



MEETING Thursday 9th June at 2pm
At Wiltshire Council Offices Committee Room D
Monkton Park Chippenham SN15 1ER
 Or Online meeting Microsoft Teams

Item	<u>Notes</u>	
	Attending	
JL	John Laverick (President)	
NN	Cllr Nabil Najjar Wiltshire Council (Chairman)	
GE	Cllr Graham Ellis (Melksham Town Council)	
CG	Cllr Colin Goodhind Melksham Town Council	
MH	Cllr Mark Harris Melksham Without PC	
GS	Cllr Gary Sumner Swindon BC	
CC	Chris Clark Wiltshire Council	
MHo	Martin Hollis Wilts & Berks Canal Trust	
GO	Gordon Olson Wilts & Berks Canal Trust	
SP	Steve Petty Berryfield Residents	
KO	Ken Oliver Wiltshire Council (Partnership Officer)	
TW	Tim Wheeldon IWA	
1	Apologies: Cllr Duncan Enright Oxfordshire CC, John Allan Cotswold Canals Trust	
2	Notes from the last meeting 3rd March 2022 (pre-circulated) were agreed	
3	Chairman's Announcements Dominic Lamb Vale of White Horse DC is changing roles and will be replaced by Matt Gulliford from the next meeting. Sam Meredith has left the Environment Agency and we are waiting to hear about a replacement. NN noted the conversation at the previous meeting regarding the future of the Partnership. NN suggested that rather than an open-ended general debate at this meeting, he asked that all Partners contacted him (and KO) by email with suggestions and ideas so that some proposals could be drafted and pre circulated before the next meeting in September for discussion then. NN also apologised for the sub standard quality of sound and vision for the hybrid meeting due to IT issues that we are unable to resolve in time for the meeting	
4	Partnership Officer Report- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M4 Crossing National Highways Designated Fund – further funding application GO reported that WBCT submitted the Phase 1 report to National Highways in April and has been very well received with the senior	KO

reviewing officer recommending that WBCT proceed with Phase 2 (bid for £900k for full design study). This funding application will be considered at the end of June by the NH Investment panel. WBCT are hopeful that the bid fulfils the criteria for investment and the stage 1 finding that for every £1 invested would generate £1.79 in economic benefits in the surrounding areas (Swindon and Royal Wootton Bassett). **GO** noted that as the largest technical issue to be resolved he was pleased with the way that WBCT had tackled the issue with National Highways giving the best chance of success.

- **Melksham Link- planning application- update**

NN noted the relentless challenge to WC to encourage more active participation in obtaining consent for the planning application . In response **NN** & **KO** had provided briefing papers for cabinet member Cllr Nick Botterill. **NN** had asked for a clear direction of what the Authority's commitment is to delivering the scheme as soon as possible and had been assured that this would happen, however it may require a further paper to Cabinet and it is firmly on the Leader's and Cabinet Member's agenda. **NN** noted that it was now outside his direct control, but both are aware of the imperative and time pressure and he is confident that there would be some action shortly. **JL** noted that as yet he had not had a reply to his email to Cllr Clewer and added that this week is the 10th anniversary of the planning application being submitted. **NN** thanked **JL** for the clarity of the briefing provided, which was very helpful for his understanding, being relatively new to the role. **NN** had personally spoken Cllrs Clewer and Botterill and to the new Corporate Director of Place. **KO** added that he recently met with Parvis Kansari (Corporate Director of Place) and Kenny Green (Planning Team Leader and Case Officer). The continuing issues with EA objections and questions being answered only to provoke new ones was identified as one of the stumbling blocks to progress. Kenny was asked to find contact names of EA officers who are working on other Wiltshire Council led projects to see if they might be able to assist. The other point to note is that we would find it very difficult to override EA objections as they have special status as a statutory consultee. **NN** added that he hoped that it is of some comfort to the project that the right people are now engaged in looking at what might be possible

CG Asked about protection of the route and the enabling development proposals. Both Melksham TC and Melksham Without PC support the canal through the Neighbourhood Plan and are keen to set up dialogue about enabling development as it is widely felt that 900 houses would be excessive. The Councils would like a dialogue with the Melksham Link project team to try to come up with an enabling scheme that is acceptable to the local community. **NN** asked if there had been any community surveys- **CG** said that there had been a survey but not for some years. **SP** said that the proposed masterplans had been made available to the community for a number of years – there had been a specific Berryfield survey confirming that those responding still wanted the canal to go through the community. **CG** wanted this dialogue to be started to avoid misconceptions about the project. **SP** said that it would be good to come to some conclusion on this as already 350 houses had been built without any significant contribution to the canal. **KO** said that the two issues raised should be considered separately. The route protection is currently done via

the Council's Core Strategy Policy 53 &16. The somewhat delayed Local Plan review will need to address how to continue with both policies, if possible, strengthening them to add some support for restoration rather than just route protection alone. In response to the need for further communication **KO** agreed with **CG** the enabling masterplan sometimes confused the situation as it has varied the route depending on landowner cooperation – for clarity the current planning application is seeking permission for the original route- the enabling development proposals will need to rely on the merits of any submitted scheme which may be at variance with this application. **KO** emphasised the required next step for the project is approval of the current application

MHo noted his concerns as a Trustee of WBCT of the 'going round in circles' process with the EA in the planning system, and also wondered in view of the time it was taken to progress the Melksham Link whether there are any lessons learnt from the planning process at Swindon for instance to speed things up. **NN** said that learning was always possible, but he was not sure whether now was a time for such a debrief when there was some apparent progress to move things forward. If things change and the application has to be resubmitted, then it might be appropriate. **NN** further said that he had heard very clearly the concerns and will do his best to feed them through the system and come back with some answers which will be positive and constructive soon.

