cruwys	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C Collis	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs C P Daw	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Mrs S Griggs	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr K Browse	Halberton Parish Council
Cllr D Cutts	Sandford Peverell Parish Council
Cllr J R Rendle	Tiverton Town Council
Mr P Brind	The Tiverton Canal Company
Mrs Pat Brind	Mid Devon Moorings
Mr R Hodgson	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr A Pilgrim	Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim	Inland Waterways Association
Mr P Saupe	Tiverton Unit Sea Cadets
Mr M Trump	Tiverton and District Angling Club
Mr J Hampshire	Cycling UK
Mr Trevor White	Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr Ray Jones	Devon Bird Watching and Preservation
Society	

Others Present:

Cllr R J Dolley	Mid Devon District Council
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Officers:

Mr M Baker	Canal Manager, DCC
Mrs R Mills	Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, DCC
Mr S Densham	Land Management Officer, MDDC
Mrs S Lees	Member Services Officer, MDDC

19 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the following members of the Committee:

- Mr Graham Moore – Canal Businesses Group
- Mr Dion Howells – Community Patrol Boat
- Cllr Jo Norton – MDDC, Canonsleigh Ward
- Cllr Luke Trevelyan – Burlescombe Parish Council

20 **PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS**

The protocol for remote meetings was **NOTED**.

21 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chairman read out a question on behalf of Mr Stephen Pugh:

“Regarding the minutes of 6/10/20 item 10 Tidcombe Hall.....the Committee resolved to object to the planning application in the strongest possible terms.

These were published on 6/11/20.

The agent responded to these points/published on 18/1/21.

My Question

Will the GWCJAC be replying to that document?”

The Chairman stated that this would be considered during the ‘Minutes of the previous meeting’ item.

Michelle White had sent in the following question which was again read out by the Chairman:

We are a family of 4 living in Halberton and we love the canal. We are keen paddle boarders and we own a canoe, so we can all enjoy the canal together. Currently the fees for doing so would be £200 per year, which I believe is unnecessary and unfair for families living in the local area. We have spoken to other families in the area who have similar views. Also I don't understand how the current fee is justified? Respectful paddle boarders, especially locals, have minimal impact on the canal, you could argue less than walkers or bike riders. I understand fees can be helpful in the maintenance of the canal and we would be happy to pay a small fee, such as £10 per board per year, and then hopefully more people will be prepared to pay the fee, bringing in more of an income.

The Canal Manager stated that the level of fees for unpowered boats had been agreed by a JAC working group back in 2010 and they had not been increased since then. They had looked at the level of fees charged by other venues offering water sports and the fees had been pitched at a similar level to those. Rather than the fees putting people off, there had been an increase in the number of people wishing to use unpowered craft on the canal. However, there was a need to review the boat permit system this year and consideration would be given for increasing the discount for families and individuals with multiple boats.

22 **MINUTES**

The minutes from the meeting held on 6 October 2020, having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record.

23 MATTERS ARISING

In response to the question posed during Public Question Time the Chairman stated that as a Committee the JAC had strongly objected to the Tidcombe Hall planning application and had posed searching questions to the agent. He asked whether there was anything more the Committee could do? It was reported that the agent had been dismissive in his or her reply, none of the reply had been constructive and that there was little more that could be done. During further discussion of this matter it was felt that the agent had not taken into account the relevant knowledge of particular Committee members who fully understood the structure of the canal and the effect upon it of potential development adjacent to it. It was confirmed that a large number of objections had been made to the application and it would be for the Planning Committee of Mid Devon District Council to determine.

It was **AGREED** that rather than write again to the applicant or agent the Committee would send a letter to the relevant Planning Officer stating its strong objections again and reiterating the comments made during the meeting tonight.

24 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

1. He informed the Committee that Cllr Luke Trevelyan would be the representative from Burlescombe Parish Council on the Committee going forwards.
2. He thanked the Canal Manager and his team for keeping the canal open during the winter months and whilst under Covid restrictions. It had been very busy with local people using it for their daily exercise.

25 PROGRESS REPORT

The Canal Manager stated that there were a number of things to update the Committee on since the publication of the report and agenda:

- a. Tree felling works were currently being undertaken due to Ash dieback at Battens Bridge. Approximately 50 trees were to be felled where the road ran parallel to the canal.
- b. Four trees had been planted in memory of Miss Jean Hall and Miss Joy Yeates and a ceremony would be held in the spring once Covid restrictions allow this.
- c. Towpath resurfacing work was due to take place underneath five bridges in the next four weeks.
- d. With regard to the issue of swans flying into powerlines in the Canal Basin, Western Power Distribution have provided dates in mid-April when they plan to bundle multiple lines up into one thick line to reduce the possibility of any further incidents occurring.
- e. The contractor is due to be back in April to rectify faults with the aqueduct relining.

26 REVIEW ACTION PLAN TARGETS IN THE CANAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Canal Manager informed the Committee that there would be an annual review of action plan targets and it would receive a report each March. The format and content of the report was briefly outlined with the Committee being informed that there had been good progress on the majority of the targets despite Covid.

