

Birmingham 10 May 2014 IWA/CRT Restoration conference

Concluding remarks by John Dodwell, a Trustee of the Canal & River Trust, at the IWEA/CRT conference on restoration entitled “Water Adds Value” at 4pm on Saturday May 10 2014 in Birmingham.

One of the purposes of the conference was to launch the results of research carried out by the University of Northampton about the impact of waterways restoration on the surrounding area.

It falls to me to try and sum up but first may I ask you to show your appreciation to Julia Tinker and Kate Langley who have organised today? It's the first such event they have organised and I hope they are suitably impressed by your enthusiasm. Will Julia and Kate please stand up and take a bow?

The research information from Northampton University is very useful. We know that to get money from Government agencies, we have to show how we tick their boxes. This is a different approach from the appeal to the heart with the general public. The summary report can be found at <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/restoration/the-benefits> and the longer version at <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/library/6337.pdf>.

Please particularly look at the video you've all been given to take away and do please show it to local opinion formers and people in authority. It's also available at http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=dg0B_2v-bLk

We had good reports from Ken Oliver from the Wilts & Berks Canal about the current planning regime (including that if it may be troublesome to show a canal can be restored within the lifetime of the Local Plan, then at least seek to get the canal line safeguarded as part of Green Infrastructure) and from Ken Burgin from the Cotswold Canal Trust about progress on restoring the Canal in Stroud and also their plans to seek HLF and other funding for the next stage to link to the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. David Penney from the Hereford & Gloucester Canal Trust opened our eyes to planning to restore financially sustainably by generating income from canalside activities. Of course, all these three restorations at one time were thought to be “beyond being impossible” but look at them now! Even so, somehow we need to speed up progress.

Very useful to hear from Glyn Cornish of the Gloucestershire Warwickshire railway and how they have funded their restoration – I'm full of admiration for what the heritage railway movement has achieved, especially in its use of volunteers. What can we learn from them? I speak as someone who volunteered on the Ffestiniog Railway Deviation, building a completely new section. Jason Leach and Julie Sharman have probably got tired of my telling them of the 364 days a year ex Marine Sergeant Major who organised those volunteers. (Using retired military people means they only need to supplement their income, not necessarily earn a full wage.)

This is one reason why I'm very interested – and very much commend to you – what Richard Drommett and the Mon & Brec Trust are doing on the bottom end of the Mon & Brec. HLF money, strong backing from Torfaen Council (is it a co-incidence that their chief exec is a member of CRT's National Council?) and working with the Skills Council who bring with them a supply of trainees, all means constant progress on site.

Within CRT, as I hope you know, we are very much aware of what volunteers can do and encourage it. Vince Moran, our Head of Operations, has said there's nothing volunteers can't do – given time. The Trustees are keen on restoration which is why Jason Leach and his team of Julia Tinker and Kate Langley have been set up as the Restoration group. Working with IWA makes sense as there's no point in duplicating effort/knowledge. We can provide technical help (within time limits) and experience of putting together funding bids. The Trust is supporting the Chesterfield Canal Trust against HS2 in the non- CRT length; I was rather impressed when the chair of that Trust said "I don't think BW would have acted in the same way and if there's a clear and palpable example of the cultural change between the old and new organisations, it's the way they have helped us over HS2".

We do need – and appreciate - your telling us how you think we can help you with your restoration. But when it comes to money, the Trust has to face the fact that it must look after the existing open network – and that what money can be earmarked for restoration is likely to be focused on the waterways the Trust itself owns and where it can be used as a lever to attract in outside money.

Talking of money, I read in a Society magazine a suggestion of increasing the subscription level. I counsel against that. What Societies need is a large membership. This not only influences local and other funders but also gives a data base for mailing special appeals. Look at the Cotswold Trust with its 7,500 members; their Bowbridge Lock appeal quickly raised £50,000 from their members, alongside £50,000 from charitable foundations.

I hope you have all thought today a worthwhile use of your time. In his opening remarks, Les told us of things done since last year. I know today has been a full agenda and your input is appreciated. When we meet next year, I expect we shall hear about progress on the key action points from today. This, to me, is important. Talking shop can be useful in spreading knowledge. Ticked off action lists are better.

Travel safely home and take back the message that you are all part of a national movement and remind people of all the many different types of benefit a restored waterway brings to your locality. How many other projects on which money can be spent bring such a vast amount of upside?