

# Minutes



## Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Joint Steering Group

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- Date: 14 April 2016
- Time: 10.00 am
- Present: Councillors J Richards (in the Chair), K James & T Williams (Caerphilly County Borough Council), J Holmes (Powys County Council) & S Ashley (Torfaen County Borough Council)
- Officers: A Dallimore (Caerphilly CBC), G Jones & D Edwards (Torfaen CBC), D Morgan & A Stumpf (Glandŵr Cymru/Canal River Trust), R Dommett, B Illman & W Mitchell (Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust), R Wysom (Islwyn Canal Society/Wysoms Wharf), and J Howells (Newport CC)
- Apologies: Councillors D Mayer & D Davies (Newport CC), D Edwards (Monmouthshire CC), A Lewis (Caerphilly CBC) & C Thomas (Torfaen CBC), A Bolter (Caerphilly CBC) C Bosley (Monmouthshire CC), M Tribbeck (Newport CC) K Francis (Powys CC), M Buckle (Brecon Beacons NPA) and R Francis (MBACT)

*As the host Council Cllr J Richards (Newport City Council) took the Chair*

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### 1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies as noted above.

### 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 14 January 2016 were submitted.

#### **Agreed:**

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

#### **Matters Arising:**

**Item 7: Crindau Development Prospectus.** W Mitchell was pleased to report that the planning application for a new industrial unit in Crindau had been refused by Newport City Council. However, despite MBACT submitting objections to a unit of this nature being built in the area, the reasons for the refusal was risk of flooding and no reference was made to the much needed enhancement of the area making it a visitor attraction. He realised the Council officers' reasons for the recommendation but was concerned as the applicant was re-submitting the application and if Natural Resources Wales were satisfied with amendments to the application it could be approved.

The redevelopment of Crindau had been included in a previous LDP although not in the present LDP as the Inspector considered that a developer could not be sourced and the redevelopment take place within the time span of the present LDP.

W Mitchell noted that a social club had been demolished in Crindau which could be of benefit to the canal. With regard to the flooding issues in Crindau Natural Resources Wales did

prefer the raising of land as a preferred flood defence which had been done previously on the east bank of the Usk in Newport.

The Group agreed that the redevelopment of Crindau was vital for the regeneration of the canal in Newport. In June 2015 Welsh Government commissioned a report from The Urbanists to look at the development potential of the Crindau area. That report highlighted that “with the right preparation Crindau Waterside could become a vibrant and sought-after urban neighbourhood by the late 2020s.” “ In addition to its position on the River Usk, Crindau Waterside has the potential to become the terminus of the Monmouthshire & Brecon canal, which is a nationally important canal opportunity, as well as linking to the Wales Coastal Path, via the regenerated City Centre”. However the Urbanists also pointed out that without protection the site could be ripe for development with distribution sheds removing that potential for ever

**Agreed:**

W Mitchell and A Stumpf to provide Cllr Richards with a briefing note on the subject of Crindau.

**3 Funding Update -Verbal Item**

This was a verbal report by G Jones who recapped on the joint bid between Torfaen, Caerphilly, MBACT and CRT for European funding. This bid was part of a wider bid with Visit Wales. The present position is that a bid of £27.7m had been approved by WEFO. These monies would be spread across 10 projects in Wales, the regeneration of the canal being one of them. Part of the match funding package for the bid was a request for £1.5m Targeted Match Funding from the Assembly. Whilst the Assembly had agreed to match fund the majority of the projects the canal was not one of them. Feedback received from the Assembly was that they believed the project did not meet their criteria.

A letter on behalf of Torfaen and Caerphilly had been sent to the Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty asking for feedback on the process of the decision making but no reply had been received to date.

Torfaen officers had recently had a positive meeting with the Assembly regarding Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) funding. It was hoped that VVP funding could be used as part of the match funding for the Visit Wales canal bid.

Other avenues of funding were now being investigated such as lottery monies etc. It was hoped that the original project could go ahead provided all funding was to hand if not the plans would need to be prioritised as to which projects would be of most benefit to the scheme.

Volunteers from MBACT met with the European officers from Caerphilly and Newport to discuss ideas for an application for lottery funding from the ‘Create Your Space’ fund. As an application could cover Caerphilly, Newport and Monmouthshire it was decided to put forward the following:

- i. Caerphilly - Manor Road Ty Sign and the Darren - Funding towards an additional new water control Penstock which would be owned by Caerphilly CBC. Also funding to assist with the development of a new and existing community group.
- ii. Newport – (a) Remove culverted canal crossing and replace with Lift Bridge at Ruskin Avenue and also funding to assist with the development of a new Rogerstone community group.  
(b) Develop a maintenance team of 3 paid staff and volunteers over a 5 year period to carry out the maintenance of completed restoration works.

- iii. Monmouthshire - Fitting out costs of the MBACT Trip Boat which is at present berthed at the Power Station.
- iv. All areas - Provide funds towards a complete Water Based Assessment Strategy for the whole canal.

The funds applied for totalled £1.9 million

News as to whether the bid passes through stage one of the process should be forthcoming in May. If successful with stage one the Trust may be offered a development fund of up to £20k. The project development plan would have to be completed by 7th December 2016. A final decision on whether the application has been successful will be forthcoming during March 2017.

MBACT Volunteers have also applied for a £10k bid via Greggs bakery but had not yet whether the bid was successful.

A Stumpf also confirmed that a bid for the same Big Lottery Fund was being made to make the Goytre Wharf site more accessible.