Discussion took place regarding:

- There appeared to be little reference to gate or boundary arrangements on offsite land within the management plan. It had been observed that a number of constructions had appeared with some people extending their gardens thereby encroaching onto canal land. The Canal Manager explained that the majority of adjacent residents along the offside banks had a Garden Agreement which was a legal agreement for use of the land and for which there was an annual charge. Those with landing stages had had discussions with the Canal Manager about the design and materials prior to their construction. A number of properties adjacent to the towpath on the Glebelands estate own the land right up to the towpath and so DCC has no control over the management of the hedges or fences on those boundaries, but will ensure that hedge growth does not encroach on the towpath.
- Management of the flower bed at the entrance to the Canal Basin car park and the creation of new wildflower meadows near Bamfylde Close, Ebear Bridge and at the Sampford Peverell picnic site.
- The toilets at the Canal Basin being vandalised recently with bottles being smashed on a number of occasions.
- Dog fouling and whether or not there were enough bins. It was MDDC's responsibility to empty the bins, but they would only do this at vehicle access points. The Canal Manager felt there were enough bins, with them being located at all the main access points, but that unfortunately a minority of dog owners regularly fail to pick up after their dog.

27 COMMUNITY PATROL BOAT VERBAL UPDATE

Mr Dion Howell, the operator of the Community Patrol Boat had sent apologies to the meeting therefore an update would be provided at the next meeting.

28 COMMUNITY PATROL BOAT - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the draft Terms of Reference for the Community Patrol Boat.

The Canal Manager explained that it had been an action from the last JAC meeting that a set of draft Terms of Reference be drawn up by a small working group and brought back to the Committee for consideration and comment. The working group had met in January and considered all relevant factors.

The following comments were made:

- Lighting requirements for use of the boat at night. However, it was felt that details such as this would be better placed in a risk assessment rather than the terms of reference.

- The level of qualification needed by the skipper and whether that outlined in the draft TOR was a bit excessive? It was explained that the current skipper already held these qualifications, but it would be possible to look at more appropriate qualifications going forwards.
- Whether the wording in section 10 was appropriate with regard to 'cycling under bridges being prohibited'.

29 **CANAL USE DURING COVID RESTRICTIONS (ADAM PILGRIM)**

Mr Adam Pilgrim had requested that the following question be put before the Committee:

Why are Grand Western Canal users such as canoeists and paddle-boarders allowed to use the canal during the Covid restrictions but motorised boat users are not?"

In considering the question the following issues were raised:

- The difficulties in interpreting changing Government guidelines during the pandemic. Exercise was allowed during the lockdown and the interpretation of the rules within the waterways sector was that this did not include recreational boating, but did include canoeing and kayaking.
- It had originally been thought that fishing would be prohibited but the Angling Trust had successfully lobbied Government and so angling has been allowed.

30 **TOURISM GROUP- VERBAL UPDATE**

Cllr Mrs Sue Griggs had been tasked at the previous meeting to talk to the appropriate officer at MDDC with responsibility for tourism to set up an informal working group with a view to doing all that was necessary to promote the canal further.

Cllr Mrs Griggs explained that she had met with the relevant officers and had reached an agreement whereby as soon as Covid restrictions were lifted they would be moving forwards with this by looking at such issues as signage and hospitality and tourism websites. It was also noted that the canal had been extremely well used during the pandemic. A lot was also being done through Facebook to promote the canal as well as the 'Visit Mid Devon' website. Despite this, there was still a lot more that could be done and Mr Phil Brind requested that he be included in any future meetings discussing this issue.

A concern was raised about what appeared to be diminishing facilities for visiting boaters, for example, a shortage of trailer storage and lack of water supplies at Minnows. It was becoming more difficult to promote the canal within the trail-boating community.

31 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following matters were raised under this item:

- Mrs Ros Mills informed the Committee that she would be taking early retirement and leaving in May. She stated that it had been a pleasure working

with the JAC and thanked members for all they do to support the Canal and the Ranger Team; there had been some interesting times such as meeting up with various members in the middle of the night when the breach occurred! The Chairman thanked Mrs Mills for her valuable contribution to the JAC and wished her well. The comment was made that Mrs Mills would be taking a lot of expertise and knowledge with her.

- The question was asked as to whether there had been any progress regarding the water management system at Westleigh quarry? It was explained that progress had been delayed due to Covid and that recent discussions with Aggregate Industries have been positive, and they are being proactive in allocating resources to push this matter forward. The main issue had centred around an application for water abstraction nearing its expiry date. This had meant that the Environment Agency had insisted that a new application was needed, however, communication with the EA had been limited and progress was taking a lot longer than expected. It was felt to be vital for the JAC to keep a watchful eye on this issue and strong concerns was expressed that no progress was being made.

32 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Additional items for the agenda (other than those which usually came) were identified as follows:

- Update on the Fenacre Water System and in particular the Environment Agency and Aggregate Industries situation.
- Ideas for how Iona, the horse drawn barge, could be used to best effect within the Canal Basin.

It was also requested that a summer site visit by Committee members take place if and when Covid restrictions were lifted.

33 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was **AGREED** that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 5th October 2021 at 7pm.

(The meeting ended at 8.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN