

THE SEVERN VOICE GROUP OF PARISHES

MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 6TH OCTOBER 2014 AT LONGNEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

PRESENT

Attendance sheet attached

IN ATTENDANCE

Neil Carmichael	MP
Nick Worthington	Canals and Rivers Trust
Louis Francis	Canals and Rivers Trust
County Cllr Blackburn	Gloucestershire County Council
Nikki Leach	Temporary Clerk

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr John Burcher	Arlingham
Cllr Peter Griffin	Arlingham
Cllr David Merrett	Arlingham
Lynn Ireland	Clerk
Cllr Pam Greenfield	Frampton on Severn
Cllr Rollo Clifford	Frampton on Severn
Cllr Sue Grist	Frampton on Severn
Cllr Andy Lundberg	Saul
Cllr Bekki Christian	Longney and Epney
Cllr Jonathan Harvey	Longney and Epney
Cllr Dave Mossman	Hardwicke

The Chair was taken by Cllr Roger Godwin, Chairman of Longney and Epney Parish Council. Unfortunately Lynn Ireland, Clerk to the Severn Voice Group of Parishes was not able to attend the meeting. Cllr Roger Godwin passed on his warmest wishes to Lynn on behalf of Severn Voice.

2. CANAL BRIDGES

Nick Worthington, Waterway Manager from the Canals and Rivers Trust (CART) provided an update on the plans to change the operating system on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal. The idea is to move the bridge operation to a self-service system. This is being developed in conjunction with colleagues in the UK and Europe. Over recent months some of the technology has been tested on the bridge in Saul. Since February 2014 the bridge has not been operated in the usual way, it has been operated through a mobile phone. There have been lasers installed on the bridge which operate in a similar way to the technology on railway crossings; they check that the area around the bridge is clear in order for it to swing.

The goal of this change in operation is to make it safer for the CART staff. At present it is extremely dangerous for the bridge operators, especially on certain bridges for example Sellars Bridge at The Pilot in Hardwicke. There is some European funding that could be used to support the technology

needed for this scheme. The system will enable a more efficient way of working where the boaters will rely on technical applications to operate the bridges.

There were a number of questions that were raised in response to this update:

- Cllr Linda Clements asked if the trial on Saul Bridge had been successful and if there were any results available which would be published. Nick Worthington responded to say that the results had been very successful; they had been trialling the lasers and apart from some initial adjustments to correct the position of the lasers there were no other problems to note.
- It was asked if the technology is responsible for dropping the barriers. Nick clarified that the lasers are responsible for sweeping the area to ensure that it is clear for the bridge to open, the software is responsible for opening and closing the barriers.
- There was also a query regarding the operation; if it is operated with a mobile phone, where will this be located? Nick clarified that the application operates using WiFi. There will be a WiFi link within each bridge and the boaters will use an application on their mobile phones to access the software. It is possible to set the parameters for the WiFi from 50 metres up to 300 metres but it has not yet been defined how this will be applied to each bridge. It is also possible to limit the number of openings of the bridge to boats in peak travel times and increase the frequency when it is less busy on the roads.
- There was a huge amount of concern as to what will happen if the software fails and the bridge is not able to open to cars, in particular for emergency services to pass. Nick explained that each bridge will be installed with CCTV and a remote operator will be able to override the software at any time.
- There was also concern regarding what will happen if it is not possible to resolve the issue remotely and an engineer needs to come out? How long will it take for someone to attend? Nick stated that this situation is no different to currently when one of his engineers will be called and will need to travel out. Nick also stated that the new system will potentially be easier to operate as there will be an isolater to override the software and immediately make the bridge passable. There was still a high level of concern from the group that relying on software is not as safe or effective as having a bridge operator present who could resolve a high percentage of the potential failings with the bridge.
- Cllr Keith Withers reiterated the concern that Arlingham is an isolated village and that they cannot risk this system failing and preventing emergency services being able to access the village. Nick responded to say that the new system should benefit the emergency services as there is an automatic override option which will make it easier for them to access, in particular in the winter when not all of the bridges are manned. Cllr Keith Withers stated that it is irrelevant to need to close down the system for the emergency services as currently the bridge operators are present and can listen and see any potential issues and can always ensure that the bridge is passable for the emergency vehicles. Cllr Withers also stated that it is completely unsafe to cut of Arlingham by relying on unstable technology.
- Cllr Roger Godwin mentioned a recent incident where the bridge was closed to vehicles for 48 minutes creating an unacceptable situation where vehicles were queuing back causing obstructions. If an emergency vehicle had attempted to pass at this time they would not have been able to. Nick Worthington stated that he has been working with the emergency services on this proposal and they are happy to work with him to reach a solution.
- Cllr William Alexander raised the issue that it is not just the emergency services that need to pass; even the regular traffic through the village can back up if there are 6-8 canal boats coming through at one time. If 20-30 cars back up either side of the bridge there is a huge potential for accidents. Having a bridge operator in attendance at the bridge means that

they can observe the build-up of traffic and stop the boats for a time to clear the traffic if necessary. Nick responded to say that the technology can be developed to limit the number of openings at certain times of day and increase at others if required.

