

## **Minutes from the thirty-fourth meeting of the Cross Party Group on Waterways**

Conference Room 24, Ty Hywel, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Wednesday 9 October 2013

6.00pm

### **AMs Present:**

Nick Ramsay AM (Chair) (Welsh Conservatives, Monmouth)  
Mohammed Asghar AM (Welsh Conservatives, South Wales East)  
Russell George AM (Welsh Conservatives, Montgomeryshire)  
Byron Davies AM (Welsh Conservatives, South Wales West)  
William Graham AM (Welsh Conservatives, South Wales East)  
Mark Isherwood AM (Welsh Conservatives, North Wales)

### **Present:**

Phil Hughes  
Martin Buckle  
Alan Platt  
Stephen Rowson  
Brian Hancock  
Richard Preece  
John Gwalter  
Raoul Shambral  
Julian Atkins  
Gillian Billsborough  
Richard Owen  
John Bridgeman  
Peter Cole  
Richard Wyson  
Robert Moreland  
Thomas Maloney  
Ed Townsend  
Chris Yewlett  
John Griffith  
Margaret Gwalter  
Matt Strickland  
Gwyn Lewis  
Gareth Jones  
John Davies  
Pam Jones  
Carole Jacob  
Dr Ann Robinson

### **Item 1: Welcome**

Chair of the Cross Party Group, Nick Ramsay AM, welcomed all to the meeting and outlined the agenda for the meeting. He apologised that the AGM will need to be deferred until the start of the next CPG meeting, or within a year.

### **Item 2: Presentation by James Byrne, Living Landscapes Manager, Wildlife Trusts Wales**

*'Water and Ecosystem Services on a Landscape Scale'- James discussed an ecosystems services approach to water and emphasised the importance of living landscapes and well-being.*

Wildlife Trusts Wales is the umbrella body for the six local wildlife trusts in Wales. The Wildlife Trusts have 11 Living Landscapes in Wales and each one has something to do with water and management

of that water in one form or another. Taking care of living landscapes not only does wonders for the wildlife and wetland creatures, but is also fundamental to ourselves.

The economic value of water for Wales is huge; Welsh Water has a total of 6,000 employees. However, one major issue is pollution. 60% of diffused pollution comes off agriculture and the NSO estimates that it costs £1.3bn a year to sort this out. We are not managing the land in a sustainable manner, but we can change this. For example, peat moss and sphagnum can provide a sustainable function.

Flooding is another major issue; one flood in Denbighshire cost the council insurance £1m. Part of the solution is peat moss – it can absorb 20 times its weight. It would cost £16m to restore all the peat moss, but it could achieve a reservoir for clean water, a reduction in flooding and make water cheaper. The water regulator OFWAT estimates a 65-1 cost ratio for restoring water services.

*A copy of this presentation is available on request.*

### **Item 3: Questions for James Byrne**

Coral Jacobs (Friends of the Earth Cymru Torfaen) commented that if governments can see the economic case then this is the way forward.

James Byrne replied that he has spoken to Alun Davies AM and other ministers and it cannot just come from this department, it needs every department behind it. 1 in 6 Welsh jobs are dependent on a healthy environment.

Brian Hancock (Former AM, Founder of CPG on Waterways) commented that there are technologies out there which can help. Reed technology – this needs beds. Vegetation takes out nitrates and more.

Julian Atkins (BBNPA & CRT) highlighted that Carbon sequestration can be managed with technology and we need to attach landscape issues with multiple benefits for society.

### **Item 4: Presentation by Cat Griffiths Williams, CPRW**

*'Waterways as Elongated Landscapes' - Cat focused on the role of waterways as "elongated landscapes," which not only connect habitats but create their own opportunities to demonstrate from a cultural, economic and social point of view the role of waterways as "living heritage assets".*

Elongated Landscapes are a medium for social well-being and prosperity. They can be defined by zone, area, visitors and the features are natural and cultural and develop over time. Waterways are a perfect example as they bring leisure and pleasure. They are multifunctional blue corridors combining the culture, heritage and the environment. There is history and culture behind Towpaths - but do we view them as this? We need to protect them not for economic reasons, but because of the value assets they offer which needs to be protected. These are historic values, environmental identity, local manual labour and countryside ambition. It is important that we recognise their benefits.

*A copy of this presentation is available upon request*

### **Item 5: Questions for Cat Griffiths Williams**

Alan Platt (Inland Waterways Association – Shrewsbury District & North Wales) commented that they are both thinking on similar lines. They submitted their plan of linear parks – lung into the city; bringing the rural area into the city.

Peter Cole (Capital & Regional Tourism) stated that there is a dilemma between thinking linear and destination. It is important to present a rounded destination and look beyond the banks. With tourism, linear can be a theme; for example, the Canal festival 200 year anniversary last year and Wye festival next year. It can be used either way.

Brian Hancock (Former AM, Founder of CPG on Waterways) asked why do we find it so difficult to get funding or tourism happening?

Nick Ramsay AM (Chair) replied that he agrees, and even in the Active Travel Bill it did not feature. Why not?

Cat Griffiths Williams (CPRW) replied that the £6m funding is starting to come through now.

James Byrne (Wildlife Trusts Wales) replied that what he finds at the Wildlife Trust is that governments like the statistics of 65-1 cost ratio etc and agree that they will do something, but then another company comes along and says that they want to build something and the governments prefer building something rather than regenerating something.

Peter Cole (Capital & Regional Tourism) commented that Wales is a small country and there is a simple message here. Those who champion this line need to speak with one voice.

Mark Lang (Chair, Glandwr Cymru) commented it's not just for the benefit of rich yachters. It is for the 96% of people who use towpaths. What does the Mon and Brec do for Ebbw Vale? Can we answer that?

John Bridgeman (Canal & River Trust, Vice Chair & Trustee) highlighted that the Scottish Government spent £100m and the benefits are successful. Restoration has come back and is in fashion. It is a success – but are we sharing this good practice?

Cat Griffiths Williams (CPRW) replied that no probably not – like Peter Cole mentioned, we need to link together as one voice.

Thomas Maloney (Fourteen Locks Canal Centre) commented that it is refreshing to see that waterways are still on the agenda. We have felt intimidated by the recession. But it is so important.

Delegate: commented that she has put her own money into trying to help this. She wants eco-systems. There has been an application, a public inquiry and Local Development Plan. After fighting for 17 years they might lose it. You need to get some money. This is in regards to a green buffer of land between Cwmbran and Pontypool, with a river in between. 12,000 houses have been proposed either side. They have come to the end of the road.

Stephen Rowson (Author of Glamorganshire Canal Project) stated that Ebbw Vale would not have grown so quickly if it was not for the canal. The history of canals is the same as railways and tram roads etc. Railway Ramblers bring attention to this but what is waterways equivalent?

Mark Lang (Chair, Glandwr Cymru) commented that the question should be what can it do for the future? Not what it has done.

#### **Item 6: Any Other Business**

Richard Owen (Anglers) discussed access to inland water as opposed to access to canals and asked if this can be on a future agenda of the CPG. There are new developments for the Green Paper proposal – so it requires some urgency. It is led by John Griffiths. His line of thinking is opposed to the report (the Inquiry into Access to Waterways) which said the way forward was not through legislation.

Nick Ramsay AM (Chair) agreed, suggesting that the Minister might be approached for more information.

#### **Item 7: Close**

Nick Ramsay AM (Chair) thanked everyone for coming and explained that the next Cross Party Group on Waterways meeting will be happening on Wednesday 4 December.

**Next meeting: Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2013.**