

# The Kennet & Avon Canal Trust



TRUST COUNCIL MEETING: Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> January by Zoom, 1000

## Minutes

Trustees present: Ali Cannon,(AC), Rob Dunton,(RD) Susan Hill,(SH)Terry Mundy,(TM ) Graham Puddephatt,(GP) (Chair) Graham Snook (GS).

In attendance: Rob Dean (RDe) (taking minutes)

### 1. Welcome & apologies. Minutes

Apologies had been received from Mike Bailey,(MB)

The minutes of the TC meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November were agreed.

### 2. Finance Report

SH reported that the finance officer was chasing final expense claims for December from branches before closing the accounts. SH had not yet been able to access the finance email account (GP to follow up). She sought advice from trustees on her role. RDe offered help where needed.

### 3. Enterprise report: (GP)

GP reported that the Board would be meeting the following week and that directors had agreed that he act as chair until a new permanent chair was appointed. He had tasked the auditors to review the pros and cons of merging Enterprise into the trust. He had also discussed this with the trust solicitors who did not consider it to be difficult.

### 4. Crofton report: (GS) (written report presented)

GS reported concern over the fire alarm system at Crofton which was unreliable probably due to the continuing cold and damp there. It regularly sounded at night, but no action was taken as there was no remote monitoring. More than £2000 had been spent in 2023 with the maintenance company trying to resolve the problem without success. The branch had concluded that there was only need for an alarm when the site was occupied and proposed to modify the installation to a manual system. This would enable removal of Crofton from the maintenance contract. Oral consultation with the trust's insurers indicated this would be acceptable. Trustees agreed with the proposed action, noting that written confirmation from the insurers would be needed.

GP noted that there was a similar problem at the Bradford on Avon café where the maintenance company were proposing a £300 solution that they admitted might not work.

GS had spoken with the insurers about payment for the repairs to Pumphouse Cottage which they had been withholding. They had agreed to pay 50% now with the remainder payable in February or March when the walls could again be tested and then decorated. The contractor was content.

An application had been made for Building Regulations consent to change use of the cottage to office and tea rooms. The work to achieve this was estimated at between £14k-£20k.

Insurers had sought an updated rebuilding valuation for both cottages which was currently only £150k each. A formal valuation would cost £1000. Trustees agreed this.

Relocation of the workshop and crew room was nearly complete

Significant deterioration of the windows in the pumphouse has been observed. Where access was feasible, repairs were being carried out by volunteers. The company which worked on them in 2018 had provided a quote of £800 per window which implied around £10k for all. Volunteer work would continue and other quotes sought.

The schools visit and STEM programme for the season was being developed. It had been boosted by a £5k grant from the Independent Museums Association.

Funder Garfield Weston had also granted £15k towards repair works which would assist in the refurbishment of the Smithy and contribute to the windows.

Provision of a pop-up tea shop in 2023 had raised £3500. The facilities had received a hygiene rating of 5 stars. The facility would continue in 2024 but the financial accounting needed to be more formalised. Trustees asked GS to thank the refreshment volunteers noting the importance of such fundraising.

GS confirmed that the canalside tunnel would be open this year permitting access to Crofton from the canalside.

Trustees discussed the merits of seeking grants from smaller funds such as had been achieved by Crofton. This needed skills in drafting applications which might not always be available in branches but perhaps could be offered by trustees and others with suitable experience.

#### 5. **Bruce Branch report** (AC) (report and business case presented)

AC reported that the branch had decided to run an Easter Fayre on Easter Monday (1<sup>st</sup> April) to raise awareness of the Trust in Great Bedwyn and to attract new volunteers. Stalls were being offered to community groups and other trust branches would be welcome to run stalls. GS noted that Crofton would be open, and that publicity could be linked. He offered to provide AC with details of trust gazebos that could be available to the branch.

The branch wished to appoint the existing engineer as the branch Operation Manager, a new staff role that would provide pre-sales, booking support and client liaison rather than this being done in Devizes. This effectively removed a 'middleman' role and should be an improvement in service and efficiency. The small increase in cost would be more than offset by savings in staff time in Devizes. Trustees agreed the proposal.

