



MEETING Thursday 7th March 2pm

This was a hybrid meeting in person in the Bewley Room Wiltshire Council Offices Monkton Park Chippenham SN15 1ER or online via Microsoft Teams

Item	<u>Notes</u>	
NN JL MH JR WS MS JA GC CC MG MHo DM KO RS LW	<p style="text-align: center;">Attending</p> <p>Cllr Nabil Najjar Wiltshire Council (Chairman) John Laverick (President) Cllr Mark Harris Melksham Without PC Cllr Judy Roberts Oxfordshire CC Cllr Bill Scott (Semington PC) Cllr Marina Strinkovsky Swindon BC (for part of meeting) John Allan Cotswold Canals Trust Gavin Champion Cooper Tires (for part of meeting) Chris Clark Wiltshire Council Mike Gibbin Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Martin Holliss Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Dick Millard Sustrans Ken Oliver Wiltshire Council (Partnership Officer) Richard Shackleton WBCT Luke Walker – Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust</p>	
1	Apologies :Peter Scatchard Wilts & Berks Canal Trust	
2	<p>Notes from the last meeting 7th December 2023 (pre-circulated) were approved</p> <p>Matters arising LW said he wished to add to what had been said at the last meeting regarding Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust and the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust</p> <p><i>Because of the nature of what was said, and that these notes are circulated beyond those who were at the meeting, this part of the meeting is not summarised here other than to note that the Chairman indicated that it was not business for the Partnership. A verbatim transcript of this part of the meeting has been made and will be retained electronically but not published</i></p> <p>Introductions Gavin Champion noted that this was his last meeting as Cooper Tires has now closed and he is leaving shortly.</p>	
3	<p>Chairman's Announcements</p> <p>Monthly update meeting with Canals Officer -NN said these meetings have continued to try to progress matters between meetings. NN said he had recently also had a separate meeting with MG and MH.</p>	

<p>4</p>	<p>Action Items –</p> <p>Letter of Support It was hoped that the letter of support from Wiltshire Council would soon be available. JR said she would take up providing a similar letter from Oxfordshire CC if WBCT sent a proposed draft . JR said that she was aware of the project around Abingdon and had visited some of the restoration. JR noted the route often came up in discussions around cycleways and Active Travel and she was pleased to promote the towpath as an opportunity to create new connections.</p> <p>Deputy Chair Cllr Strinkovsky has indicated that she would be willing to take on the role The meeting approved this appointment ‘nem com’.</p> <p>Towpath Challenge sub group KO said that the group had met shortly after the last Partnership meeting. The concept of restoring the towpath seems to have wide community support. The group is trying to put together projects in each of the Local Authority areas-.Melksham to Lacock- Swindon New Eastern Villages- Shrivenham to Swindon</p> <p>Funding-Group MH and KO will look to start this group and define terms of reference.</p> <p>MH said that land acquisition and funding are the two key elements of the success project and therefore should be given due prominence in delivering the scheme.</p> <p>RS asked if Oxfordshire CC could provide a letter of support for the towpath projects in the county. JR said that could be possible subject to the constraints of any planning applications. JR said that she would look into finding a suitable contact. MH suggested that a more generic letter similar to the one proposed from Wiltshire might be considered. JR said this should be possible and it could also possible for the Vale of White Horse DC to do something similar. MG said that WBCT were very glad for the support shown by both Authorities and that he could send an outline of what would be useful for the Trust.</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>Proposed changes to MoU and revised Strategy document (pre-circulated) KO said that the documents had first been tabled at the last Partnership meeting and following comments they had been updated and amended and recirculated. KO said he was seeking approval of the revised documents which set out clearly the aims of the Partnership particularly putting emphasis on the Towpath Challenge JL asked to make some comments noting that there appeared to be a reduction in the number of organisations shown as partners- for instance Nationwide Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council, Canoe England & Wiltshire College. JL would like to know, if this is the case and that their membership had ‘fallen away’, were any active steps being taken to encourage them to rejoin. KO said that in general organisations joined through discussions with an individual and if the person moved on it was difficult to re-establish contact. KO was happy to take an action to investigate whether we could re-establish links with those who had left by default. In response to whether Oxfordshire projects have been included KO confirmed that the two projects at Shrivenham and Uffington are listed. JL also asked if the Options Approval section could be re-worded- Option 4 – standalone section of viable water channel. MHo said that he recognised the importance of standalone sections being connected to the navigable network. MHo fully supported getting as many organisations as possible to join the Partnership and that we should learn by the example of the Cotswold Canals project. MHo also said that he was not keen on putting an</p>	

