



MEETING Thursday 7th September 2023 2pm

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

Item	<u>Notes</u>	
<p>NN CG MH BS CC MG MHo RS DM KO LW</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Attending</p> <p>Cllr Nabil Najjar Wiltshire Council (Chairman) Cllr Colin Goodhind Melksham TC Cllr Mark Harris Melksham Without PC Cllr Bill Scott Semington Parish Council Chris Clark Wiltshire Council Mike Gibbin Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Martin Hollis Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Richard Shackleton Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Dick Millard Sustrans Ken Oliver Wiltshire Council (Partnership Officer) Luke Walker – Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust</p>	
1	<p>Apologies: Cllr Duncan Enright Oxfordshire CC, Gavin Champion Cooper Tires, John Allan Cotswold Canals Trust, Chris Sims K&A Canal Trust John Laverick (President),</p>	
2	<p>Notes from the last meeting 6th July 2023 (pre-circulated) were agreed</p>	
3	<p>Chairman’s Announcements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly update meeting with Canals Officer NN reported that to make sure action items are progressed he is meeting with KO each month. 	
4	<p>Action Items –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Deputy Chair NN said that there is a need for a deputy Chairman. KO noted that this had previously been a Councillor from another Local Authority (Until May 2023 Cllr Sumner from Swindon BC). To date we have not received any official notification from Swindon BC of a replacement – KO would check and confirm representation. Cllr Enright is from Oxfordshire- all other Councillors are from Wiltshire Towns and Parishes. NN would email other Councillors on the Partnership and gauge the response and report back to the next meeting. • Towpath Challenge sub group KO said that the group has now met twice and there was much enthusiasm for the project. The concept of a walking and cycling route seemed to have more traction than the more complicated work required to restore the canal and its structures. Two members from Oxfordshire’s Active Travel team attended the last meeting. Their interest reflects a project that has been suggested for a number of 	

years to create a route from Grove/Wantage to Abingdon. There is also some interest in Shrivenham to Wantage. In Swindon the Rights of Way Officer is helping to establish whether the canal route in the New Eastern Villages is going to be designated and hopefully constructed. The group is meeting at the end of September and these together specific projects in Wiltshire will be discussed. **RS** noted that if the reservoir proposals go ahead he would be keen to be a strong position to deliver the required deviation to the canal route .

[**MG** joined the meeting at this point]

MHo noted that the concept of creating a walking and cycling route seems to be non-contentious in all areas with support from councils, councillors and members of the public. Clearly in terms of the reservoir it would be foolish to create a route that may be flooded but active involvement with SESRO is desirable. **KO** said he would seek involvement of Wiltshire’s Active travel team to look at Royal Wootton Bassett to Swindon (where a non canal route is being considered) and Melksham to Lacock where Sustrans Route 45 currently uses a busy on road route. In conclusion there seems to be much interest in the project which should provide a strong base for further support.

- **Funding- deferred to 2024.** **KO** noted that formation of this group had been deferred to next year . **MG** said that WBCT are still trying to increase the level of funding with an aim to get to £500k pa. Unfortunately the possible intervention by HSE and the Coroner has apparently gathered pace recently and due diligence of funders would suggest that any major funding will be deferred until the result of any possible court case is known. This process could take 12-18 months. In the meanwhile some six objectives focussing on community engagement are going to be discussed by the WBCT Executive team with a view to implementation.

These objectives are :

- Strengthening Safety Culture.
- Strengthening the organisation.
- Engaging with community at Parish and Town Councils.
- Working with Unitary, County and District Councils
- Strengthen project work and capability .
- Supporting and implementing the Towpath Challenge

MHo said he viewed this as an opportunity to take stock and get the fundamentals right.

- **Letter of Support from Local Authorities** **NN** noted that he had received a draft from **MHo** and now that the Leader has returned from leave **NN** would take the opportunity to discuss it with Cllr Clewer. **MHo** said he would resend a revised draft. **MHo** said that the draft had not been sent to other Local Authorities yet. **LW** noted he was making a presentation to Bremhill Parish Council.