- Cllr William Alexander also asked if it would be possible for certain bridges, in particular Fretherne, Sellars and Slimbridge to stay manned? Nick clarified that in order to make the project feasible it would need to include all bridges. Sellars bridge is one of the most dangerous bridges for the staff to operate and there would need to be a very compelling reason to exclude one or more bridges from the proposal.
- Cllr Carl Bierer asked if there were plans to automate the bridge. Nick said that there were no funds available for this to happen. The current proposal has support from Europe hence the access to European funds for the self-service system. Cllr Biere asked how many bridges the European funding will pay for. Nick stated that they will be funding a percentage of them and that the CART will pay the rest. Cllr Biere asked for clarification of the financial status if there is funding available for the current scheme but not for automation. Nick responded to state that it costs hundreds of thousands of pounds to automate one bridge and there is no funding for this to occur.
- Cllr Jon Shaw asked if there were plans to change the periods when the bridge is open or shut and asked if there is a potential for the villages to be exposed to greater periods when the bridge is in operation. Nick stated that there the bridges operate until 7pm currently and there may be plans to increase this to 8pm. They would also plan for the bridge to be open 7 days a week (currently it is open 5 days a week in the winter and 7 days a week in the summer).
- Cllr Linda Clements asked how they will guarantee connection considering the amount of problems with mobile phone providers in the area. Nick responded to say that each bridge has its own WiFi system and that there should be no problem with operation within the zone set for each bridge.
- Cllr Roger Godwin asked if there will be an apology following the recent incident where the bridge was impassable for 48 minutes? Nick stated there were grounds for a legitimate complaint and advised Cllr Godwin to submit one to him for review.
- Cllr Graham Wingrove asked if there has been any prioritisation in the order in which the bridges will be set up? Nick responded to say that the North end will be prioritised first (from Saul upwards). Cllr Wingrove asked if the prioritisation related to finance, Nick confirmed that it was.
- Cllr Linda Clements asked again if there had been no problems on the Saul Bridge since the trial had begun. Nick confirmed that apart from the adjustment of the lasers there had been no other problems.
- Cllr Keith Withers stressed the importance of the link into an isolated area. He stated that most of the time the canal is used for pleasure whereas the majority of road traffic is for business, for example grain harvest traffic. In these instances it is not practical for the traffic to wait for 10-15 minutes several times a day as this will impact on the efficiency of the business. Nick advised that at times like this the control centre should be contacted to discuss possible solutions. Nick also reiterated that this is the first step in a very long journey and it will be essential to collaborate with all parties to ensure that a positive compromise is reached.
- Cllr Jon Shaw asked if a priority sign will be put on Sandfield Bridge? Nick confirmed that this will be the responsibility of Gloucestershire Highways, not the canals. Nick also advised that they will need parishioner input into the traffic management.
- Cllr Godwin asked how to take the matter further and suggested a forum to continue the discussions. Nick responded to say that the proposal will not be signed off until they have full stakeholder support and he is committed to achieving this. He suggested that it would be important to have 2-3 representatives from Severn Voice, the same from the emergency

services, the boating community and CART staff. Cllr Godwin asked who will be responsible for setting this form up, Nick agreed that CART would be responsible for managing this group.

- MP Neil Carmichael stated that he will talk to Gloucestershire County Council highways about the bridges priorities to see if he can help.

Cllr Godwin thanked Nick for coming to the meeting and for answering all of the questions. Nick commented that he needs input from Severn Voice to make the proposal a success. Nick will contact Cllr Alexander directly to continue the arrangements for the discussion group.

MP Neil Carmichael Update

MP Neil Carmichael updated the group on his plans to attend Lapperditch in Longney on the 24th October at 11.30 to oversee the work that is being undertaken to ensure that this area of Longney remains properly protected from flooding. He noted that £700,000 is being spent in this area and assured the group that action is being taken.

