

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

Conference Rooms C&D, Welsh Assembly, Cardiff, CF99 1NA

Wednesday 17th May 2017

6:00pm

AMs in attendance:

Nick Ramsay AM (Welsh Conservative, Monmouth) Chair

Attendees:

Andrew Stumpf – Glandŵr Cymru, the Canal & River Trust in Wales - Secretariat

Emily Lewis – Glandŵr Cymru, the Canal & River Trust in Wales - Secretariat

John Dodwell, Canal & River Trust & Montgomery Canal Partnership

Bernard Illman – MBACT

Richard Dommett – MBACT

Monica Dommett – MBACT

Richard Dearing – NRW

Steve Morgan - NRW

Alan Platt – IWA

Michael Limbrey – Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust

Martin Buckle – BBS

Gareth Williams – CITB

Robert Moreland – Canal & River Trust

Peter Hindley – MBACT

Wendy Dodds – Research Service, Welsh Assembly

Gareth Jones – TCBC

Jeremy Frost – Welsh Government

David Morgan – Canal & River Trust

Anthony Pugh – IWA

Nick Worthington – Canal & River Trust

Gail Devine – Groundwork Wales

Ray Alexander – IWA

Roger Holmes – IWA

The Meeting commenced at 6:20pm

Andrew Stumpf began by welcoming everyone to the group and introduced the 'How Water Adds Value' video. This video provided an overview of how waterway restorations can add value to property, create jobs and increase opportunities for businesses, while also managing the environment and encouraging biodiversity. The positive impact of volunteers was also touched upon.

'How water adds value' by Canal & River Trust: https://youtu.be/dg0B_2v-bLk

Item 1: Presentation: The role of communities and Heritage Lottery Fund in furthering the restoration of the Montgomery Canal – John Dodwell, Chair, Montgomery Canal Restoration Partnership & Trustee, Canal & River Trust

John Dodwell gave a presentation outlining the progress of the Montgomery Canal restoration over the last fifty years, and expanded on the current ten year restoration strategy and the positive impacts being seen locally and in Wales more generally.

The presentation began by describing the origins of the restoration project in the 1960s, when volunteers managed to revive and re-water a section of the canal over the course of a weekend, in response to the threat of a bypass being built over the canal.

The speaker emphasised the Montgomery Canal's potential for the Welsh economy, noting that approximately 20% of Wales' GDP comes from tourism. The importance of Active Travel investment in towpaths was also pointed out.

In Powys, when restored the Montgomery Canal is estimated to bring in £5m visitor spend per annum and provides 128 FTE jobs. Events held on the waterway in recent years, such as the Welshpool Festival, triathlon, and Dinghy Dawdles have attracted people from around the UK, boosting the local tourism industry. Forming a 'tourism corridor', restored waterways such as this one can become catalysts for wider regeneration in the area, with adjacent buildings such as mills often becoming attractions in themselves.

The canal is also the base of the Heulwen Trust, a charity that offers boat trips for disabled visitors, widening the diversity of people who can enjoy the canal.

The ability for restorations to unite communities was highlighted. The work restoring Freestone Lock was noted to have used much volunteer power as well as through collaboration with local groups and Keep Wales Tidy.

Welshpool Town Council features the canal in their town plan. Newtown Town Council also found that in consultations the canal was in the top five suggested items to focus on.

The restoration has received a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, which will be used for dredging, 6km of towpath and boundary hedge work, expanding the navigable part of the canal and extending the Aston nature reserves. The success of the HLF bid was attributed to:

- Local commitment – the bid scored high on participation, as the enthusiasm and support of local people was evident through surveys undertaken with upwards of 3,000 people
- Getting the restoration on the agendas of town and county councils
- The multifaceted nature of the bid, which envisaged the canal as a community resource
- Significant volunteer impact – labour intensive work will see £300,000 worth of volunteer effort go into the project, vastly reducing spend on contractors. In the future, a construction training scheme and use of community payback can keep costs to a minimum
- Working with the town and county councils to get the canal further up the agenda

The Montgomery Canal has no costly aqueducts or tunnels and its source of water supply is known. In addition, all the canal is owned by the Trust, apart from two miles at Newtown. This means that, compared with other restoration projects without those features, the

restoration will be relatively simple with the right amount of money. Alongside the HLF funding, Montgomery Canal Partnership have just launched a public appeal to raise £250,000 which has already seen magnificent progress.

One obstacle is the roads which in places have completely destroyed small sections of the canal. Voluntary engineers can go to highway authorities to work out appropriate solutions.

Key Statistics:

- When re-opened, the Montgomery Canal in Powys is estimated to be worth £5m in visitor spend each year and provide 128 FTE jobs
- £8-10 million over five years to restore the canal in Powys
- £2.5 million of HLF funding to go towards a £4 million project across England and Wales

Q: Andrew Stumpf asked how volunteers can be kept engaged in a long-term restoration project.

A: Keep having small successes. Grab enthusiasm while it's there. Enthusiasing the local community and council members to actively engage with the project as a corridor of heritage and regeneration. Encompass as many people as possible, for example, the additional lime kiln project at Llanymynech.

Q: Martin Buckle asked if as lengths of the Monty are restored, the Canal & River Trust will take them over.

A: The Trust owns these waterways anyway regardless of whether they are navigable.

Attendees were referred to the 'Montgomery Canal: Regeneration through sustainable restoration' document: <https://goo.gl/ITVYd4>

The presentation slides included many pictures of the progress of the restoration, wildlife and different areas of the canal. Please contact emily.lewis@canalrivertrust.org.uk for a copy. The presentation has also been lodged with the Senedd library.

