

MEETING OF THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR WATERWAYS GROUP (APPGW)

Waterways restoration programmes and their wider social, environmental and economic impact on local and regional economies

16 October 2018, 10am – 12pm, Committee Room G, House of Lords, SW1A 0PW

Present: Lord German (Vice Chair of APPGW), Kevin Brennan MP Shadow Minister, David Drew MP, Mike Palmer IWA, David Marshall Stroud District Council, Robin Stonebridge Chesterfield Canal Trust, Neil Edwards IWA, Alison Smedley IWA, Peter Walker CRT, Sam Anderson-Brown CRT and representatives from British Canoeing, Bridgewater Canal Company, Derby & Sandiacre Canals Trust, Ashby Canal Association, Lapal Canal Trust, Montgomery Canal Partnership, Great Ouse Boating Association, River Stour Trust, Historic Narrow Boat Club, Basingstoke Canal Society, Maidenhead Waterways Restoration Group, Buckingham Canal Society, Wilts and Berks Canal Society

1. Apologies

John Grogan MP, Ivor Caplan, Lord Bradshaw

2. Declarations

Lord German is also President of the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust, which is working to restore the Ty Coch lock flight on a derelict section of the canal in Cwmbran

3. Welcome for Chair – Lord German

Presentations

4. Mike Palmer IWA – Waterways Recovery Group Chairman

“Water adds value.”

Waterways in Progress is a new report to be published in the near future by IWA’s Restoration Hub in conjunction with members of the Hub's High Level Panel of restoration movement representatives.

Highlights from the report were presented to delegates at the World Canals Conference hosted in Ireland earlier this year. Case studies included Ebley Mill on the Cotswold Canals project, Hollingwood Hub on the Chesterfield Canal and the built and natural assets on the Montgomery Canal.

Using case studies such as these, Waterways in Progress seeks to spell out how well thought-out, partial restoration initiatives can start to deliver right from Day One.

Example: Eden Project

Still work in progress but there was delivery of work from day one. From clay pit to world-famous visitor attraction and educational charity.

Importance of short term plans and schemes to be implemented from day one.

Chesterfield Canal

Hollingwood Lock House is the sole remaining lock house on this stretch of the canal. It is unique as a railway built lock house.

The railway line was closed in 1963 and the station was demolished in the 1960s.

The Lock House was been rebuilt and extended in 2010/11 thanks to a grant of £385,000 from HM Government. It is now known as Hollingwood Hub.

Facilities include a Coffee Shop, a meeting and education room, a play and picnic area, shower and toilets. There is office space for the Chesterfield Canal Trust.

Hollingwood Hub is available for a huge number of uses. The meeting room can be used by schools, crèches or playgroups. It is available from the early morning until late evening so social events, training courses and night school classes find it really handy.

The garden is being developed by members of the Trust and local people and schools. There are benches, picnic tables and cycle racks.

The canal project has already bought huge environmental and local leisure benefits for the local community and visitors.

Economic benefits can include the creation of jobs as well as increased leisure and tourism. Social benefits can include sense of community through campaigning and volunteering for a local project as well as benefits to health through increased opportunities for cycling and walking. Environmental benefits include creating habitats to increase bio-diversity of wildlife.

The University of Northampton has recently carried out research into the benefits of restoration. See link

https://www.waterways.org.uk/waterways/restoration/restoration_resources/pdfs/water_adds_value_benefits_of_waterways_restoration

5. Robin Stonebridge, Chair Chesterfield Canal Trust

The Gain and Drain of Waiting - making the most of work in progress by taking the public [and the water] along with them.

THE TRUST'S VISION

Full restoration of the canal and the creation of the Rother Valley Link by 2027, 250 years after the canal was opened and 120 years after the Norwood Tunnel collapsed.

Adding value

There is growing and surprisingly incontrovertible evidence that canal restoration has a significant role to play in four distinct areas of our national life;

In improving personal health and well-being - both physical and mental through creating peaceful spaces and places for individuals and families to enjoy and are increasingly prepared to care for.

In stimulating local economies by creating jobs and adding value for businesses and residential areas i.e. Water Adds Value;

In making a major positive contribution to water management, flood alleviation and habitat creation in a time of climate change;

In bringing industrial history and heritage to life for the communities that live along its banks; for tourists and visitors, thus contributing to the nation's tourism income whilst conserving part of our nation's heritage.