Cllr Godwin asked if there was anyone that Severn Voice could escalate matters to if it appears that Nick Worthington is not listening to the needs of the group. This was reiterated by other members who felt that the message presented was very political and that the Canals and Rivers Trust were not taking on board the views of the Cllrs. Neil assured the group that Nick would deliver and that the matter would be dealt with.

- **3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 24th March 2014 (previously circulated) were approved as a true record of proceedings.

Proposal Cllr John Jones
Seconded Cllr William Alexander

- **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 Fretherne Bridge Traffic Project

Cllr John Jones provided an overview of the issue regarding Fretherne bridge. During a meeting in November 2012 there were a number of discussions around how to make the bridge safer as there have been several accidents during recent years. One of the proposals was to insert a set of flashing lights coming towards the bridge from the Saul area. Shaun Brown obtained an initial quote in the region of £15,000. Cllr Alexander has obtained a more recent quote in the region of £18,000. There has been an ongoing discussion as to whether this is inside or outside the remit of the Parish funds. The Council would like to request input from Highways or CART. The Area Manager had mentioned that he would get "SLOW" markings on the road and would arrange for the vegetation to be cleared around the sign. CART do not have the funds for traffic management beyond the immediate structure of the bridge and it was suggested that the responsibility lies with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC). Nick Worthington commented that if there was a strong commitment from the Parish and GCC then CART could look at contributing a small amount towards the cost. Cllr Haydn Jones stated that he was not convinced that all of the councils are yet in agreement about what is needed to make the bridge safer and the lights may not be the answer. He suggested that the 3 communities need to get together and ensure they have a clear message before going back to GCC.

Cllr Alexander said that it may be time to move down another route as in reality the quotes for the lights could be much higher. He said that it would be wrong for the Parishes to contribute funds to a

project if it is not the right solution. He suggested that the correct route would be to proceed through the County Council to see if they will commit to saving lives at a highly dangerous junction.

Cllr Godwin stated that he would like to see a wider commitment from CART to the areas surrounding the bridges rather than just the structure itself. They need to take more responsibility for the wider community. Nick Worthington noted this comment and thanked Cllr Godwin for the feedback.

Cllr Jones mentioned that at the meeting it was suggested that the configuration of the road junction be changed. This was not met with much enthusiasm.

Cllr Jones also provided an update on the Flood Group. A letter was sent to Minister Owen Patterson. There have now been several follow up letters, a response from DEFRA has been sent to Severn Voice and the Environment Agency has written back to MP Neil Carmichael. Cllr Jones will forward a copy of these letters to the Acting Clerk Nikki Leach for distribution.

ACTION

Cllr Jones to provide copies of the letters to Nikki Leach

4.2 Schools Admissions

Cllr Shaw gave a presentation on the issues surrounding schools admissions. Copies of the slides are attached to these minutes for reference. There were a number of comments following the presentation:

- It was suggested that a sub-group should be created to ensure that a clear and concise argument is available should the issue be presented to the County Council.
- The children of Arlingham and Elmore Back deserve to be represented,
- It is important that the teachers of the involved schools are on board with the case before seeking engagement at the elected County Cllr level.
- It may seem acceptable at a local level but how will it affect other areas in Gloucestershire? County Council have a responsibility that if they change a policy they need to be sure that they recognise the impact for all areas in the County. Cllr Shaw responded to say that it is not a requirement to have a blanket policy, although most councils do it is possible to have a different policy for an area that is adversely affected.
- Comment from County Cllr Blackburn – at an earlier stage of this proposal when only Lakefield school was under discussion, the case was taken to Charlotte Jones – Senior Officer – she stated that she would rather deal with anomalies on a person by person basis rather than implementing a change in policy. County Cllr Blackburn asked if Severn Voice still supported this proposal in the way that they did 12-18 months ago – the response was yes.
- Cllr John Howe stated that when this was initially being discussed, the County were reviewing their policy and we challenged it, they then came up with the same policy again. They maintained the policy despite the views of the County. He said that the chances of success on a review are unlikely. It was also clarified that Lakefield School is not an academy.

The Chairman proposed that Cllr Shaw should set up a working group and speak with the schools concerned to seek agreement. The meeting should be with the schools all at the same time to ensure that the different needs and views are discussed in one forum. Cllr Wingrove asked if all of the schools support this proposal. It was discussed that Whitminster support the proposal and Lakefield and Longney neither support nor oppose at this stage.