Item 2: Presentation: Impacts of the restoration of the Droitwich Canals completed 2011 – Jason Leach, Project manager for the Droitwich restoration project, Canal & River Trust

Jason Leach gave a presentation on the Canal & River Trust Droitwich restoration project. Annually, the Droitwich Canals now see 380 million visitors, most of whom are towpath based. A small proportion are customers of the Trust (e.g. boaters). These visitors fuel local businesses, including boat hire companies, pubs and cafes.

For every job directly employed in the core boating tourism sector, there are an additional 10 jobs supported in the wider economy through the direct and indirect effects of expenditures of boaters and boating tourism businesses.

Improving towpath accessibility has seen a rise in visitor numbers across the Trust's network, through extending time of use in winter.

Several case studies were covered, such as the Bridgewater and Taunton restoration, which created 51 jobs within recreation & leisure and tourism with an estimated property value enhancement of £54 million. In several cases business development and canal related investments were shown to have acted as a catalyst for investment and regeneration.

The Droitwich Canals opened again in 2011, with 17 miles of canal improved or restored. This connected Worcester and Birmingham to the River Severn to create a ring, which has also been used by charities as a route for competitions. A 40% increase in towpath use was seen, also aided by improved parking. Crime was displaced elsewhere and there was more of a sense of place and community. A 239 berth marina was opened in Droitwich, and was a considerable investment.

In terms of environmental improvements, a new 5 hectare reed bed provided a better managed habitat for wildlife.

A blueprint for a successful regeneration project was noted to involve:

- Integration with local planning policy
- An emphasis on the economic, social and environmental benefits
- Developing a strong partnership with an agreed delivery plan with short, medium and long term actions

Belief in the project was also emphasised.

Q: Martin Buckle asked if water supply has ever been an issue with restorations.

A: Not on the Monty or Droitwich Canals, however there is an Environmental Framework document that provides guidance. 'Environmental framework for waterway restoration in England and Wales' link: <http://bit.ly/2sbZftS>

Q: Roger Holmes asked about restoration projects that start to go downhill again,

A: There is a need to consider the sustainability of these projects particularly restored structures. An important part of securing funding is ensuring there is a local group who will take ownership and maintain the structures and natural environment after a particular project has been completed. John Dodwell added that there are multiple ways of continuing to generate income e.g. trip boats and also referred to the Hereford and Gloucester Canal Trust <http://www.h-g-canal.org.uk/> that now owns properties generating income.

It was noted that even in the last 12 months the context of HLF has changed; oversubscribed and less money available. Funding is difficult to obtain and Stage 2 applications are being turned down. A reliance on HLF is a concern.

Q: Nick Worthington asked the speaker if he sees alternative funding streams emerging after European funding stops.

A: Don't know, Government might try to replace but it will be difficult.

The speaker referred attendees to the 'Water Adds Value' document, produced with the University of Northampton. Link: <https://goo.gl/Ev1bWS>

Presentation available and lodged with the Senedd library, contact emily.lewis@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Item 3: Feedback and Discussion

Nick Ramsay AM thanked the speakers for their presentations and apologised for the late-running plenary session which delayed him. Attendees were asked to feedback on the presentations and share their thoughts on what waterway restorations can bring to communities in Wales.

Q: Attendees were asked how a younger and more diverse audience could become involved with restoration volunteering.

A: Martin Buckle said the priority is engaging with young people at the earliest opportunity via schools. Andrew Stumpf described the Trust's current Explorers education scheme for 7-11 year olds (KS2), as well as the STEM co-ordinator working with schools. It was noted that the IWA and MBACT also have schemes. Jeremy Frost suggested that schemes such as Eco-Schools and Active Schools were another good way to engage.

It was also noted that there was potential for helping young people explore career options. Gareth Williams stressed the importance of linking things together e.g. work experience through NVQ qualifications.

Q: Attendees were asked what angles rural restorations can take when seeking funding.

A: John Dodwell, speaker, said that jobs are a good argument, citing 20% of Wales GDP is from tourism. It was noted that rural places shouldn't just be holiday or retirement spots. While HLF don't measure jobs other funders do. Jobs and training opportunities were noted as benefits to emphasise. A small number of jobs in a rural community can make a big difference, particularly if they are keeping community facilities alive, such as pubs, shops and post offices.

Item 4: Update from Andrew Stumpf

Andrew Stumpf updated the group on the completion of the Mon & Brec Green Infrastructure Investment Fund £2.538m Canal & River Trust project:

- 650m of canal lined and no longer leaking,
- 3 bridges and 2 aqueducts repaired,
- Local economies supported - over 50% was sourced within 1 hour of site, 87% of the labour on site was Welsh

- Significant environmental improvements
- Recognition that the canal, river and land between are one ecosystem

Funding from NRW has built 3 new access points to improve canoe access in Llangollen. A code of conduct has been written aimed at encouraging considerate use and highlighting areas of caution when paddling on the canal.

Published in Welsh & English "Paddle the Right Way" is available as a leaflet and online:
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/canoeing-and-kayaking>

Important dates:

- **Navigations - Art as Research exhibition – Oriel Davis Gallery, Newtown**
20th May – 19th July 2017
- **Welshpool Canal & Food Festival**
22nd July 2017
- **Canalathon – Mon & Brec**
September 9th 2017
- **Cross Party Group on Waterways & AGM**
26th September 2017

Item 5: AOB

No other business was recorded.