

Minutes from the thirty-fifth meeting of the Cross Party Group on Waterways

Conference Room 24, Tŷ Hywel, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Wednesday 4 December 2013

6.00pm

AMs in attendance:

Nick Ramsay AM (Welsh Conservative, Monmouth)

Julie James AM (Welsh Labour, Swansea West)

Russell George AM (Welsh Conservative, Montgomeryshire)

Antoinette Sandbach AM (Welsh Conservative, North Wales)

Attendees:

Andrew Stumpf – Glandŵr Cymru – Canal & River Trust in Wales

Mark Lang – Glandŵr Cymru – Canal & River Trust in Wales

Hazel Bowen – Glandŵr Cymru – Canal & River Trust in Wales

Russell Dodd – Glandŵr Cymru – Canal & River Trust in Wales

David Collins - Glandŵr Cymru – Canal & River Trust in Wales

David Morgan – Canal & River Trust

Chris Charters – British Outdoor Professionals Association

Colin Powell – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Chris Yewlett – Cardiff University School of City and Regional Planning

Brian Hancock

John Griffith

Matt Strickland – Natural Resources Wales

Richard Preece – Natural resources Wales

Martin Buckle – Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Stephen Hughes – RCAHMW

John Davies – Swansea Community Boat Trust

Charles White – Swansea Community Boat Trust

Richard Owen – Teifi Fishery Owners' Group (TFOG),

Rachael Evans – Countryside Alliance

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The meeting commenced at 6:15pm

Nick Ramsay AM began by noting that the group was required to hold an Annual General Meeting under the new regulations for Cross Party Groups in the National Assembly for Wales. This would involve the election of the group's chair, registration of new members, and the election of the secretary.

Item 1: Annual General Meeting

Russell George AM nominated Nick Ramsay AM to the position of Chair. There were no objections.

Julie James AM (Welsh Labour, Swansea West) agreed to sign up as a member of the group.

Glandŵr Cymru – The Canal & River Trust in Wales was confirmed as the group's secretariat.

Nick Ramsay noted that the 'Matters Arising' section would be deferred till the end of the meeting.

Item 2: Presentation: Beyond the Towpath

Andrew Stumpf, Head of Wales, Glandŵr Cymru, gave an overview of the organisation's ten year strategy for Wales, noting that this was a strategy for the augmentation of all waterways in Wales, and not just those under the stewardship of Glandŵr Cymru itself. Andrew explained that the strategy had been launched on 12th November in the Senedd, and is open for responses until 6th January.

Andrew added that there is considerable synergy between public policy aspirations in Wales and the potential for Waterways to act as an agent for delivery. A framework agreement recently signed between Cardiff University and Glandŵr Cymru is helping to substantiate this.

Andrew Stumpf then explained how the feedback process was structured and the format for the rest of the group's session.

Item 3: Feedback and Discussion

Attendees divided into three groups to discuss what the priorities of Glandŵr Cymru's ten year strategy should be in order to best promote and preserve waterways in Wales.

Suggested policy areas of focus:

- Growth & Jobs - Job creation should be a key performance indicator
- Education
- Cultural & Heritage Tourism – regeneration through heritage
- Protection of the existing canal network should be prioritised, before expansion
- There should be more proactive marketing, to welcome users onto the canals, including digital media
- Affordable homes – residential moorings for local people
- The value of a canal must be seen beyond its catchment area and valued across the whole of Wales as a national treasure
- Regeneration through City Regions
- Supporting delivery of the Active Travel Bill

Brian Hancock suggested that one way of strengthening Welsh waterways would be for council's to donate disused canals to the Trust as an asset for generating funds, and becoming self-financing. The revitalised canals can then act as a wider platform for regeneration through becoming a platform for social enterprise. Greater self-financing mechanisms would allow the Trust to maintain a reserve of funds for use during emergency situations such as canal breaches.

Aspirations might also include eventually linking the Monmouth and Brecon canal with the Wye Navigation at Chepstow, which is navigable for 110 miles and offers the potential of linking to Bristol and the Severn.

Item 4: Matters arising

Nick Ramsay noted that the matter of access to water policy was raised at the previous meeting. Nick added that the Department for Culture and Sport has confirmed that the minister responsible, John Griffiths AM, is currently reviewing this policy, with a broader Green Paper to be issued for consultation in the New Year.

Richard Owen expressed his concern that the Welsh Government was preparing the Green Paper, and suggested that the Minister, John Griffiths AM, does not have a mandate to plan

to introduce legislation for access to inland water. He believed the previous report by the Assembly's Sustainability Committee promoted the facilitation of access to water by voluntary agreement and not legislation, which has been endorsed by the Assembly. He repeated that he does not believe that the Welsh Government has a mandate for legislative proposals in this area, which is of great concern to the angling community. He asked that the group keep an eye on the matter.

Nick Ramsay agreed that he would monitor this policy.

Chris Charters explained that there had been voluntary agreements for the Wye, Usk and Dee rivers, and riparian interests had been involved in this discussion.

Chris Charters said his understanding was that no agreement had been signed but that fishermen had made concessions to canoeists.

Richard Owen asked that Assembly Members who are members of the CPG make representations to the Minister about the speed of the change in policy taking place.

Andrew Stumpf noted that it was for the Group to determine its forward work programme.

Brian Hancock noted that recent newspaper articles had detailed some of the restoration work done on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, but that he believed that in some instances the wrong clay had been used as part of the restoration, and in others the profile of the canal had been altered.

Andrew Stumpf noted that canals are of varying shapes and dimensions as, in their freight days, there was no necessity for boats to moor or pull into the sides except at wharves .

Brain Hancock expressed concerns about some of the work carried out by Caerphilly County Borough Council.

Andrew Stumpf suggested that there was a plethora of expertise in canal societies locally which might be consulted to ensure that work is carried out to the appropriate dimensions and standards.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 19th March 2014, 6pm