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Projects update –

- **Swindon Wichelstowe**
 - **Canalside**

KO said that plans are being submitted for the next phase of housing and shortly planning consent for the next section of the canal will be discussed with WBCT.

- **East Wichel- canal leak**

KO reported that further investigation has revealed offside bank leakage in some areas. A plan is being drawn up to make the affected sections watertight with an aim to complete by the end of the year. **GS** noted that it is important that this is resolved as the next sections of the canal to connect to it are due to be constructed in the near future.

- **Landowner issue**

GO said that the canal remains closed to boating traffic north of Canalside but there is a prospect of a licence agreement **GS** said that SBC had made some proposals to the landowner which may help resolve the situation and that because of its amenity value it was desirable that the canal is reopened before the summer.

- **Swindon New Eastern Villages-**

KO said that the new road (Southern Connector) is now under construction with the intention that the canal is built on a route alongside it subject to resolution of some outstanding technical issues. **GS** said it would be helpful to understand the practicalities of the next steps for the canal planning consent bearing in mind the potential survey costs. **GO** said that the project is planning for a £700k allocation of funds for this work which needed to be raised to enable progress. **GS** said that a number of promoters of the different parcels of land were now advancing delivery of the schemes and are seeking to maximise land values. **KO** noted that the project had engaged with the planning process and had sought to include allocation of land to enable future construction of the canal and that the

	<p>project was relying on the resilience of the planning process and the Local Authority to avoid situations that had occurred previously where insufficient land had been set aside to construct the canal. GO said the local WBCT team were continually monitoring the situation to ensure this did not happen. SP asked how many houses were planned- GS said it was likely to over 9000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pewsham Land transfer/lease <p>GO said that 550 metres of the canal had been transferred by way of lease from Wiltshire Council at Naish Hill near Lacock and WBCT is very grateful for this. Survey work has started to put together a plan for canal clearance that conforms to environmental requirements. KO commented that both Swindon BC and Wiltshire Council have resolved to transfer land in their ownership where it is required for projects to restore the waterway</p>	
7	<p>Partners Reports and Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal to form M.P.s group for the Wilts & Berks project <p>NN said the previous attempt to host an online event had resulted in response from only one of the MPs and therefore we were attempting to tackle this in a slightly different way with a planned date for early October . It would be probably more effective if WBCT could help using any existing communication channels. GO said that they already have contacts with Michelle Donelan, James Gray, David Johnson and Robert Buckland and would be pleased to help in any way they can. KO and GO will work in a plan to contact the MPs in the most effective way possible. NN said it would be helpful to have an agreed objective with partners as alongside briefing and information sharing there is an opportunity to be more creative and perhaps consider an all-party Parliamentary group for the Wilts & Berks Canal – this approach seemed to receive a favourable response from the North Wessex Downs AONB MP’s. GO queried whether ministers could be part of all party groups- NN said he would check but his understanding was that they could be affiliated but not ‘officers’. KO noted that the IWA already worked with a national Parliamentary Waterways Group chaired by Michael Fabricant MP and it might be possible for a sub group to be set up for the Wilts & Berks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cotswold Canals –update <p>John Allan submitted the following written report The Phase 1B restoration between Stonehouse and Saul is progressing well, with the most notable item being the formal opening of the new railway bridge at Stonehouse by the Chairman of Network Rail and the bridge is now officially “Ocean Jubilee Bridge” named as such in honour of the Queen’s 70th.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AoB <p>MHo said with pre-empting further future discussion he felt that MPs would be more inclined to engage with a vibrant Partnership where all the Local Authorities were actively engaged . The example of Stroud DC on the Cotswold project was an example of such active engagement. NN agreed that this was a desirable aim for local authorities at every level and statutory organisations to be actively engaged . There was a lot of good</p>	

	<p>news at today's meeting and that aim is not as far away as everyone might think. Progress in Swindon and the Pewsham land transfer were two examples and when things like the Melksham Link are resolved the 'acrimony' will be taken out of the process and there will be a more positive way forward. NN said that as Chair this is certainly his ambition and he hoped that it was shared by Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a further brief discussion about the desirability of further communication between Melksham Link Ltd and the local community 	
<p>8</p>	<p>Date and time and location of next meeting: There was a brief discussion on location of future meetings and whether they should be hybrid or online only. NN asked if partners could let him know their preference along with other thoughts on the future of the Partnership. CG wondered if there was any flexibility to allow key members to be able to attend- KO said that the meeting dates were set 3 months in advance and future ones could also be included JL asked if proposed agendas could be sent out further in advance to allow partner additions</p> <p>It is proposed to change from date announced at the meeting to Thursday 8th September 2022 2pm at Monkton Park Chippenham Future dates : Thursday 8th December 2022</p>	