



MEETING Thursday 2nd March 2023 2pm

This is a hybrid meeting -in person at Wiltshire Council Offices Monkton Park Chippenham SN15 1ER – Committee Room D or online meeting via Microsoft Teams

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Item	<u>Notes</u>	
	<p>Post meeting Note <i>There were connection issues for some trying join the meeting via Teams. The cause of this issue has not been identified and we apologise to those members who could not join. The Chairman* had these connection issues and was not able to join until the point indicated in the notes- Ken Oliver temporality chaired the meeting up to this point</i></p>	
<p>NN JL GS WS JA GC GCo MG MHo KO</p>	<p>Cllr Nabil Najjar Wiltshire Council (Chairman)* John Laverick (President) Cllr Gary Sumner Swindon BC Cllr William Scott Semington Parish Council John Allan Cotswold CC Gavin Champion Cooper Tires Geraint Coles – Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust Mike Gibbin Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Martin Hollis Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Ken Oliver Wiltshire Council (Partnership Officer)</p>	
<p>1</p>	<p>Apologies: Paul Harris Oxfordshire CC, Steve Petty, Tim Wheeldon IWA, Dick Millard Sustrans Duncan Enright Oxfordshire CC, Mark Harris Melksham Without PC, Chris Clerk Wiltshire Council Peter Scatchard Wilts & Berks Canal Trust</p>	
<p>2</p>	<p>Notes from the last meeting 1st December 2022 (pre-circulated) were agreed</p>	
<p>3</p>	<p>Chairman’s Announcements. KO noted that the meeting was being recorded for note taking accuracy. All the usual safety issues applied for those attending in person.</p>	
<p>4</p>	<p>Action Items – Partnership sub groups MHo noted the previous meeting had agreed to set up 2 sub-groups :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towpath Challenge • Funding <p>The aim of these groups will be to advise WBCT and not necessarily be executive .The Towpath Challenge in particular is being targeted by WBCT as getting the line formally recognised ‘on the ground’ as a publicly accessible path and is seen as a pre-cursor to restoration.</p>	

In terms of Fundraising WBCT has a new ambitious plan to raise £20m p.a. for the next 20 years and is keen to explore all possible channels to access this funding from larger organisations. The Trust has recently started work on a 'Case for Support' document to allow conversations with large scale funders. **MHo** noted he had sent a terms of reference document to **KO** & **NN** and wondered how best to progress this. **KO** said that he would need to talk further with **NN**. **KO** noted that Paul Harris (Oxfordshire CC) has expressed an interest in joining the Towpath Challenge group. **KO** thought it was likely that we would need to directly seek out others to join. **MHo** said that Tim Pyatt (who ran the Towpath Challenge originally) had expressed an interest subject to availability. **KO** said that from Wiltshire Council our newly appointed Countryside Access Development Officer would be able to be involved. We would probably need also to talk to Martin Fry at Swindon BC. **GS** said that in principle this would be fine if he has the time. **MG** asked about the process of creating a Public Right of way. **KO** replied that the landowner could dedicate the towpath as a right of way with the Local Authority or keep it as permissive. **KO** said that as far as he was aware this issue had not been resolved as a matter of WBCT policy. One of the conditions of funding the Kennet & Avon restoration was making the towpath a Right of Way. **KO** said that although this was probably a sensible proposal some careful thought might be required about the implications. **MHo** thought that permissive option should be sufficient for the short term. **KO** noted that one of the attractions of the towpath was that it is a route that is defined by the canal and towpath hedge to 'channel' walkers rather than give free access to the land.