	<p>end date on completion. As funding is such a key issue MHo thought that the Partnership should grapple with finding the necessary finance from third parties. He also said that he was not sure that there is a requirement for a navigation authority at this stage. MHo repeated what had been said at previous meeting that he expected the ability of WBCT to provide funds for anything in the next year are likely to be severely limited depending on the possible fine from HSE . In particular the contribution to the Partnership Officer post was likely to be jeopardised and he therefore urged other organisations to see whether they could also contribute. MS said that she would love to be able to find some funding but having just passed a budget with £40m of cuts it was extremely unlikely. This would not preclude reconsideration in future years when a strategic framework is in place via the Local Plan where the canal could be given a specific budget allocation. MG said that he hoped the budget decisions could be made bearing in mind the projected economic benefit of restoration (£54m)- currently demonstrated by the Kennet & Avon Canal. He noted that this at present would be investment with payback coming in subsequent years – WBCT would be please to supply relevant information. JR said that sadly Local Authorities are very strapped for cash at the moment – she wondered if there was an opportunity for raising cash by organising a funding event to walk the route – this could also provide further publicity for the Towpath Challenge. KO said he would put the idea to the Towpath Challenge group MHo said for clarity the main route is 50 miles and with branches 72 miles – he noted that with a large number of landowners, who had varying degrees of support, accessing all the canal route is not possible at the moment. KO asked if the documents with the amendments suggested could be approved. It was agreed that the amended versions would be circulated prior to the next meeting</p>	
6	<p>Partnership Officer Report- Melksham Link- planning application- KO reported that consultants are working on a report to provide solutions to the current Environment Agency objections. Melksham Hydro Scheme – the project is being developed and further partners are being sought including Wiltshire Council.</p>	
7	<p>Projects update –KO reported :- Swindon Wichelstowe Canalside-that subject to planning consent being granted work on the next section of canal construction should start in a few months time subject to ground conditions. East Wichel- canal leak- Adverse weather conditions had prevented any further work. Landowner issue Westleaze- No further progress to report. Repairs Rushey Platt – Funded by Swindon BC WBCT are developing a bank repair schedule which should start in the autumn. Mouldon Hill- progress is being made on ownership issues and permission to work on the site. Uffington Gorse and Shrivenham Canal Park – work is continuing in these projects</p>	
8	<p>Partners Reports and Issues WBCT update MHo gave an update to the meeting on the fatality at Pewsham that took place 7 ½ years ago . HSE had proceeded to prosecute for a breach of the Health & Safety at Work Act and WBCT have decided to plead guilty. The hearing will be in June.</p>	

	<p>MG said that much work still continued on updating safety procedures and culture.</p> <p>The organisation continues to expand and the new Board of Directors is working well. Governance- the Trustees look at and set strategy.</p> <p>Community Engagement continues through the WBCT branch network (5 branches) and social media. This has seen an upturn in the number of new members.</p> <p>MG said that WBCT has a new trip boat which will be operating shortly at Royal Wootton Bassett. He said that shortly WBCT hoped to start a campaign to communicate with external stakeholders, both locally and nationally. MG said that the recent bad weather had caused continuing flooding issues at the Peterborough Arms Dauntsey Lock affecting the viability of the business. He thanked the Wiltshire Council team who had attended to clear gulleys and drains. A more robust technical solution required and WBCT is currently fundraising to implement a new drainage system. CC said that the drainage team are working with WBCT to assist in a suitable drainage design.</p> <p>Cotswold Canals –JA said he was delighted to report that planning consent has been granted for Phase 1b (The Missing Mile) – this is a new channel to replace the lost section of historic route. The consent has taken 3 years and comes with a large number of conditions. It is good news for the project which has been impacted by steep rises in construction cost. The CCT now has appointed an engineering director to examine how the project costs can be reduced by changing some of the structure designs.</p> <p>JA shared that they had been approached by a consultancy proposing a water transfer grid using the Cotswold and West & Berks canals. MG said that they had also been approached and were looking into the validity of the scheme.</p> <p>Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust. LW reported that they had taken delivery of a number of pieces of equipment funded by Bradenstoke Solar park. Work continues on keeping towpaths tidy. A bridge had been repaired on a public right of way and the cost re-imbursed by Wiltshire Council.</p>	
<p>10</p>	<p>Date and time and location of next meeting: Next meeting 2pm - 13th June –at project offices Wichelstowe Swindon . This will be in person only and will include an opportunity to visit the canal with a boat trip – possibility of post meeting social get together the Hall & Woodhouse pub.</p> <p>Future meetings -please note change of day -4th September- 4th December</p>	