

CARDIFF BAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 29th November, 2023.

Present: Councillor M.R. Wilson (Chair); Councillor N.C. Thomas (Vice-Chair); C. Dimond (Cardiff Flood Action Committee), S. Jones (Boatfolk Marinas Ltd.), C. Pooley (Natural Resources Wales) and M. Thomas (Clerk – Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, Vale of Glamorgan Council).

Also present: A.M. Ernest (Penarth Tourism and Visitor Association), D. Hall (Cardiff Harbour Authority), Councillor M. Lewis (Cardiff Council), A. Michael (Penarth Headland Link Charity) and A. Vye-Parminter (Cardiff Harbour Authority).

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor J. Burke-Davies (Cardiff Council), F. Hourahine (Natural Resources Wales), C. Kingston (Waterfront Partners), J. Maidment (Cardiff Harbour Authority), C. Michael (RSPB) and P. Stone (Canoe Wales).

(b) Minutes of the Meeting Held on 6th September, 2023 –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 6th September, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(c) & (d) Navigational Safety Update and General Progress Reports – Cardiff Harbour Authority (CHA) –

A. Vye-Parminter, in conjunction with D. Hall, representing Cardiff Harbour Authority (CHA), updated the Committee on the navigational safety and general progress reports:

Navigation:

Outer Harbour Dredging was successfully completed, with no issues having arisen.

Harbour General:

Barrage

- Live Nation Series September 2023 – The concert series was held from Wednesday 6th until Saturday 9th September with the weekend concerts sold out with 14,000 attending. The Barrage site was fully closed, with events staff managing this. This had been an extremely successful event, with the closure of the Barrage having been managed successfully. Future dates for this series of events at the Barrage, for 2024, were currently being looked at.

- Cardiff Half Marathon took place on Sunday, 1st October. This was now in its twentieth year. There were over 20,000 competitors on the day. From the Harbour Authority perspective everything went well on the day and Channel racing went ahead as planned via the first lock out at midday.
- On Monday morning, 23rd October, during a Bridge operation of Pont y Werin, one of the hydraulic hoses in the substation failed which resulted in the bridge being stuck in the raised position. The Engineering team were called out to assist. The failure caused a significant loss of oil but this was contained within the sump of the control housing. The Environment and Harbour Master team dealt with the oil clean up, including a Tier 2 oil spill contractor.

Engineers were able to lower the bridge to allow pedestrian access. New hoses and oil were procured and fitted, and the bridge was put back into service on Tuesday, 31st October.

Overall, the response plan to this incident worked well.

The hose that failed was brand new as part of a preventative maintenance plan. Investigations were continuing to understand why this failed.

- The Cardiff Bay Yacht Club Open Cod Competition was held on 12th November. 86 boats took part in the event, with several boats from out of the area. There was praise for the efforts undertaken by the CHA, with the teams on duty thanked for their efforts on the day which was managed to a very high standard.

Environment

- CHA had been approached by a company looking to stock 30,000 Eels into Cardiff Bay. CHA had consulted with NRW to determine how to progress this proposal, with the decision being made that this would not be progressed when Eel stocks remained still healthy in the Bay.
- A PhD student had been appointed by Cardiff University to investigate water quality management in Cardiff Bay (including aeration) and to identify long-term mitigation strategies for future challenges. Another PhD student would be recruited in 2024.

Following the update(s), a number of queries were raised by Members of the Forum and attendees.

The Vice-Chair asked if there had been complaints by residents within the Bay area concerning the Live Nation Series. It was explained that the CHA was only aware of a very small number of complaints about noise during these concerts, which centred on one day where wind conditions had carried noise into residential areas near to the Bay. Shared Regulatory Services had also monitored these events to ensure noise levels, etc stayed within the parameters of the relevant Events Licence.

Councillor Lewis (Cardiff Council) had received some complaints around traffic and litter due to the Live Nation Series and was unsure who to pass these on to. It was explained that any such issues should be passed on to Cardiff Council and / or the CHA.

The Chair asked if CHA could pass on to Members of the Committee contact details, etc. on how to forward any concerns or complaints of this nature to the relevant authorities. It was explained that such details were on the CHA website, including Natalie Taylor, the CHA's Community Liaison Manager.

A.M. Ernest (Penarth Tourism and Visitor Association) asked if there had been any parking issues in the Bay area due to these events, etc, to which the response was that there had been no issues due to there being limited parking spaces available in the Barrage area.

On the Chair's queries concerning the failure of the Bridge operation of Pont y Werin, it was explained that the bridge, following the hydraulic failure, was manually lowered and kept that way until repaired to ensure its continued accessibility. It was not practical or cost effective to keep a complete set of spares for all equipment / parts and the expected lifespan of the hydraulic hose that failed would not necessitate a spare set to be manufactured or held in stock. Also, the significant volume of oil that was lost had to be cleaned up before being able to identify the failed hose and procuring both hose and oil.

On the query raised about the Cardiff Bay Yacht Club Open Cod Competition and its success in light of declining fish stocks, the numbers of fish caught at the event were unknown but operationally this event had been a success. A.M. Ernest stated that further fishing events would provide a clearer indication of whether fish stocks were okay. C. Pooley (Natural Resources Wales (NRW)) referred to the fact that a recent report suggested that illegal fishing, including at key feeding grounds, might be contributing more than people originally thought in the decline of salmon stocks. This was just one report and many people considered climate change to still be the main contributing factor. Regarding cod stocks these might actually be recovering in some places following a reduction in fishing pressure.

C. Dimond (Cardiff Flood Action Committee) asked about the durability of the aeration system for the Bay, to which the response was that the system had been operating for 20 years but would need to be changed, in order to improve and streamline the system going forward. The recently recruited PhD student would be looking at reducing the aeration, with this work to be signed off by NRW. The Chair suggested that the PhD student provide an update to the Committee in the latter part of 2024. Stuart Jones (Boatfolk Marinas Ltd.) referred to the review of the set dissolved oxygen / aeration levels (5 mg/L threshold) which were set by Act of Parliament. Any subsequent NRW decisions on this matter would offer some flexibility under the aegis of the Barrage Act. Such changes would need to be backed up by the relevant science.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the reports be noted.

(e) Natural Resources Wales Update –

The update was presented to the Committee by C. Pooley, a representative from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), and who highlighted the following areas of interest:

(i) **Dissolved Oxygen (DO) Levels**

The Cardiff Harbor Authority (CHA) had provided regular updates regarding DO levels, water quality, river flows and Bay levels.

Overall, DO levels within the Bay had remained above the 5 mg/L threshold. During late September it was noted that levels dropped in Penarth Marina. It was believed that this may have been caused when aquatic vegetation started to die back and decay, increasing the biological oxygen demand. This was monitored closely and no environmental issues were reported. By early October levels had returned to normal and have not dropped since.

CHA had not reported any other issues.

(ii) **Pollution Incidents and Investigations**

Ferry Road Landfill Site

Since the last meeting the leachate collection system had been operating effectively and there had been no reported incidents of leachate entering the River Ely from the outfall next to the Watermark building.

A recent site inspection showed that the operator had undertaken a lot of work on site to ensure the infrastructure was functioning adequately. Work continued to ensure that compliance with safety requirements was maintained.

Pollution Incidents

There had been no further reports of oil spilling into the River Ely from the Llandough Trading Estate surface water outfall.

There had been no reported incidents in the Bay, Penarth Marina or Docks since the last meeting. However, the committee were notified of a minor oil spill which had happened recently from an unknown source. This had come directly to NRW, but in future such notifications would go through the CHA.

Due to ongoing Police investigations it was still not possible to provide an update regarding the pollution incident that had been reported on the lower River Ely in late December 2022.

(iii) **Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station**

There were no further updates since the last meeting.

(iv) **The Barrage Fish Pass**

During a routine visit to check the fish monitoring equipment it was discovered that the intake grille was heavily clogged with debris, reducing flows and causing a significant head-drop leading into the pass. This had caused the fish counter equipment to shut down; a feature to protect the equipment during low flows. It became apparent that the monitoring equipment had not been operating from 21st September to 11th October, a significant period of time when historically, some salmon had entered the bay.

The buildup of debris on the grille was partly the result of industrial action by the engineering team, meaning there were limited staff resources available to carry out maintenance work. The blockage was cleared immediately after it was reported and arrangements were now in place to ensure this did not happen again.

On 16th October one of the two pumps used to operate the auxiliary fish pass during high spring tides failed. We were informed that due to the ongoing industrial action there were limited resources available to fix this pump until the end of November. There were concerns amongst fisheries staff that one pump would not provide sufficient flow to allow salmonids to use this pass but fortunately the pump was fixed shortly after and to date has been operating at full capacity.

Recent Trends in Salmon Numbers

Since the last meeting two more fish have been recorded through the pass, bringing the estimated total to 20 fish. Unfortunately, due to the failure of monitoring equipment we do not know if any fish entered the Bay between 21st September and 11th October.