MHo said the main purpose of the fundraising group would be to gather data to feed into the Case for Support- things like population growth-proposed housing – recreation facilities -tourism numbers-biodiversity. The aim of the group would be to help identify potential funders from local regional and national sources to allow WBCT to make applications. The group should be able to identify suitable platforms to showcase the 'Case for Support'. **KO** asked how the local authorities might fit into the equation. **MHo** said that the LA's would be a key source of relevant data but perhaps this should be looked at from a different perspective and Partnership Members, whose key role is to facilitate the canal's restoration might consider what resource they might be able to deliver to fulfil that purpose. **JA** pointed out that much valuable information was available in the IWA 'Waterways for Today' report. **MHo** said that the information from that report and from Canal & River Trust was being used. **MG** noted the scale of the challenge is £20m p.a. over the next 20 years and was by far the biggest task WBCT had ever considered and therefore there must be a really strong Case for Support to be able to attract the funding. The role of the LA's is not only to be the source of economic data but their ability to give support for large funding applications and therefore active participation in the preparation of the Case for Support is crucial.

5 ***At this point Nabil Najjar was able to join the meeting and took over the chair***

NN thanked **KO** standing in and said that in terms of Chairman's announcements he noted the work currently going on for the Wiltshire Local Plan and was keen to know if there had been any progress on the engagement with officers for the Melksham Link and with the Area Boards.

Introduction of WBCT Chief Exec Mike Gibbin

- Reorganisation and Strategy of WBCT.

MG said that he had been in post for about 8 weeks and is the process of assessing a number of aspects of the Trust's structure and management. A new Board of Directors has been established to ensure that the strategic development of the project is carried out by the relevant personnel. A new Chief Operating Officer post has been created and recently filled. The role is to look after the branches of WBCT and their volunteers. **MG** said his role is assess strategy and decide what order things should be done in, and in particular to develop the Case for Support and make appropriate funders aware. There still are some Director vacancies to fill, particularly for fundraising, which is currently being temporarily supported by Gordon Olsen. Experience and leadership qualities will be required to interface with national funding organisations. Also vacant (requiring similar attributes) is Head of Marketing. Work is also required to strengthen engineering and project management teams. The new structure is available on the WBCT web site. In assessing the available reports on economic benefit, the general public benefit (economic and wellbeing) of a canal the length of the Wilts & Berks is likely to be in the region of £200m pa. This is the sort of data that is required to justify the capital expenditure for restoration of £400m. This approach is new and the journey is just starting and in all fairness we cannot predict the outcome' but it has not been tried before and we hope for success. **MHo** said that if Local Authority economic development team could act in a 'critical friend' role to verify data and statistics this would be very useful. **MHo** said that having new CEO and COO appointed was an indication of the intention to scale up the restoration work. **NN** said he hoped we would be able to support this process and he was currently working on integrating some work of economic development, tourism and environmental protection and this would seem to fit in. **NN** would try to find someone in the economic development team to liaise with as and when the group is ready. **KO** noted that a big challenge is to get acknowledgement that the Wilts & Berks restoration has moved from aspirational to being delivered and therefore needs to be included in Local Authority thinking and programmes. **KO** had recently met with Rory Bowen from WC economic development team and Ian Britten (Melksham Link Ltd) where it was agreed that the Link project should be included as one of the projects for the town. **MG** asked if it was possible. **KO** said that credibility is one of the key issues and while the aim of generating £400m of funding over 20 years is admirable, demonstrable delivery is the only way that third parties will be able to judge the project. **MHo** said he was concerned if this was the case then we might be in a 'chicken and egg' situation as major projects like the M4 crossing or Melksham Link would need Local Authority support before they were built. **KO** asked JA how the Cotswold Canals project has dealt with this issue. **JA** said the section of restoration where most progress had been made is around Stroud where there was strong local support to turn an unattractive derelict feature into an asset that creates regeneration and funding. The six miles that have been restored has attracted £115m of investment over the last few years. The challenge for this partnership is to find the one section that could deliver similar benefit and create the snowball effect for the remainder of the project. The Melksham Link could be that flagship to showcase what is possible elsewhere. **JL** echoed this view that Melksham could be exactly that with

