

## SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Date 07/04/2022, 17:00-18:00

Location Zoom.

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### Welcome

David Hagg, Chair of the Regional Advisory Board, welcomed everyone to the meeting and offered an introduction to the Advisory Board.

Mark Evans, Director for Wales & South West was introduced and presented on the Wales & South West Team's work over the last 12 months as well as a look forward to the year ahead. (Presentation shared alongside these minutes).

### Questions & Answers

The floor was handed over to attendees for a Q&A session. Notable discussions and points raised are below.

#### Julian Stirling from Claverton Pumping Station

Julian raised the issue of safety training and compliance – there are currently the wrong number of fire extinguishers on site and some are out of service. This is to be immediately addressed by the local team. Fire alarms are reported as not working and contrary to the fire service plan.

Julian raised concerns over the voluntary group's relationship with the Trust and felt that it is not currently working, with inadequate support from colleagues. This is an issue which both David Hagg and Mark Evans agreed needs attention and will work with the group to improve the relationship.

At the previous annual public meeting, Julian had raised the issue that the group were not notified of inspections ahead of visits. This does not seem to have improved. Mark Evans to address with colleagues, however the issue seems to be that the inspections are conducted by contractors and they are not notifying the Trust when they are due to take place and so we are unable to pass this information onto the group currently.

A payment for tools was provided to the group in 2021 for the work they are carrying out on a voluntary basis to support the Trust's heritage asset. Julian requested that the group

receive a permanent budget going forward. Consideration will be given to this and the Trust will ensure the group have sufficient resource and funding to continue.

Mark Evans will address the concerns raised by Julian Stirling offline and will pick up discussion in more depth with the group.

### **Pamela Smith from the National Bargee Travellers Association**

In 2015 CRT made most visitor moorings 14-days over the winter, which was very welcome by the boating community. However, most of these 14-days in winter visitor moorings have now reverted to 24- or 48-hour moorings all year round, including on the Kennet and Avon Canal. Mark Evans to work with colleagues from the Customer Service & Moorings Team to find out more and come back to Pamela with further information.

Pamela asked why the Trust in Wales & South West is not making comparable efforts to engage with and support the wellbeing of the liveaboard boater community? Anna Finn, Strategic Programme Delivery Manager shared information regarding the Trust's efforts to improve and increase engagement and support for the local community on the western K&A, which has received positive feedback from across the local communities over the last 12 months. This includes the appointment of a Ranger for the western K&A, Paul Broadstock (funded by the Trust and BANES Council), who is on the ground and working with local boaters, waterways users and local partners to improve the relationships between all canal users. We are also delivering initiatives and events throughout 2022 to support boaters, such as Let's Tidy, which aims to improve towpath conditions and support boaters in the disposal of unwanted waste (especially larger items they may struggle to remove themselves). Let's Chat also provides the opportunity throughout the year to meet with colleagues face to face to ask questions and find out more about what's being done in the area. Anna to make introductions between Pamela and Paul, and welcomes feedback and ideas about what else we can do to improve support for the local community.

Question regarding what is happening in Bridgwater docks - are all the boaters being evicted? The Trust is working as closely with the Council as we can and providing support to the boater owners who the Council instructed to leave the Docks in 2021 and have since moved onto the canal. The Docks are owned and managed by the Council and we are waiting for them to share a decision on the future of the waterspace. In the meantime, we

continue to support the boaters to remain on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal pending a longer-term decision.

### **Di Harris**

There have been many reports of crime on the K&A recently, particularly around Devizes. What links does the Trust have with the Police? The police are frustrated by many of the crimes not being reported and would like Canal Watch introduced to help them be more effective. Can the Trust mediate in any way? The crimes taking place are not just against boaters, but people walking and cycling on the towpath.

The Trust will reach out to the local police to find out more. There has not been any recent activity from the Canalwatch group and we are unsure whether local support for this has dwindled during Covid. We will endeavour to forge a closer relationship with the Police to address this. We always encourage any customers who contact us to report incidents to the Police as well, as they have the powers to take action against criminal offences. We report all criminal offences against us/on our land which we are aware of, but having witness accounts helps enable action to be taken.

Di Harris will be in touch offline with Mark to pick this matter up.

### **Dr Kim Daniels, Caen Hill Volunteer Lock Keeper**

Positive feedback that drug taking in the Caen Hill car park has reduced since the barrier was installed to limit access outside of visitor opening hours.

### **Robert Moreland**

Is Bridgwater going to receive levelling up funding?

Bridgwater is receiving funding from the Towns Fund rather than Levelling Up. We hope as a result of this funding, the Council will be able to welcome boats back into the Docks. The IWA welcomes the announcement by Bridgwater Town Development Forum that £23.2m has been awarded from the Government's Towns Fund to Sedgemoor District Council for the regeneration of Bridgwater.

Robert raises the point that the Trust could do more at Sharpness to engage with new audiences. The Trust has a lovely picnic area at the Port and do have some volunteering projects, however we are limited as to what we can do at the site due to the safety restrictions of an active port and visitor number limits in place.

Robert asked about plans for development at the National Waterways Museum Gloucester and recovery from Covid. Anna Finn, who is managing the museum on an interim basis, provided an update on the museum's Covid recovery and initiatives to improve visitor experience and re-engage families. Visitor numbers are increasing since reopening in 2022 and are showing positive trends so far.

Positive feedback about the Annual Restoration Conference, which included good presentations and local interest etc. Thanks from the Trust to the IWA for the important role they play in this event.

**Mike Rodd, NABO Chair**

Mike reported that the paddle on Dunhill Lock still not fixed after three years. Mark Evans will pick this matter up with Rob Coles, Area Operations Manager to address.

Positive feedback from Mike about the efficient tree clearances on the Mon & Brec Canal following the storms.