Chesterfield Waterside 1,100 houses, 300 apartments, 4,000 jobs and £340 million of private sector investment predicated on a restored canal.

The Iron Link - Staveley to Renishaw. For hundreds of years iron working in NE Derbyshire was a cottage industry. The canal changed all that. The Trust want to store the Iron Link and tell the story.

Staveley Works Corridor. A whole new community, 1500 new homes, business and retail area, marina, boatyard, rail college, HS2 construction and maintenance depot + 500 jobs

The Chesterfield Canal is part of the way through a restoration of its historical route, which is to be completed in time for its 250th anniversary in 2027. However, the restoration of the last few miles has been stopped in recent years because confirmation cannot be obtained from HS2 that boats will still be able to get underneath it if the trains go ahead.

6. David Marshall – Canal Project Manager, Stroud District Council

Cotswold Canals Project - work began in 2006.

Built on solid community support established by Cotswold Canals Trust (CCT), founded in 1972

Cotswold Canals Partnership set up in 2001

Stroud District Council took over project in 2008. All-party support; councillors could see the benefits of restoring a landlocked 4 mile length of canal. Stroud was post-industrial, with areas along the derelict canal places to avoid

Plan was to begin with a couple of short exemplar lengths – would encourage support and create the vision. Also viable if project as a whole was scrubbed.

First restoration was a 300m length at Ebley. Canal was filled in. Now a thriving community hub with attractive waterside development including businesses - and wildlife.

Second was a derelict 200m length at Wallbridge. Important – gateway to the centre and interface between canal and town.

Result of partnership working. Highway Bridge built by Gloucester County Council. Canal cleared by Stroud District Council and volunteers. Visitor Centre opened by CCT, cafe opened by a former volunteer who saw the potential

Now an attractive gateway, used for annual raft race and weekly canoeing

Adjacent site has now become viable thanks to the uplift in property value resulting from canal restoration and is about to be developed (mixed residential/retail), with through access into the town centre and including a wharf

Project now a success, with the whole corridor transformed. Short lengths joined up, creating an attractive wildlife, leisure and commuting corridor, where people want to be. Dependent on volunteers, but with enormous social capital, e.g. upskilling and health benefits, resulting

Over 60 young people with learning difficulties embedded with volunteers – a unique and rewarding experience for all

Associated education programme – over 2000 pupils involved

Heritage and interpretation programme – ways found to involve more distant groups such as Mothers' Union and a pre-natal group.

Towpath has become a major commuting and leisure route, with enormous CO₂ savings and health benefits.

Now a nationally important project. Has attracted two Royal visits and numerous awards – which in turn assist with attracting funding. Project has also spawned a Boat mobility charity.

Project has Heritage Lottery funding to develop plans for connecting to the national network.

Potential to use the Eastern end of the canal to transfer water from the Severn to the Thames, thus alleviating London's water shortage. Thames Water needs to see wider benefits.

7. Summary

Waterways not party political. Support across political parties as the key issue unites politicians.

Restoration projects should be implemented in stages – fully illustrating and communicating the community benefits at each stage.

Effective partnership building is the key to success of all restoration projects.

Presentations have shown that restoration of waterways can bring 'big' economic, social and environment benefits to an area.

Considerable health benefits in restoring our waterways. Canal & River Trust (CRT) analysis identifies that waterways touched so many aspects of our society and our economy: physical and mental health, transport, leisure, local regeneration, volunteering, energy production and more.

Discussion identifies key difficulties navigating local authority planning departments.

CRT raised concerns about lack of diversity and representations within canal trust memberships and volunteers. Urgent steps need to be taken to promote greater inclusion

Planning departments poorly informed and lack knowledge of waterway projects; do not take in account short term and long term benefits.

Government should be looking to provide appropriate guidance for planning officers to manage waterway restoration projects.

Kevin Brennan MP “Canal Trusts should look to build greater relationship with their MPs – working in partnership, for them to be an effective local and central government supporter of the projects – and promoting the benefits within the wider communities.”

MPs can play a key role in facilitating dialogue with local authorities, Network Rail and other organisations who are opposed to the projects.

8. End