

## Exeter River & Canal User Group

Minutes of the meeting of the 9 November 2016 meeting held at Haven Banks  
Outdoor Education Centre

01	<p><b>Attendance:</b> Lynn Trout (LT) W.Trout &amp; Son Ltd, Topsham Jane Evans (JE) Exeter Canoe Club / Exe Water Sports Association Colin Acton (CA), Exeter City Council Waterways Dept Paul Wilson (PW), Exeter Rowing Club &amp; Regatta Guy Parker (GP) Exeter Boat Owners Association Chris Price (CP), Boat owner Simon Reader (SR), Retreat Boatyard Heather Baker (HB), Saddles &amp; Paddles Ben Hedden (BH) Haven Banks OEC Mike Trout (MT), W.Trout &amp; Son Ltd, Topsham Mitch Bewsey (MB), AS Watersports Ltd Simon Bates (SB), Exeter City Council / East Devon District Council Mike Holland (MH), Environment Agency Cody Lyster, Exeter Sea Cadets John Monks (JM), Friends of Exeter Ship Canal Peter Nickol, Friends of Exeter Ship Canal Derrick Morrison, 19<sup>th</sup> Exeter Sea Scout Group Steve Gibson, Exeter Rowing Club Alex Robey, Exeter University Boat Club Chris Green (CG), CH2M Damian Johnson, Quay Climbing Centre Anya Oliver, Devon Wildlife Trust Peter Burgess, Devon Wildlife Trust Adrian Mountford, Exeter Riverside Parkrun John Caswell, Exeter Riverside Parkrun David Brearley, Exeter University Canoe Club</p> <p><b>Apologies</b> Stephanie Clark (SC), Exe Estuary Management Partnership Mark Bloxham (MB), Adventure Activities Devon Joe Grayling, Exeter Cruises Chris Rogers, Exeter Regatta Roly Palmer (RP), Exeter and District Angling Association</p>
02	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Jane welcomed everyone to the meeting. Minutes have not been prepared for the last meeting owing to too many volunteer tasks being undertaken.</p>

03	<p><b>Cessation of negotiations between Exeter City Council, and Canal &amp; River Trust</b></p> <p><b>ECC's vision for the canal</b></p> <p><b>ECC's proposed Management Plan for the canal to include new approaches to abandoned boats, live aboards, moorings, programmed maintenance and improvements in financial control, customer processes and systems, marketing and published information</b></p> <p><b>Suggestions from the User Group for the Management Plan</b></p> <p>The Council has stopped negotiations with the CRT and are going to manage the canal inhouse. There is a requirement to increase the income by £110,000 but it was not known from which base date. The income has been falling as can be seen by the smaller number of boats being moored, and also that the moored boats are shorter.</p> <p>The Waterways Department is now in the Sports and Recreation portfolio.</p> <p>The Waterways Management Plan is about the management of the water, and not the land assets around the canal.</p> <p>Issues for the Council include the safety of the activities on the canal and estuary and whether users are insured. Unfettered access to the canal is seen as not viable or safe.</p> <p>There was a good discussion about whether the Council should be able to charge for recreational use of the canal in the future. Views included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much of the waterways income is siphoned by other departments in the Council, for example the income from mooring pontoons. The recreational users would want to see their money providing benefits to the canal and if the money goes elsewhere then there would be no point.</li> <li>• Users would only accept a licence fee if the service is improved, eg removal of the weed (In 2015 it lasted from July 2015 to January 2016 causing major problems). At present races are not held because the weed is hazard. The cost of the recent weed boat work was £6,000/£7,000 for one week, including craning in. Having the weed dealt with would be a real benefit and the clubs would be willing to enter into negotiations on recreational licences if there was a proper plan to tackle the weed.</li> <li>• Also the Kings Arms gates would need to be kept open unless water levels required them to be shut. At present they are shut for most of the winter.</li> <li>• Recreational users would want to see a Service Level Agreement or similar contract before they would be willing to pay a licence fee. A promise to make improvements would not be sufficient.</li> <li>• How would licences be calculated? By visits, number of boats in the shed, reductions for regular visitors? Would clubs be willing to collect licence fees on behalf of their members? Only if there were obvious benefits being provided to users of the canal.</li> <li>• Could the collection of licences be delegated to agents who would keep a commission and pass the remaining income to the Council?</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would businesses paying a licence fee for running boating activities on the canal be protected by the Council from pop up businesses who might not be paying a licence fee, pontoon charges or business rates? At present about 15 organisations bring groups of paddlers to the canal over the summer.</li> <li>• Mark Bloxham advised that he had researched the fees that CRT would have charged for a commercial licence for a small business like his: £4,500 pa was the standard fee. This would have shut his business down.</li> <li>• How would licences be collected from casual users? There are many access points to the canal. Could casual users be permitted not to pay as provides goodwill and is cheaper not to have to enforce?</li> <li>• How would people be able to purchase the licence? Online as well as in person? There is a significant cost of collecting and enforcing the licences which might make it not worthwhile, whilst reducing the numbers of people using the canal. Some usage of the canal would disappear.</li> <li>• Would membership of national governing bodies such as British Canoeing provide an exemption from paying a licence fee on the canal as happens on canals operated by the CRT? These organisations negotiate an overall fee with the canal owners for their members.</li> <li>• There should be transparency on the Waterways Department accounts so that licence payers could see that their income is being used to improve the canal.</li> <li>• It would be useful to have information on how much it would cost to keep the canal free of weed. For example what would a weed cutting boat cost? Perhaps a three year programme to tackle the problem. The Tiverton boat cost c £60,000 a few year ago.</li> <li>• Can volunteers help with aspects of running the canal, including the Friends of Exeter Ship canal which has recently been set up?</li> </ul>
04	<p><b>Discussion with Peter Burgess, Director of Development, Policy &amp; Research, and Anya Oliver, Business Development Officer, Devon Wildlife Trust on DWT's proposed management of the Riverside Valley Park from April 2017</b></p> <p>PB and AO explained that the DWT hoped to take over the management of the Valley Parks from April 2017 via a 30 year lease. The DWT would be managing the EA land as well. Not the canal or the towpaths. The cycle paths would remain the responsibility of DCC.</p> <p>The DWT would be aiming for some SANGS money to enhance the trails. DWT will do some fund raising, try to obtain grants but would not charge for the use of the parks.</p> <p>John Monks asked how the DWT would be accountable for its management of the land. The DWT has a Board of Trustees who manage the organisation. Its 32,000 members hold the DWT to account. There are also the terms of the lease. There are break clauses in the lease so if the situation was not acceptable the Council could look to terminate the lease.</p>

