

# All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

## Waterway Restoration: A catalyst for regeneration and economic recovery

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2020

### Minutes

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NB: Participating Parliamentary members of the APPG are highlighted in **bold**.

The Webinar was opened by **Michael Fabricant MP** at 9:45am.

Peter Buck, Director & Trustee at the [Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust](#), presented on the work of the Trust and their efforts to improve the environment of the waterway. Mr Buck noted the rise in visitor numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent construction works as part of the development of local roads and preliminary works for the High-Speed 2 (HS2) railway line. However, he added that social distancing and lockdown regulations had limited volunteer action over the recent months.

Mr Buck highlighted that, despite a lack of direct financial assistance from local authorities, bodies such as the Restoration Trust were nevertheless supported by a range of public-sector bodies, especially with regard to the aforementioned road and HS2 schemes. He added that the Trust was being further supported to provide access between housing developments and other schemes. He also noted the capacity for Trust to facilitate utilities work, as well as the need for policy-makers to improve certain bureaucratic challenges associated with restoration works.

The second presentation was from John Dodwell, Chair of the Montgomery Canal Partnership. Mr Dodwell began by providing an overview of the Partnership's restoration strategy. He noted that approximately half of the 35 mile Canal route the Partnership is responsible for had currently been restored as part of a four phase programme. The restoration of the canal began in 1969.

Mr Dodwell highlighted strong support from County and Town Councils, as well as extensive local interest. He added that 68 percent of local residents were "very supportive" of the work of the Partnership, with another 25 percent "somewhat supportive".

Concluding, Mr Dodwell added that the Partnership's programme was in line with a range of government initiatives. He noted that "shovel ready" projects in infrastructure such as Canals provided a

range of benefits, including investment in infrastructure, support for tourism, and provision for jobs and careers in construction and engineering.

The third speaker was Terry Cavender, Executive Officer and Trustee of the [Buckingham Canal Society](#). Mr Cavender highlighted a range of benefits regarding the work of the Society, including improving the environment conditions for waterfowl and other wildlife, as well as restoration for a range of heritage bridges and other structures. He noted that a recently completed scheme had been dubbed “the best wildlife reserve in Buckinghamshire”.

Mr Cavender noted a community project aimed at restoring various bridges along the Canal. He said that the Society had been effective at encouraging young people into the heritage skills “pipeline”, as well as developing business links and partnerships as a means of leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). He said that the current track record associated with applying for funding and other grants would be challenged by Brexit, and more clarity about what would replace EU-backed schemes would be of interest.

In closing, Mr Cavender reiterated some of the points raised by other speakers, such as the wider social benefit of canal restoration, developing new links between Trusts and local and national government, and the benefits of tax rebates and support for the heritage sector.

Following the speakers, Michael Fabricant opened a panel discussion and contributions from members.

**Lord German** asked how policy-makers and Canal Trusts could leverage CSR in a more effective way.

Terry Cavender said that a range of corporate sponsors and businesses provided a great deal of practical support for bodies such as the Buckingham Canal Society.

**Michael Fabricant MP** highlighted that the Government’s newly announced Jobs Programme could provide a means of funding jobs for individuals in the canal and waterways sector.

**Simon Baynes MP** asked how cross-border bodies, such as the Montgomery Canal Partnership, were treated by national and devolved administrations.

Replying, John Dodwell noted that the mid-Wales region suffered from being somewhat isolated from the more populated and prioritised North and Cardiff Bay regions. He said that the Partnership, with 10 miles in England and 25 miles in Wales, would provide a clear example for a successful cross-border partnership to incorporate Powys and Shropshire. This was supported by **Craig Williams MP**.

**Michael Fabricant MP** then introduced a statement by Simon Harrow of [Ofwat](#), noting the [Regulators’ Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development](#) (RAPID) project, a cross-agency regulatory organisation to help deliver sustainability across the waterway network. Mr Harrow explained that the project identifies and develops water resource solutions at a regional and national level. He added that

the project had identified a range of schemes to improve the transfer of water. RAPID have identified six water transfer options that directly make use of, canals and pipelines. Of this, Mr Harrow stated that two options include elements of raw water transfer by canal.

**Lord Bradshaw** asked what plans existed to support the transfer of water into the River Thames via the canal network to accommodate increased demand.

Replying, Mr Harrow highlighted a transfer scheme from the Severn to the Thames to ensure sustainable water levels. He noted that, as part of this project, a number of routes were being developed, including a water resource management plan using either a pipeline, or a waterway-led scheme using the Cotswold Canal.

Terry Cavender highlighted the importance of improving links between regional and local authorities as part of the project.

Bernie Jones of the [Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust](#) noted the government's "build, build, build" mantra would be well served by investing in shovel-ready projects in the canal partnership sector, as well as further investing in skills and re-training. .

Richard Handley of the [Cromford Canal](#) in Derbyshire further requested more information from participants.

Ellen Hawes of the [Inland Waterways Association](#) asked how third-party organisations could be involved in the work of Ofwat and other regulators.

Replying, Simon Harrow said that RAPID members were keen to speak with such bodies and that he would provide more information on how to do so. He noted the concerns expressed by various participants about the bureaucracy associate with dealing with public bodies and that RAPID was intended to help respond to this.

Michael Limbrey, Chairman of the [Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust](#), expressed a note of caution about schemes that involved the merging of different water sources, and the need for bodies to better co-ordinate their wider program of works.

Mike Palmer, Chairman of the Inland Waterways Association's Waterway Recovery Group, mentioned IWA's vision for waterway restoration to be regarded as a fully joined up restorable network rather than as individual projects. A national infrastructure project that included hundreds of miles of towpaths and waterways restored to navigation would be an answer to many of the issues that Government has stated it wishes to address as part of its post-COVID recovery plan, including more miles of cycling and walking to work routes, investment in infrastructure and greater community engagement.

Sir Robert Atkins noted the importance of Government being made aware of the wider benefits of canal and river restoration. He added that engagement with Rebecca Pow MP, the Minister responsible for the sector, should be followed up. **Mr Fabricant** replied by saying that Ms Pow would be approached to take part in subsequent meetings of the APPG for the Waterways.

Paul Rodgers, Chairman of the Inland Waterways Association, said that there was a key role for the Group to emphasise the importance of raising standards concerning restoration and waterway development schemes across a range of regulatory bodies.

**Mr Fabricant** concluded the meeting by reaffirming the Group's engagement with Government and to invite a relevant Minister from DEFRA to a future meeting of the Group.

**The meeting closed at 10:55.**

## Addendum

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Simon Harrow, Principal Engineer, RAPID / Future Assets & Resources, can be contacted at [Simon.Harrow@ofwat.gov.uk](mailto:Simon.Harrow@ofwat.gov.uk). Simon provided the following information after the meeting:

For more information on RAPID see:

<https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/regulated-companies/rapid/>

This also provides access to past newsletters and the option to sign up to future ones.

For more information on the Ofwat funding of the strategic regional water resource solutions at PR19 see the final determination appendix at this link:

<https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/pr19-final-determinations-strategic-regional-water-resource-solutions-appendix/>