

Minutes from the forty-fourth meeting of the Cross Party Group on Waterways

Location: Education Room, Welsh Assembly, Cardiff, CF99 1NA

Wednesday 8th March 2017

6:00pm

AMs in attendance:

Nick Ramsay AM (Welsh Conservative, Monmouth)

Mike Hedges AM (Welsh Labour, Swansea East)

Mark Isherwood AM (Welsh Conservatives, North Wales)

Attendees:

Andrew Stumpf – Glandwr Cymru

Laura Lewis – Glandwr Cymru

Emily Lewis – Glandwr Cymru

Stephen Marsh Smith – Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust of Wales

Philip Thomas – Glandwr Cymru

Gareth Jones – Torfaen CBC

Mark Lang

Joe Bickerton – Wrexham CBC

Mike Feeney – CRT Volunteer

Bernard Illman – MBACK

Julian Atkins – SWSWP

Malcolm Harrison – Pub is the HUB

John Roger – ENIM

Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance

Carys Howell – Bwrdd Glandwr Cymru

Roger Holmes – Inland Waterways Association

Gail Devine – Groundwork Wales

Wyn Mitchell – MBACT

Roger Francis

Nigel Annett – Chair Bwrdd Glandwr Cymru

Steve Moran – NRW

Stan Evans – NRW

Richard Dommett

The Meeting Commenced at 6:15pm

Nick Ramsay AM began by welcoming everyone to the group and introduced our speakers.

Item 1: Presentation: How Llangollen Canal and Aqueduct WHS fits into Wrexham County Council's Destination Management Plan - Joe Bickerton, Destination Manager, Wrexham County Borough Council

Joe Bickerton, Wrexham County Council gave a presentation outlining the work of Wrexham County Council in incorporating the World Heritage Site into their destination management plan.

The presentation gave an overview of how the aqueduct fits into their tourism management plan, and highlighted the changes that have occurred since becoming a World Heritage Site. The audience were shown a promotional video that debuted to America in October 2016 to tempt tourists to the Aqueduct. Joe discussed the impact that the UNESCO badge has had

on visitor numbers (246 000 in 2016), with a significant increase on the number of cruise excursions to the site.

The presentation then highlighted the extent of partnership working that is involved in getting maximum potential from the waterway, with particular attention to managing the challenges that have arisen due to the increasing popularity of the site. Challenges included keeping facilities at a high standard for visitors, getting all council departments thinking the same way about tourism, how to stretch visitors across the 11 miles outside of Trever basin.

One community issue was the overuse of the carpark at the basin, as the surrounding streets became busy with parking and congestion. They allowed the community to use a field near the carpark to generate income, using volunteers to man the car park. All customer service trained with literature so they know the whole 11 miles. The pride they feel when welcoming people to their community is really paying off with the visitor experience

The presentation explained that people want to see the famous part of the site (Pontcysyllte aqueduct) which builds pressure on the area. Wrexham Council's message has been to see the aqueduct but to also explore the rest of the WHS by foot, boat and cycling. There are examples of brilliant engineering all across the canal and they want to make sure that businesses along the whole route benefit.

Joe then discussed the impact of the local media, who have been excellent in embracing the WHS status. Wrexham and its partners talk very positively in the media about the site. The local community have an ownership over the canal, and they are starting to see the increased pressure. Their DMP is looking to relieve these issues and make sure the community are ambassadors for the canal. Wrexham are working to highlight the community benefits of the site.

The website needed to be mobile friendly, engaging and tell you how to explore the site. They commissioned a brand new site – the 3D maps are a great way to show people how to explore all areas of the canal. This is a new product. Tying the website and map is a great way to get people to see the whole 11 miles.

Marketing and promotion – they brand themselves as north east Wales. They work really closely with Flintshire and Denbighshire. All stations near the site have the WHS branded boards, Wrexham have worked with bus companies to get good connections. They have also Worked with taxi drivers to understand the site and catering to the market.

The presentation went on to cover the importance of the WHS to local businesses and how Wrexham needed to raise awareness for businesses to cater to international tourists. There is a tourism ambassador network in Wrexham to get these businesses to understand what is on their doorstep. If someone is recruiting a new member of staff for front of house roles, then Wrexham CC will introduce them to the site. This has enhanced the visitor experience and is working very well with support from Visit Wales. If a business signs up to the free scheme they do a photo shoot, literature about the site, daily and weekly training, show them the site and talk about local events and things in the wider county.

Key Statistics from the presentation:

Visitor spend:

- Visitor economy Now worth £111.9 million
- 1.7 million visitors to the county borough
- 1640 jobs supported.

Presentation available, contact Emily.lewis@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Item 2: Presentation: All Wales and Marches Fishing Passport – Dr Stephen Marsh-Smith OBE, Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust of Wales

Technical Issue, PowerPoint did not work so Dr Marsh-Smith will return at a later date to give full presentation.