	<p>Potentially the combination of these measures provide more democratic influence than the current situation.</p> <p>Once the final decisions have been made the DWT will consult widely on the management of the land and will include the RCUG in this.</p>
05	<p><b>Status of the Valley Parks Masterplan</b></p> <p>The Masterplan was prepared to show how the land can be made attractive to encourage people away from the areas with environmental designations. There is money from developer contributions for this purpose.</p> <p>The Riverside &amp; Ludwell Valley Parks Master Plan 2016-2026 is not binding on the DWT. It is a guidance document and highly aspirational.</p> <p>Questions were asked about whether the Masterplan will be updated as there were some sections that people would like to see improved. SB said that there was no review date scheduled for this but people could ask the Council to review it in due course. Comments could be sent to Simon Bates and he would forward them to the right people.</p> <p>There was a suggestion that the user group who contributed to the writing of the Masterplan should be reconvened to update the Masterplan.</p>
06	<p><b>Quick Updates</b></p> <p>Dredging at the Kings Arms gates is still being considered. The purpose would be to keep the lock gates open plus maintaining the canal depth outside the Welcome café. The cost, and whether it is capital or revenue expenditure is a matter for Roger Crane.</p> <p>Fishing permits are no longer being issued and therefore this issue is resolved.</p> <p>The next 12/18 months of flood defence work will be very busy. They are currently on programme. Users should receive 4 weeks notice and any problems should be notified to Paul Downs.</p> <p>The pontoons for Double Locks have been ordered. Colin Acton confirmed that the pontoon would definitely be installed by 31 March.</p> <p>The steps at the lower end of the flood relief channel will be replaced with concrete steps by the EA early in 2017.</p> <p>The cleanliness of the public toilets on the quay has not improved. Rodding of the drains is occurring weekly and the traders are monitoring the situation. Major improvements are required to the drains in the area and it is not a quick fix.</p> <p>Roger Crane is looking into a website to promote the quay and canal and provide information to users and visitors.</p> <p>The Exeter Waterways Partnership Board has been dissolved by the Council.</p> <p>The Exeter Port Users Group has been established as a result of the City Council as Harbour Authority seeking the ability to issue harbour Directions. Harbour Directions relate to safety and navigation. When the HA wants to issue HDs it has to consult the PUG. The EPUG represents all users on the estuary and has had its first meeting. The RCUG reps are Jane Evans and Guy Parker.</p>

	<p>Lynn Trout provided a short briefing on the roles of bodies involved with management of the Exe. The Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP) has recently set out its 5 year plan for the estuary. The EEMP would like to encourage more members.</p> <p>There is a new body called the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership which is made up of the three local councils and funded by developer levies whose purpose is to protect the birds and can take legal action if users disturb the birds. There is a review of zonation meeting taking place on Thursday 8.12.16 at 6pm at the Coaver Club. The zones are to protect the eel grass and provide a bird habitat zone. There may be 2 patrol boats and the new organisation may be duplicating responsibilities already held by the Harbour Authority. There was a suggestion to invite the patrol officers to a future meeting of the RCUG.</p>
07	<p><b>Any other business</b></p> <p>The Waterways Recovery Group of the Inland Waterways Association has skilled people knowledgeable in the repair and renovation of canals. They could be very useful in looking at improvements of the canal. The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal are able to undertake smaller projects such as clearing vegetation.</p> <p>There has been an inspection of the foot bridges over the canal by DCC and repairs are required. A temporary walkway bridge may be put in place.</p> <p>Colin Acton said that the aim is to close the Kings Arms gates for the winter as they are concerned about debris making it difficult to close the gates quickly as needed.</p> <p>The footbridge over the canal at Double Locks is going to be redocked during December 2016.</p>
09	<p><b>Action Points from Previous Meetings Outstanding</b></p> <p><b>Canal Users Good Management Plan:</b> JE said that paragraph 8 states that the maximum speed permitted is 4 knots. Please could this be amended to apply to motorised craft only. <b>Action Exeter City Council</b></p>