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WBCT update **MHo** noted that the new structure of WBCT seems to be bedding in well with an increasing emphasis of health and safety. The Trust’s financial position has not improved but it is being dealt with until the situation can be resolved .**MG** agreed that with limited funds WBCT is carrying out ‘soft’ activities to match the available resources, while preparing for larger projects when funding is available.

6	<p>Partnership Officer Report-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melksham Link- planning application- update KO noted that the case planning officer had convened a further meeting with Wiltshire Council's ecologist and agreed 'specification' for WBCT consultants to deal with the outstanding matters in and around the river which aligned with the issues already raised by the Environment Agency. When the consultants have completed the work and submitted a further report there will be a further public consultation via the planning system. • Melksham Hydro Scheme KO reported that WBCT and Melksham Town Council are working in partnership to progress the scheme and have met with EA to discuss the possible future use of the existing Melksham Gate river control structure . KO said that he had been investigating crowd funding of the scheme and had met with Swindon Borough Council to understand how their scheme for funding renewable energy projects (solar) worked. A new Government scheme (£10m Community Energy) is being launched in the autumn which may offer another funding opportunity. LW noted that the Cotswold project had installed a hydro scheme. KO said that the project may be affected by any future plans for the Cooper Tires site when the factory closes at the end of this year. MHo asked if it was the aim of EA to remove the weir (as already proposed in Chippenham). KO said that in general the EA are seeking to remove artificial structures in river system. The Melksham Gate specifically provides sufficient water to supply the abstraction licence for Cooper Tires. CG said that there would be considerable loss of amenity value of the river if the levels were lowered (for canoeing and boating). 	KO
7	<p>Projects update – KO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Swindon Wichelstowe Canalside construction of the next section of canal westwards of the lock will start as soon as a planning condition from the EA had been discharged. ▪ East Wichel- canal leak High levels of summer rainfall had hampered further investigations however it was evident that there are still leaks around the aqueduct structure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Landowner issue Westleaze is still unresolved. ▪ Repairs Rushey Platt Swindon BC has agreed to fund WBCT to carry out repairs on the towpath bank. A first trial section is to be worked on during the autumn. ▪ Mouldon Hill- no further update <p>MHo reported that there were continuing issues with apparently non-compliance with planning consents at Badbury Park where the land reserved for the canal was being used for soil storage. KO said that he was in touch with the local branch and had advised that as the planning department had not responded then it would be best for WBCT to contact the local Councillor to try to get the matter resolved.</p>	
8	<p>Partners Reports and Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cotswold Canals –update- John Allan reported by email that remaining issues on the Phase 1 b (missing mile) planning application appeared to be resolved and that determination was expected in the autumn. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wessex Waterways Restoration Trust LW said most of their work was currently maintenance and small scale fundraising. KO asked whether WWRT would be able to help the Towpath Challenge open a significant section of the canal as it was part owned by one of their directors. LW said he continued to try to achieve this and he was trying to open a dialogue with the owner and MHo. <p>MHo noted that it would a huge step forward to open this section and indeed to have it as a restored section of the waterway. WBCT had recently been given notice by its tenant at the Peterborough Arms at Dauntsey Lock and not withstanding the current local road difficulties, the financial viability of the public house would be greatly enhanced by having the canal open with boats and associated activity.</p> <p>Chris Sims (KA Trust) reported by email that DeFRA had now made a grant offer to Canal & River Trust which is a considerable reduction in funding and that there was concern that it would not be sufficient to keep all the canal network open.</p> <p>KO noted that Wiltshire Council's Local Plan goes to public consultation from 27th September. Details of the consultation will be circulated when available and KO is liaising with WBCT on a suitable response. One thing to highlight is that the Canal Policy has progressed from simply protecting the route to supporting the restoration. NN said that it is a step forward but is of course funding dependent. NN encouraged partners either as individuals or as organisations to respond. KO said that he would be pleased to answer any questions about the policy when the consultation goes live. MG said that much of the WBCT response was contained in their case for support which had by extrapolation from existing data suggests an annual economic benefit of £50m pa for the restored canal with a further similar sum for well being and health benefits.</p>	
8	<p>Date and time and location of next meeting: Next meeting 2pm Thursday 7th December 2023 2pm Hybrid/ Monkton Park Proposed dates 2024 7th March - 6th June -5th September- 5th December</p>	