Dr Marsh-Smith, Chief Executive, The Rivers Trust of Wales, spoke about the issues organisations face during river restoration, in particular fish passes, acid rain and pollution. A Background was given on the River Wye restoration, which is located on Desborough recreation grounds towards the west of Wycombe. The river Wye flows through council parkland which is surrounded by domestic and commercial developments and two busy roads. It is a popular site for dog walking and is used regularly by the local community and school.

The presentation discussed the history of the Wye, and stated that demand to fish the Wye was such that in the mid-20th century it was a case of "Dead Men's Shoes". Beats were extremely valuable and anglers paid handsomely to fish the better ones. The pressure on catching fish was also high - all methods were used and beats seemed to accommodate many more rods than they do today. In addition, ghillies were employed to ensure catches remained high.

Dr Marsh-Smith added that when the salmon runs collapsed in the early '90s, it was sudden and dramatic for all, except the lower beats. Lots of fishing suddenly became available but there was no means of putting anglers in touch with it. In 2003 they contacted all the fishing hotels on the upper Wye and found only one (owned by a keen angler) who was able to accommodate visiting anglers. The economy linked with fishing had all but collapsed along with most of the associated jobs. In order to meet the requirements of EU funding, it was essential to show that our work and subsequent improvement to fisheries benefitted the rural economy, either with direct employment or by boosting revenue. They needed a scheme that did just this and at the same time enable them to calculate the extent of these benefits. The launch of pHish and some post Foot and Mouth funding (Adfywio) to get visitors back to Powys were the drivers that created the 'Upper Wye Passport' in 2003.

How it works

The Passport is made up of two distinct elements:

"Wild Streams" focuses on the wild trout fisheries created by our habitat restoration, while the "Booking Office" (telephone and online) has been created to take day, week and season reservations for salmon, trout, grayling & coarse fishing on the larger and more established fisheries.

Dr Marsh-Smith will return to do the presentation in full.

Item 3: Feedback and Discussion

Attendees were asked to feedback on the presentations and share their thoughts on what the canal network can bring to Tourism in Wales.

Nigel Annett – Chair of Bwrdd Glandwr Cymru asked speaker Dr Marsh-Smith “what was the biggest problem?”

Dr Marsh-Smith stated that they blocked off the commercial nets, built 70 fish passes, and they are still working on this. The residue of things like the water rams, drawing off water and blocking access, were stopping fish. Acid rain was also a problem. 62km of the wye and tributaries were dead, no fish, no invertebrates. Low ph. drops. In the early years we were also just finishing with foot and mouth.

Is it catch and release? Yes – it wasn't that which brought the fish back, this has only recently come into place.

Gareth Jones- Torfaen CC asked speaker Dr Marsh-Smith if there is an opportunity to link in with the requirements of the NRW licence?

Dr Marsh-Smith replied that they used to be a licence distributor – all money collected by the English, we have a net influx of fishing visitors, but the division is not in our favour as not many Welshman go to England.

Mark Isherwood AM asked speaker Joe Bickerton – Thanks for the presentation, great to see the NE Wales offer, more opportunities in the area as it develops. You talk about using the visitor centre to attract visitors once they are there. Llangollen railway are keen on developing the staycation model. Where are you with this?

Joe Bickerton answered that we've thought of this for a while, the website is built to book all of the attractors and hotel at the same time. It's a victim of circumstances, this is the first financial year without support from Visit Wales to fund the ambassador scheme. Now the businesses are contributing. It started off as WHS scheme now it is NE Wales tourist ambassador scheme. It's important to incorporate other assets. The next step would be to look at who would be interested in joining in on this.

Carys Howell – Bwrdd Member of Glandwr Cymru asked Joe Bickerton if they have considered a shuttle bus or committed tourism trip that visits all sites which would encourage longer stays to places like Cefn Mawr, which would love to welcome more tourists?

Joe Bickerton responded that there was a trail about 5 years ago between Chirk and Aqueduct. It ran for six months; we think it should be considered again. There's nothing planned now but the opportunity is there. Now that we are getting an annual increase of visitors we need to look at how we use things like the passport scheme and how we can relieve pressure on the basin.

Dr Mark Lang asked speaker Joe Bickerton how far can this growth increase realistically? What are you as an authority doing to ensure the growth benefits a more inclusive cross section of the community?

Joe responded that there's a lot of brown field sites. There is potential via the masterplan to look at these sites to see how they could be used for community benefit. There are a lot of low socio economic areas near the canal. For us in economic development it is vital that this

masterplan succeeds and can deliver prosperity for these communities. Landowners are around the table for the first time.

Item 4: Update from Andrew Stumpf

Important dates:

Llangattock Winter Works Open Day 19th March

NWB Unlocking the Health Potential of the Waterways Workshop Llangollen 24th March

Minister for Skills visit 27th March

Cross Party Group 17th May

Navigations - Art as Research Oriel Davis Newtown 20th May – 19th July 2017

Welshpool Canal & Food Festival 22nd July 2017

Launch of the Brecon Lime Kilns Trail unveiling one of the interpretation panels at the front of the Watton Lime Kilns has been postponed until later in the spring – date to be confirmed / probably May

Date of next meeting: Cross party Group – 17th May 2017

Item 5: AOB

No comments.