

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