In October two salmon were caught by anglers in the Taff between Blackweir and Radyr Weir, causing considerable excitement within the angling community. These were subsequently returned to the Taff.

(v) **Blackweir Docks Feeder Canal**

The Hydrometry and Telemetry team had marked the feeder gauging board to facilitate Associated British Ports (ABP's) ability to accurately monitor and maintain the feeder level and abstraction rate. Following the requirement to reduce abstraction rates during low Taff flows in early summer it appeared that ABP had been able to maintain dock levels with low abstraction rates and therefore rates had not been increased to those observed early in 2023.

Abstraction Licence Requirements

Work was underway to meet the remaining conditions of the licence. The contractors, JBA Consulting, had been commissioned by ABP to install a smaller diameter screen at the point of abstraction and also to install facilities to accurately measure and monitor the rate of abstraction from the River Taff.

The contractors were currently exploring options with regards to screen type and diameter. The licence conditions required that the screen must prevent salmonids, eels and lamprey of all life stages from entering the feeder. As a result the required screen size should be 2- 3mm, however, it was recognised that there were already issues with the current screen becoming frequently clogged with rubbish and debris. This had a diameter of approximately 100mm so it was anticipated that problems with operation and maintenance would be experienced if such a fine screen was fitted. Discussions between NRW and ABP had concluded that a 10mm diameter might be an option as this would still prevent juvenile salmonids from entering the feeder. It would allow juvenile eels and lamprey through so this would only be approved by NRW if it could be proven that eels had a clear route through the feeder and dock system to the sea. This was vital to allow adult eels and lamprey to migrate to sea to complete their spawning cycle. To achieve this JBA were currently surveying the entire route, identifying and assessing all the potential barriers and would provide suggestions for improving connectivity if any were identified. With this information a Habitat Regulation Assessment would then be carried out to see if a 10mm screen was acceptable.

It was well known that many eels were found in the feeder and docks so this was a great opportunity to ensure that they were able to reach the sea.

Following the report, the Chair asked about the possibility of tracking and monitoring salmonid populations. D. Hall and S. Jones explained that as part of the initial testing of the efficacy of the Barrage Fish Pass this had been undertaken. However, this was no longer done due to concerns on the impact on wild Salmonid, its labour-intensive nature and the requirement of Home Office Licensing to undertake this process. Subsequently, the Chair stressed the importance of encouraging fish populations and combatting the threat of river pollution. C. Pooley, for NRW, stated that overall the water quality for the river Taff was believed to be good. There was room for improvement and NRW teams, etc., that covered some of the tributaries worked very hard to try and identify and resolve any potential sources of pollution (i.e. misconnections, silt pollution etc.).

A.M. Ernest (Penarth Tourism and Visitor Association) asked about the potential impact of the reopening of the dock feeder at Churchill Way, Cardiff. It was explained that this would have a positive impact, i.e. the return of vegetation.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(f) Any Other Business –

A. Michael, the representative from the Penarth Headland Link Charity, provided an update to the Committee concerning the link. He explained that this had been a challenging and difficult period for developing the link, despite ongoing Welsh Government support, i.e. the impact of Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis had contributed to the rise in building and construction costs, etc. Subsequently, the volunteer experts who had been working on developing the link had maintained contact with the Welsh Government and Cardiff Council in order to discuss rising costs, etc. and it was agreed that a more modest scheme would be more viable and achievable i.e. the use of a 4m wide link rather than 12m which would still allow cycling and walking, thus still enabling and encouraging active travel and accessibility to the Barrage. These proposals had been submitted to Welsh Government, but finances remained acute.

Discussions have been undertaken with the Cardiff Harbour Authority (CHA) and Cardiff Council and as part of this, to look at what could still be done, in conjunction with the experts who provided their services to this project, to keep the scheme going in the short term, whilst anticipating an improved situation in the longer term. Short term, the aim would be to look at those aims that could be achieved now and to remove any obstacles, as well as having the necessary permission in place to help progress the scheme for the medium and longer term. The Welsh Government appeared to be supportive of this new and pragmatic approach.

On A.M. Ernest's (Penarth Tourism and Visitor Association) question concerning the make-up of the funding for this project, this would be solely from the Welsh Government at this time, with both Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils providing non-financial support. Other funding streams would be looked into as well i.e. the U.K. Levelling Up Fund.

Councillor Lewis (Cardiff Council) asked which local Councillors were involved with this scheme. It was explained that local Councillors and others were not directly involved but were updated through various sources i.e. this Committee and the CHA.

(g) Date of Next Meeting –

Wednesday, 28th February, 2024 at 5.00 p.m. Remote meeting (via MS Teams application).