

Minutes



Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Joint Steering Group

Date: 31 August 2017

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors David Mayer (in the Chair) & R Jeavons (Newport CC), Sean Morgan (Caerphilly CBC), Richard Roden (Monmouthshire CC), Jackie Charlton (Powys CC), Stuart Ashley & Jon Horler (Torfaen CBC)

Officers: G Lewis & M Lea (Newport), M Lewis (Monmouthshire), Gareth Jones & Heidi Carey (Torfaen), R Dommett, R Francis & W Mitchell (MBACT), A Stumpf, D Morgan & Dr A Comerford (CRT)

Apologies: Councillors J Mudd (Newport), E Stenner & C Thomas (Caerphilly) & C Thomas (Torfaen), B Illman (MBACT), M Tribbeck (Newport), C Bosley (Monmouthshire), K Francis (Powys)

1 Apologies for Absence

As noted above.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of 20 October 2016 were submitted.

Agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting were recorded as a true record.

3 Importance of Water to Canals/Implication of Legislative Changes

A presentation was made by Dr Adam Comerford of Canals & River Trust (the Trust) based at their Hatton offices in the Midlands.

In 2011 the Government published the Water White Paper. The Environment Agency and Ofwat produced two papers which looked at the pressures on water in England and Wales due to climate change and population growth and the need to reform the existing system for licensing of water abstractions. The Trust published its Water Resources Strategy in 2015 which took a long term view of the pressures on water supply for the 2000 miles of waterways managed by the Trust. One of the major pressures was increasing legislation impacting on water availability.

The Water Resources Act 1991 and Water Industry Act 1991 did not restrict navigation authorities in the abstraction of surface water. However the Water Act of 2003 replaced the exemption with a much more limited one. Navigation authorities will need to apply for licences to abstract water which will be determined by the Environment Agency/Natural Resources Wales. Although licensing was not currently in place it could be introduced in the coming months.

Dr C confirmed that whilst the cost of a licence was reasonable (£1500 per application) there would be add on costs in the form of advertising fees, monitoring and control of abstraction and securing replacement water resources.

A discussion ensued and several questions were raised:

1. It was confirmed that licences would be required for the purpose of fracking (it was expected this is already the case, as the abstraction probably does not come under any current exemption).
2. Certain organisations would not be offered compensation if they suffered loss or damage due to the Water Act 2003 abstraction licensing process (either by refusal or curtailment) – local authorities come under this umbrella if they were operating as a navigation authority.
3. The selling of water – where there is a suitable supply of water (eg. Swansea canal) the water can be sold for irrigation, industrial purposes and for drinking water. Many of these uses are consumptive, so the water does not return to the canal, but others are for non-evaporative heating/cooling, and hence the water is returned.
4. Evidence would need to be supplied of previous long standing abstractions when the need for licences comes into effect, this has to be in the four years prior to the start of the application period.
5. As water is a devolved matter for Welsh Government it was hoped it would recognise the positive role of the canal and appreciate the importance of the need to keep it replenished with water.
6. In addition, Welsh Government is consulting on “Taking Forward Wales’ Sustainable Management of Natural Resources” (deadline 30th Sept). Andrew Stumpf is co-ordinating the Trust’s response and will circulate this to all members

The Chair thanked Dr Comerford for attending the meeting and making the presentation.

4 Importance of Developing a Water Strategy

The Water Strategy presentation was made by Heidi Carey of Torfaen CBC.

Canal & River Trust as lead partner for the partnership are submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI) to the WG Sustainable Management Scheme. The maximum grant threshold is £700,000 CRT will be applying for £500,000 on behalf of the Steering Group. The submission date is 5 September and the EOI decision date 90 days later.

The presentation emphasised the need for a partnership of all five authorities and organisations to ensure there is sufficient water supply for the canal.

Current water supply needed to be identified together with new supplies and future options should be developed. There was a need to improve the accuracy of demand by future monitoring which could be carried out by community volunteers giving them a sense of ownership of parts of the canal.

The project proposed:

- Development of an inclusive water supply strategy covering all areas of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal
- Preparation of a prioritised action plan with detail work plan and fully costed projects agreed by the partnership
- Delivery of key projects as decided by the partnership with remaining capital grant monies

Questions were asked about the cost of a monitoring instrument. These vary from £1000 although more complex ones would be more costly.

Agreed:

It was agreed by all members of the group that there was a need to sign up to this project.

5 Restoration Schemes Update (incorporating Community Engagement)

The Restoration Schemes Update presentation was made by Gareth Jones of TCBC

Visit Wales Project: A bid had been submitted 18 months ago to WEFO and was currently being considered. TCBC and Caerphilly are currently working together with WG on match funding. The bid was still on course for approval and it was hoped a decision would be forthcoming within the next month.

RDP Ty Coch Restoration: This was a bid for restoration of Cabin Lock at Ty Coch carrying on volunteer led restoration and training on the Waterworks project site. It is hoped that this bid will secure funds of £160k.

RDP Ty Coch Waterpark Feasibility: MBACT had applied for £10k via the RDP local action group to compile a feasibility study for development of the land adjacent to Waterworks Project at Ty Coch. It is hoped to develop the site into a key rural visitor hub with additional water mooring and leisure facilities.