R Dommatt confirmed he would be bringing a report to the next meeting on projects which had been carried out on the canal since 1999. In the past 3 consultants had carried out a feasibility study on the restoration of the canal. All 3 had confirmed that the canal could be restored provided certain projects were carried out in certain ways. Restoration of the canal is a long term project and some projects need to be carried out on an ad hoc basis (A Stumpf supported this view). However it was positive that despite local authorities experiencing financial constraints monies were still being found to restore and hopefully maintain the canal.

#### **4 Briefing: 2016 World Canal Conference (Inverness) - Verbal Item**

R Dommatt informed the group that the 2016 World Canal Conference will take place in September in Inverness. MBACT representatives would be attending the conference together with Gareth Jones of Torfaen. They were hoping to make a positive presentation at the conference.

#### **5 CRT Presentation: Adoption of Sections of Waterways by Communities - Verbal Item**

D Morgan was pleased to report that the Canals River Trust had benefitted from becoming a Trust as opposed to a public sector body. There was now a better opportunity to engage with the public.

A report had been prepared following a 'canal adoptions: supporting and sustaining community waterways' meeting which took place in Birmingham in November 2015. The report outlined the main benefits of adoption of parts of the canal:

1. Health and wellbeing.
2. Community engagement.
3. Education and skills.
4. Raising awareness of heritage and culture.
5. Economic and business benefits.
6. Environment and ecological improvements.

There were several forms of adoption:

- a. A local group could approach CRT with a view to maintenance of the canal. CRT would encourage them to adopt a mile of the canal for one year. CRT would look at the skills possessed by the group and identify what these skills were best suited to do.

- b. This involved getting encouraging local businesses or corporations to commit themselves to adopting a mile. The Trust sets a minimum of 100 days in this type of adoption. This can take the form of 100 staff doing one day each or in the case of smaller businesses 10 staff volunteering for 10 days each. There is the opportunity for a business to advertise their adoption in the form of signs or media coverage.
- c. The third scheme is working with a range of charity groups. This could be done via an organisation such as the Scouts who would identify any problems being encountered along the canal eg. A particular area of towpath inaccessible to the blind – this would be reported to CRT who could ensure that the area is cleared for use by blind people.

It was important that the adoption was a formal process to ensure that the skills of volunteers was recognised in the work they were allocated. The adoption scheme had proved very successful to date. In 2014/15 26 companies had taken part in the scheme totalling 1861 days which equates to almost £84,000 in terms of maintenance work carried out along canals.

A Stumpf agreed that previously whilst still a public sector body the attitude of the public had been an expectation on the Canals & River organisation to do things for them whereas now the public were approaching the Trust asking what they could do. As a public sector body the organisation had a responsibility for safety but the first challenge since becoming a Trust was to identify that volunteers had knowledge or health and safety and the skills necessary to carry out their tasks. There was also a need to ensure that volunteers did not do the work being done by paid staff. He confirmed that the Trust had no unpaid interns in the organisation. The Trust wanted to ensure that the waterways of Britain were used and did not fall into disrepair as had happened in the 1960s and 1970s.

S Ashley was aware of several partnerships working within the Torfaen/Newport section of the canal but was unsure as to whether they would engage in the adoption process. A Stumpf confirmed that many people assume the canal has no owner and some activities take place without the knowledge of CRT. He also acknowledged that there are occasions when negotiating with certain groups could be difficult. He was however pleased to report of several cases whereby those given maintenance of a canal as a community service order had returned as a volunteer having enjoyed the work.

In answer to R Wysom's query D Morgan confirmed that corporate/business queries were passed to a central team who would discuss terms and commitments of the adoption.

Several questions were asked regarding health and safety and insurance. D Morgan confirmed that the Trust would meet with the group and an agreement would be drawn up ensuring the group possessed the necessary skills for the work and had sufficient health and safety knowledge. They would also carry out an induction and the agreement would cover insurance.

G Jones felt that this was a big opportunity for local authorities to look after their area of the canal and ask if CRT could share documentation which would assist the setting up of schemes in other areas.

**Agreed:**

Copies of the report to be sent to all members.

**6 Update from Individual Authorities - Verbal Item**

**I. MFACT**

The new modular gate at the Waterworks project had been tested. Another 4 gates had been ordered. There had been real benefits to the project especially with regard to the employment of previously unemployed youths. Billman circulated flyers regarding the Canalthon due to take place in September. Last year's event had proved very successful.

II. **Caerphilly County Borough Council**

An initial allocation of £220k had been earmarked for canal restoration. A lot of re-lining had taken place on the section at Pontywaun and the aquaduct had been repaired.

III. **Torfaen County Borough Council**

All works were on schedule and would hopefully be finished by the end of September.

IV. **Newport City Council**

In partnership with MBACT, a final tranche of works has now been completed at the top pond of the Fourteen Locks in order to protect the vulnerable water supply. This included re-grouting of all joints, re-paving the floor of the lock in pennant slab, replacement of the stanking board and tying-in the corresponding walls from the pond to make the area completely water tight. Due to these works coming in under cost, replacement of a number of coping stones further along the lock and resetting of the winch mechanism at one of the locks further down the system was also undertaken.

V. **Canal & River Trust**

Re-lining of the canal bed at Llangynidr had been completed. An open day had been held on 14 February which was very successful. A ramp had been put in place enabling wheelchair users and pushchairs to make a tour of the canal bed and lock. The canal was re-opened in March.

£2.2m had been spent over the last year at Goytre on dredging and works to the lock and bridges. Work had just been completed on the towpath between bridges 118 to 121. It is hoped that next year habitats can be improved getting them to the stage when they can be managed by the community.

It was acknowledged that following the May elections there are likely to be familiar and new faces involved with the regeneration of the canal. A Stumpf offered to assist with familiarisation visits for councillors/officers following the election.

7 **Date of Next Meeting**

14 July 2016 at 10am. Caerphilly would host the meeting.

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