	<p>the inbuilt immediate benefit of direct connection to the waterways network. MHo asked if the direct involvement of Stroud DC was a principal catalyst for progress. JA said that indeed they had ‘rescued’ the situation when British Waterways withdrew from being the lead partner and it was fair to say that this had moved things on. MHo said the next 10 years would be crucial and the challenge for the partnership is to energise partners to make it happen from support from their organisation to help achieve more rapid progress.</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p>Partnership Officer Report-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melksham Link- planning application- update <p>KO reported that the WBCT were seeking proposals from consultants for the river section of the scheme to take into account the current objections from EA and WC. KO welcomed Gavin Champion from Cooper Tires who own land either side of the river in Melksham and asked Gavin to outline what is happening on the site. GC said in 2021 the company had been taken over by Goodyear Tyre and Rubber Co and last year it was announced that the Melksham site would be closed. Following the appropriate consultations, it has been confirmed that manufacturing will cease after December 2023 and the site will be decommissioned over the following months. Goodyear is currently assessing options for disposal of the site and other land- which is approximately 70 acres in total- 30 acres are the factory site. There clearly will be much local debate about what happens to the site but with the canal project included there is a fantastic potential for it being of great future benefit to Melksham. There is of course much interest in the site but at present it is difficult to say much more. KO wished GC and those affected well and wondered how best to stay in touch about developments. GC said that he is the best contact initially and would be in post for another 12 months and would try to attend the Partnership meetings. Although a project manager is not yet in place local consultations will take place with the Town Council and Wiltshire Council about any proposals on what is a very important site for the town. GC he was making all aware of the Partnership and Melksham Link plans however one particularly challenging aspect for the site is that most of it is located within the flood plain. JA noted that on the Cotswold Canals project the ‘missing mile’ section co locates the canal and the River Frome in the vicinity of the M5 and requires a very comprehensive Flood Risk Assessment. This required consultants to deal with very complex issues – unfortunately the models used by the consultants for the Local Authority and EA were not the same and perhaps in terms of the Melksham Link, it might be wise to consider this issue when appointing a consultant to make sure they were in tune with EA methodology. GC noted the comment and KO said that was very much the approach that WBCT is taking to appoint a suitable consultant with skills in river re-profiling. The brief for this work is currently being prepared and the case officer for planning has agreed to check with EA and Wiltshire Council’s ecologist that the brief will resolve the outstanding objections. GCo noted from previous experience it might be prudent for the Local Authority to produce a planning guidance policy for the site. GC said that the company was having discussions with councils and the MP and would welcome any such guidance.</p> <p><i>(MHo apologised that he had to leave at this point)</i></p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SESRO/Thames Water KO confirmed that Wiltshire Council has responded to the first consultation • Local Plans: South & Vale KO said he is currently seeking clarity from Vale White Horse DC on the process Swindon WBCT team is liaising with spatial planning officers and will be making a submission to the current 'call for sites' Wiltshire – consultation is expected shortly (spring 2023) 	
7	<p>Projects update –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swindon Wichelstowe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canalside ▪ East Wichel- canal leak –GS reported that further works are planned before the next section of canal is constructed. ▪ Landowner issue- GS said that Swindon BC property team had made a formal offer to the landowner to remove covenant in return for transfer of the canal. There has not yet been a positive response. 	
8	<p>Partners Reports and Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions and other Partner updates – none • Cotswold Canals –JA reported that the 'missing mile' planning consent was presenting some huge challenges . A new visitor centre is being opened at the Cotswold Water Park. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust NN welcomed WWRT to the partnership. GCo said he had attended to observe but y was not directly part of the team so unfortunately was unable to provide any updates other than to say the previous governance issues had now been resolved. <p>AoB KO said that he was aware that Ken Burgin (CCT) was currently unwell and asked JA to convey our best wishes and speedy recovery. NN echoed these thoughts and wishes.</p> 	
8	<p>Date and time and location of next meeting: 2pm Thursday 1st June 2023- Monkton Park Chippenham in person and online Further dates 2023: 7th Sept; 7th December</p>	