
HEREFORDSHIRE & GLOUCESTERSHIRE CANAL TRUST

Minutes of the HGCT Annual Meeting

7.30 pm 23rd June 2021

Meeting held digitally via Zoom

Chairman Ralph Barber welcomed everyone to the meeting, quorum reached. He explained about the polling system in place for the meeting - making for accurate voting. A fun practice ensued – voting for or against for a three-day weekend.

Apologies received from Paul Brown, Niki and Steve Clark and John Pritchard.

2020 AGM Minutes: No questions or queries were raised. Voting 96% accept 4% abstain.

Chairman's Remarks: As everyone will have read the Annual Report in the Wharfinger the Chairman restricted himself to comments and updates.

“Thank you to all of you, whatever role you do with in the Trust, it is important. Thank you to my fellow trustees. We are building a group of Trustees who I hope will move the Trust forward dealing with a number of areas that we need to address. Thank you to the volunteers who attend site each week whatever the weather and others working on promotions or in the background. We need all of you and more. Getting more volunteers is going to be one of the many challenges to get this canal restored.

Last year I mentioned about the Hereford end of the canal. We have had a number of discussions and meetings about the very end of the canal, the development at Holmer, next to Aylestone Park. How we work with Herefordshire Council is something that I hope the Trust can focus further on more this year. With Robert Moreland putting himself forward as Trustee, we have an extra body to help us engage with all the councils better and further improve our relationships with them.

The work that Chris High and John Kilpatrick and the team worked on is well documented in the Wharfinger recently with the part of the canal next to Yarkhill. Even with the restrictions they did a great job is making this a very picturesque section.

Ledbury, this just shows how much work is being done in the background. Two of us spent most of a week sat in on an appeal - only for us not to be called to speak until 3 months later when the appeal was continued. Thank you to Bob Hargreaves who helped convince the Planning Officer for the Secretary of State that the canal should be included in the development and some funding also supplied.

I just want to talk about the time spent behind the scenes before any canal restoration or excavation can take place. The Malswick Planning Application - this is for 600yards of canal no locks – just canal – in a blank field, more or less. This has taken an incredible amount of work by the team, of whom too many to mention individually, who have had to deal with so many issues while applying for planning. The work for slow worms, that were reported about in the Wharfinger, Great Created Newts survey, Bats' survey, all take time and money, as well as others. The process has highlighted the amount and complexity of reports required, throwing up numerous challenges, including at the last minute an archaeological dig, I hope the team got some pictures for the Wharfinger. As well as learning the local councils' processes. We will obviously be learning from this exercise how to improve our approach to the rest of the canal corridor. Thank you to the team in continuing all their hard work.

Jumping to the Over end of the canal. Since the part lifting of restrictions, we have been able to have a visit from the IWA engineer to discuss the connection to the rest of the network.

This is well down the list of work, physical work I mean, but we are developing the options and some very interesting work is starting up on this. This will be my first shout out for help. If anybody is interested in helping to shape how we are going to connect to the main system please contact me.

Of course, if you think, as we continue through the evening, you could help in any other way, please do contact myself or one of the fellow people listed in the back of the Wharfinger. We need help.

Mill Barn project was revived last year, we produced updated plans in the Wharfinger and we are now on the pre-planning process. Surveys are starting in July for the levels as we are planning to include the car park as part of the planning to enable more spaces and hopefully remove some of the congestion on the local roads of an evening. You may ask why July, well fortunately we in this area are not directly affected by HS2, but they are making use of all the same people we need to use complete work like the surveys around Over. Covid as well has had different effects on the Trust, and Mill Barn not moving on as quickly as I would have liked.

Getting the word out: we have used the web site, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to get the word out as the Promotions team have been unable to hold or attend any events. But Janet Moulton has had many visits to the Post Office with envelopes of Walk Leaflets that have proved very popular – over 30 requests for walk leaflet bundles. Thanks to all of you for your generous donations. Also, for supporting the Grand Holiday Draw by buying raffle tickets (you can still buy more for friends and family, online as well) The latest numbers from Janet are GHD figures are just short of 1500 pounds at £1485. It is good to see people still want to have a good read and the Rescued from Obscurity book written by Dick Skeet has sold a number of copies via the website. We use PayPal as the payment process and thank you to Nick Dymott who pushed through the work required to get the system available for supporters. PayPal as an American company does not understand UK charities. Thank you also to Nick Dymott for his support also with the Wharfinger and other publications he creates for the Trust.

We are looking at attending our first event this year. The IWA festival in Worcester. Details are slow in coming, but we know it is 3 days over the August Bank Holiday. We need help in supporting this event. Please contact Janet who is looking at the resources for the event.

Our sites have also had many visitors. Whilst it is great to see everyone, we have had some unfortunate behaviour. I am sorry, I just cannot understand that people come to enjoy the canal and think it is right to leave litter dumped on the ground left for others to pick up. “

Accounts

Philip Marshall then spoke about the accounts. Couple of points enlarged on. Very pleased to see that the rents received from Trust and Wharf House Company properties continues to rise.

As mentioned, all sorts of reports are required to obtain planning permission and they are all expensive averaging between £1000 to £3000. Volunteers aren't specifically expert in these areas to meet the requirements of the planners and these have to be paid out of income. That is why Philip is so delighted that trust income from properties has risen from approx. £44,000 in 2018 to £75,000 in 2020/1. A lot of that increase from The Lock Keepers and Malswick House. If we hadn't had Covid and its restrictions, we would have had noticeably more.

Dymock House has been sold, sadly, but although the trust has lost £10000 in rent income, we have also lost nearly £9000 in interest costs due to overwhelming interest charges due to level of borrowing.

The Wharf House Company Ltd and H&G Canal Trust have been through a torrid time over the last few years but are now emerging from the tunnel. When Philip started his role as

treasurer The Wharf House Company accounts were a complete mess – there was virtually no financial control and it was a very difficult time but now, after the year end, we have secured the sale of the house at Dymock, a lot of old debt has been paid down and the accounts are looking cleaner and less burdened by debt than they have done for many years. The Wharf House Company has now been financially reconfigured and is producing surpluses and should continue to do so in the future and hopefully the long term.

Query about Malswick House – is rental obtained from the burger stall and the marquee? Prospect of pub reopening. Yes, rental is being received and we are trying to arrange for the pub to reopen.

The poll was held to accept the Annual Report and Accounts - 96% for, 4% against.
Poll held to approve the Independent Examiners Griffiths Marshall for the next year - 100% for.

Election of Trustees:

Standing down by rotation Debbie Barber, Ed Helps and Tony Sellwood.

Tony Sellwood has decided not to stand again. The Chairman thanked him for all his hard work as trustee and thankful that he is staying on to work with the Malswick project team.

Polls for trustees

Robert Moreland – 96% for, 4% abstain – approved

Debbie Barber – 96% for 4% abstain – approved

Ed Helps – 100% for – approved.

Chairman hoped that next year we can meet in person. No further questions were asked. Ralph thanked everyone attending and closed the meeting.