ACTION

Cllr John Shaw to set up a working group

- **5. SEFRMS UPDATE**

Cllr Godwin said that at this stage there is very little in terms of an update. A recent report has been released and there is mixed views as to the use of it. Cllr Godwin stated that he has had 3 recent cases of people coming to him because they either could not sell their house or could not get insurance, for each of these cases the Environment Agency has been able to provide a letter to support the application.

- **6. STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Cllr Haydn Jones provided an update on the boundary commission review. It seems that at this stage the 51 Cllrs will remain.

A multiservice contract has been signed; Stroud District Council is to become a shareholder. The start date is anticipated to be July 2016. This will mean changes for recycling, waste management etc. There will be more frequent cleaning of streets in rural areas.

The biggest piece of work ongoing at present is the Local Plan. The recent view has been focused upon the number of houses and the calculations used for these. The current proposal needs to be voted on and approved and it is likely that the number of houses presented in the initial plan (9,500) will increase. There is a meeting tomorrow to evaluate the sites in the original plan to find locations for the additional houses.

There have been 4 recent supermarket applications in and around Stroud. It is not clear if any/all of these will be approved.

Cllr John Jones provided further detail on the waste collection changes with the new multiservice contract. It is proposed that a food collection facility could be set up for weekly collections. If this goes ahead the black bag collection will be reduced to fortnightly as it is thought that around half of householders black bag waste is food and therefore if a food collection service is implemented it will reduce the need for the regular waste collection.

- **7. GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

County Cllr Tony Blackburn commented that there remains a Conservative minority at present. There is to be a bi-election due to the sad death of Norman Stevens in Mitcheldean. The Council need to achieve 25 million pounds a year saving each year for the next 3 years in order to satisfy government.

There has been recent success with the local enterprise partnership between Gloucestershire County Council and the local district.

There have been some recent meetings with Jo Martin from the Environment Agency, as of yet there is no satisfactory policy but there are some estimated figures surrounding the planned spend over the next 100 years, these have been circulated already amongst the Councils.

There has been a recent report from the House of Commons regarding the winter floods. The report mainly focusses on Somerset but there are some areas of relevance for Gloucestershire.

Recent meetings have taken place regarding the broadband initiative. There is slow progress

Proposals have been put forward regarding the Active Gloucestershire grant. £40,000 was made available for sports equipment, some of which has been allocated to Frampton. The initiative is

supposed to be closed but County Cllr Blackburn said it could be possible to squeeze in any last minute proposals if there were any.

£5,000 is being made available for children's initiatives, further details of this are on the County Council website. There are also some initiatives starting up for older people, leaflets will be distributed with details on this.

- **8. ROUND THE TABLE / ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Whitminster

There have been planning applications for 126 houses in the Parish. The Parish Council has engaged a planning consultant to help them write letters of objection. This will be going to development control in December. One of the applications (for 91 houses) included an offering of £232,000 to support the school but the other application did not allow for any support. Cllr Alexander stated that Frampton have also agreed to object on the proposal in support of Whitminster.

Elmore

Cllr John Field provided a further update on the Broadband meeting which as an impact on Longney and Elmore. The plans are already 2 weeks behind schedule from the agreed timescale. Initially the plan was to achieve 80Mg in Elmore and Longney by Christmas but it is now not clear if this will be possible.

Fretherne with Saul

Cllr Bierer attended a recent police meeting discussing local police issues and tasking people to set priorities and actions. A representative from the Berkeley panel said that it was primarily individuals but there were also 2 Parish Council members. It was commented that the policing in Frampton has been poor recently and has lacked continuity. There was some discussion as to whether it would be appropriate to ask the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire to come to the next Severn Voice meeting or if this was a more suitable job for the Police Commissioner. It was agreed to ask the Police Commissioner to attend the next meeting to discuss the local panels, recent burglaries, the local support now that Stonehouse has closed and community policing in general.

ACTION

Clerk to invite Police Commissioner to the next Severn Voice meeting.

- **9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Hardwicke Parish Council will be hosting the next meeting and it was suggested that this should take place in March 2015.

ACTION

Clerk to contact Kevin Lee, Clerk to Hardwicke Parish Council to arrange the date of the next meeting.

- **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The representatives for the Canals and Rivers action group were discussed. As there are so many Councils represented in the Severn Voice Group it was suggested that one representative from each council should meet together first and then following this meeting, 4 members could be selected to go forward to the CART meeting. Cllr Godwin suggested that this initial meeting could be held in Longney.

ACTION

Clerk to write to all Clerks and ask for a representative from each council for the initial meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.55pm.