

Minutes of Banbridge u3a Meeting

Tuesday 9th January 2024

Bannside Presbyterian Church Hall

1. Present

There were 41 members in attendance, plus two visitors.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Alwyn Thompson, Mary Morgan, Mary McLean, Anne Buggy and Margret Murphy.

3. Welcome from the Chair

Veronica welcomed all to the January meeting and wished everyone a Happy New Year. She was delighted to report that two members had agreed to be co-opted to the Executive Committee, Cathal McAlister, and Paul Neilands. Veronica then extended a warm welcome to our speaker Peter Maxwell, treasurer and founder member of the IWAI Newry and Portadown Branch. Peter will focus on the conservation of the work undertaken on the canal by the volunteers.

4. Inland Waterways – Conservation work on Newry Canal

Peter began by giving us some background to The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI), it is a registered charity in the Republic of Ireland and from 2005 also operates in Northern Ireland. It was founded in 1954 by a group of folk from the Shannon area to campaign for the conservation and development of the waterways.

Today the IWAI represents over 3,000 waterways users and has 23 branches across Ireland both north and south. The association is a voluntary body and aims to promote the development, use and maintenance of Ireland's navigable rivers and canals.

Peter explained that the Newry and Portadown branch have the long-term aspiration of restoring the Newry canal. The branch has already begun to conserve and restore the waterway with regular work parties.

Peter highlighted a number of successes with volunteers removing trees and vegetation from the lock chambers so that the impressive craftsmanship and architecture can be better appreciated by the public. In 2015 they manufactured and installed two sets of lock gates at Poyntzpass and Moneypenny's Lock, near

Scarva and have lobbied locally and nationally to have restoration of the canal placed on the political agenda. The branch has successfully applied for funding for projects to increase public awareness of the canal and to encourage the various waterside communities to become part of the cause.

Peter went on to say that future plans are to continue to lobby and campaign; to fund raise and apply for grants; so they can maintain and conserve the architecture and industrial heritage of the canal. As a result of lobbying by the local groups ABC council is now committed to restoring the canal.

A lively questions and answer session ensued as members were very interested in the work. If you would like to become a member and/or volunteer with the canal, please speak to Peter.

5. Update on Interest Groups

There was a general update on Interest Groups, these are detailed in the January Newsletter. Please note:

Walking Group – Helen Tranmer has taken over as the point of contact and walks will be led by members of the group.

History Group - the next outing is to Carrickmacross, please contact Margaret Murphy.

6. AOB

The Executive Committee has been preparing our submission to the Charities Commission. This will be submitted before the end of January.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 12 February when our speaker will be from the Banbridge Policing Community Safety Partnership.