Trustees considered a detailed business case to convert Diana to hybrid propulsion. This would be largely funded by an existing restricted donation provided for developing electric boating. It was noted that electrification of Trust boats was a question of 'when' rather than 'if' and that this project would provide invaluable experience of operating electric propulsion systems. The work on Diana could be completed without impacting

the branch's ability to provide boats this season. Most of the work could be carried out by the 'Winter Warriors' volunteer team. Trustees approved the business case.

GP reported that Reading BC were particularly pleased that a Bruce boat would be attending the Reading Water Fest on 8th June and suggested they might be able to provide some sponsorship.

AC reported that steady progress was being made in securing bookings for the 2024 season on which she was leading. She asked trustees to spread the word especially about the DoE Award residential courses on offer.

#### 6. **Office staff (GP)**

GP reported that the two booking and admin staff had resigned from Enterprise despite 2 meetings with GP and GS before Christmas which had failed to identify the issues mentioned in the staff letter of grievance. It was now necessary to urgently review the staffing requirement and GP requested input on appropriate job descriptions. It was agreed that a subgroup would meet within the following week to agree this. Trustees agreed that, if feasible, the new staff should work for the trust rather than Enterprise. In consultation with boat branches, it was necessary to decide urgently what a central team need to do. Could, for example, charter trip bookings be returned to branches as previously? It was noted that the Finance Officer needed to be carefully consulted on changes to booking arrangements but was already fully tasked and could not be expected to take on any additional work.

The bookings email addresses and the Trust main voicemail was currently being monitored and actioned by AC. She offered a team of Bruce volunteers to help manage this until suitable staff were in place. This was gratefully accepted (action AC). GP noted that Ann Snook was managing office mail and asked GS to thank her.

There was an urgent need to get to grips with the Beyonk public booking system.

#### 7. **H&S report. (MB)**

MB (absent on holiday) had reported that a review of policy and procedures would take place on his return. There was also a need to address electrical safety at Devizes. TM offered to be safety officer for Devizes.

#### 8. **Bradford on Avon branch (GP/MB)**

GP reported that he had met with one side of the argument at BoA and would be meeting the other soon. It was difficult to see how an agreement could be achieved without compromise, and he noted that the issues should have been dealt with much more quickly. Trustees noted that a solution that best preserved the boat operating capability at BoA was likely to be the best way forward.

#### 9. **Policies and procedures – grievances & complaints (AC)**

AC reported that she had consulted NCVO guidance on the procedures and found that the ones adopted by trustees were largely compliant. The need was to ensure consistency between these and the Staff Handbook. GP noted that it would be ideal to a handbook common to staff and volunteers or at least documents that were entirely consistent. AC agreed to circulate the Staff Handbook to trustees.

AC briefed trustees on her role as Safeguarding Officer. She noted that the approach to safeguarding had changed over the years, and it was now recognised that this was a responsibility for all. An issue (resolved) in one branch recently had highlighted the need (agreed in the policy) for there to be a safeguarding lead in each branch. We also needed to provide basic safeguarding training to volunteers (AC had provided a draft) and to consider volunteer recruitment procedures. GS described processes and Crofton and AC agreed these were appropriate. Trustees agreed that branches should be invited to nominate a safeguarding lead and that, if there wasn't someone in a branch, the chair would be safeguarding lead by default. Action: AC. Trustees agreed that the training quiz presented by AC was good and suitable. She would finalise and issue it to branches. Action: AC

#### **10. Structure and Strategy (GP)**

Trustees agreed that the practice of inviting branch chairs and vice Presidents as non-speaking observers at Trust Council should be revived.

GP proposed drafting a policy on chairing of trustees and the Enterprise Board. He would like to see vice chairman appointed to both boards. He suggested the policy also say that the Trust Chairman would chair Enterprise if there was no chairman appointed. And that the President would be invited by trustees to chair Trust Council if the Trust Chairman was incapacitated. Trustees were supportive of these proposals. It was noted that work was need in the memorandum of understanding between Trust and Enterprise, and on branch delegations.

Trustees agreed to hold a strategy meeting with branches and directors to be organised at Crofton on a day in March to be proposed by GS. GP asked trustees to offer content for the day.

Trustees agreed to offer long standing senior trust volunteers David Copley and Mike Wyatt, appointments as Honorary Vice Presidents.

#### **11. A.O.B.**

GP noted the need to renew registration with the Information Commissioners Office

The Trust AGM had previously been set for 1<sup>st</sup> June. It was agreed that this would be in Devizes and also available online.