HLF Five Locks Stage One Application: A stage one heritage lottery fund bid was submitted by TCBC to develop restoration of five locks which would extend current navigation of the canal in Pontnewydd village by 1.5 miles. The project would build on current volunteer training and opportunities and look to make this element of the project sustainable by creating an income for the project.

6 Review of Memorandum of Understanding

The Memorandum of Understanding had not been reviewed since January 2013 it was therefore agreed that the officer group would need to review the document and come back to the meeting in February 2018 with suggested updates.

Agreed

That the Officer group review the current Memorandum of Understanding and report back to the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Joint Steering Group meeting in February 2018 with suggested updates.

7 Update from Individual Authorities

Newport City Council

Matthew Lea confirmed that a group of people made up of anglers, NCC staff and members of Natural Resources Wales had rescued 15000 fish following a leakage of water at 14 Locks. Half of the fish went to Rogerstone (Newport Golf Course by Bethesda Church) and the other half went to Pontywaun, Crosskeys.

A contractor had been appointed to carry out the repair and it was hoped work will start in the coming week. Following the repair the lock will be to be replenished with water. NCC would need to liaise with Caerphilly with regards to restoring the water level. Welsh Water have upgraded the pumping station at Manor Road to 20% due to problems being experienced in

the past at 14 locks. It was recommended that the Area Manager at Telford Street liaise with MBACT regarding the repair and replenishing of water at 14 Locks.

Monmouthshire County Council

MCC are progressing the registration of Goytre Wharf as a “Dark Skies Discovery Site” see <http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/things-to-do/dark-skies.aspx>

Its new responsive visitor web site, Visit Monmouthshire, also includes Goytre Wharf as a place to visit <http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/places-to-visit/goytre-wharf.aspx>

MCC’s wider tourism business support now includes an online form to upload event details onto the website <http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/events/add-your-event.aspx> which partners may find of use.

In a wider context MCC continue to work with partners to develop the access potential for cycling and walking along the canal and the Usk Valley corridor. They are working with Sustrans, the Usk Trail Access Group and Coleg Gwent to develop the long term aspiration of a shared cycle/walking path between Mamhilad and Usk and they are also liaising with Torfaen CBC over how this might link to the wider “Iron Discovery” trail idea to provide a circular route utilising existing cycleways and the canal towpath.

Finally MCC are continuing to contribute to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site partnership, including the new management plan which identifies the importance of the canal.

MBACT

A community trip boat will be in situ at Goytre Wharf in the very near future. The boat will accommodate 36 people and will be used for families and school parties. MBACT also took the opportunity to thank Newport for the recent clear up of vegetation at the Crumlin Arm.

Canal & River Trust

The Lime Kiln trail was now complete with the lime kilns having been restored at Watton Llangattock and Goytre. <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/walking/canal-trails/limekilns-trail-monmouthshire-and-brecon-canal>

The 2017 Canalathon is due to take place on Saturday 9 September and to date 35 teams had signed up for the event.

Visit Wales’ theme for 2018 is the Year of the Sea. With its partners, CRT intends submitting a proposal highlighting the canal and tramways as routes to the sea as the canal was used to transport materials from various industries in Wales to seagoing vessels.

ITV were in the process of compiling a programme on the 100 best walks in the UK and CRT were submitting canal walks.

The last programme of the series ‘Great Canal Journeys’ would feature Timothy West & Prunella Scales on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal.

Outputs from the Mon & Brecon Green Infrastructure Investment Fund are shown below. The following were Key Performance Indicators for the programme:

- 650m of canal lined
- Talybont and Llangattock aqueducts repaired
- bridges 114, 115 & 116 repaired
- 172 schoolchildren through 403 sessions—Generic Learning Outcomes tracked
- Works open day—600 visitors of whom 20 signed up as Friends, ITV Wales coverage plus local print and social media
- Canoe access at bridge 116 improved
- 362 hazel stools coppiced, some after 50 years
- 1,200 pollinator plants planted

- 3.54 km of hedgerow brought into management of which 35m has been laid and 900m diversified and gapped
- 4.587 km of canal bank replanted for diversity
- Waterways and Wildlife Handbook published
- Mon & Brecon action plan published

In addition, the programme delivered the following outputs:

- 22,500 other plants planted
- 900 metres of hedge diversified and gapped
- 458 hours of volunteer time were contributed through education activities, planting and coppicing, which also received Countryfile magazine coverage
- 2 community adoptions; one new one at Talybont on Usk and an extension to the Llangattock adoption to include wet woodland and grazing land.
- 14 training sessions
- 1 apprentice
- Environmental prospectus to be added to Hwb as a bilingual educational resource
- Extensive media coverage including BBC Countryfile.

8 **Any Other Business**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be used as a tour of the restoration sites on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal. A Stumpf confirmed that he would arrange transport. Details would be circulated when they had been confirmed.

A presentation was made to Gareth Jones who would shortly be leaving Torfaen CBC to join Powys County Council. Gareth was thanked for all of his hard work during his time with the Steering Group. Gareth responded that it had been a privilege to work with on the Steering Group. He had enjoyed the various projects the group had tackled and hoped to have some contact with them in the future.

9 **Future Meeting Dates**

The following dates were agreed:
26 October 2017

With no further matters to discuss the Chair thanked everyone for attending and also those who had made presentations.

The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified