

Scottish Waterways for All
Minutes of Meeting - Thursday 25th June 2020 at 3pm
Held virtually using GoToMeeting

Attendees: Ronnie Rusack, Pat Bowie (Re-Union - Chair), Sue Bedford-Visser (Bridge 19-40 CS - Minutes), Stuart Rennie (LUCS), Richard Davies (IWA), Josie Saunders (SC), Gordon Daly, Karen Bradford (The Sorted Project), Richard Millar (SC), Sandra Purves, Fergus Duncanson (RYAS), Don Williams (LCA), Paul Gunning (SC), Graeme Harvey, David Edes (GGCUA), Cathy Gostick, Paul Flarry (STC), Tommy Thomson (SC), Neil Kitchener (LCA). Catherine Topley (SC).

Apologies: John Pomfret, Andy Devenport (ECS), Cicely Oliver, Jonathan Mosse (RYAS/IWA)

1	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting</p> <p>Approved</p>	
2	<p>Action Points</p> <p>No matters arising</p>	
3	<p>Scottish Canals' Coronavirus Update - RM</p> <p>RM reported that SC is in phase 2 of restart and weed cutting and vegetation maintenance is well underway. It is proving particularly challenging after the delays, especially after the recent warm and wet weather as there has been considerable weed growth. It is being tackled in a strategic way so that the canals are ready to re-open in line with government timelines for reopening of the tourism sector, as follows:</p> <p>Lowland canals – 17 July Crinan – 17 July Caledonian – 22 July Falkirk Wheel and outside catering at the Horse Box - 27 July</p> <p>Holding back on F&C transits until they are sure they are on top of the weeds.</p> <p>Weed cutting teams are starting at 6.30 am. TT's team on the Union are working their way from Broxburn towards Edinburgh. They will go to Linlithgow when the stop planks have been removed (next Wednesday).</p> <p>On the F&C the weed around Twecher, Hillhead, Kirkintilloch is very challenging. Grass cutting is also challenging as most of the teams have been on furlough. "Honeypot" sites on the towpath will be tackled first.</p> <p>Seasonals are back on the Caledonian and the Crinan and Re-Union volunteers on Lowland locks.</p> <p>Hire boats are being prepared, and SC are talking to Caley Cruises re the 22nd July.</p> <p>There is massive enthusiasm for getting back on the canals. Posters are being introduced to ensure that people stay socially distanced. Also chalk signs on the towpaths. PB wondered if it would be a good idea to keep the pink chalk towpath signs (such as the Be Safe, Be Smart, Be Kind signs) going as part of our learning through this process.</p>	

	<p>Canoeists, paddle boarders and anglers are back on the water. Lots of conversations are being held with various groups.</p> <p>Boaters are to be advised that the licence refund will be extended for another month as the canals are not yet open. This is costing SC around £7 to £8K each month.</p> <p>The extended Boat Safety Scheme is to end in September 2020. Leeway if licences have expired – about 60 boats are affected by this. Significant impact on SC budget, with an income hit of about £2 million including business at the Falkirk Wheel.</p> <p>There will be five days service on the Crinan now, Thursday – Monday.</p> <p>On the Caledonian there will be 7 days opening when the hire boats are back. SC no longer have the same level of staffing and longer hours are not affordable,</p> <p>RD asked what depths the weed cutters are cutting to? RM explained that in order to cover ground quickly to get the canal open, at the moment they are cutting to 4 – 4.5 feet, not the full 6 ft (2.5 – 3 ft on the Union). TT explained that if they go too deep at the moment they will be slowed down by picking up things on the bottom such as shopping trollies. But this is temporary; on the next pass they will cut deeper.</p> <p>RR asked what the bookings are like for the hire boats? RM said currently about 40-50% of normal with bookings still coming in as people start to think about their holidays. GD said that he was able to give up to date information regarding bookings as he had spoken to Gail yesterday. She had said that 10 boats were due to go out on the weekend of the 15th/ 16th / 17th July.</p> <p>RM explained that the Falkirk Wheel will be closed in July as it is going to be painted. This is not a job that can be done in the winter and it is starting to look quite rusty.</p> <p>RR asked about the holiday cottages. RM said they expected to get the keys back in the next week or so. SC will be looking for partners to manage a couple of them as holiday lets but the majority would be let under private residential tenancies. The 15 or so cottages have been empty for over a year and SC do not have the capacity to manage them as holiday lets.</p> <p>SR made the point that it is not only SC that are under financial stress but that canal societies and other canal-based organisations are also facing severe financial difficulties.</p> <p>RM said it was ok for RYA (and others) to promote the canal re-opening dates he had given, with JS adding that they were looking to the group to help promote these.</p>	
4	<p>Year of Coasts and Waterways Update - JS</p> <p>After discussion at SC Board and VisitScotland, the Year of Coasts and Waterways is to be extended to the end of 2021.</p> <p>Planning will now start for the Scottish Boat Rally on the first weekend of May 2021 as well as the sister event, the Canal Festival Time Machine. SC is currently driving awareness of the pleasures of boating on the canal.</p> <p>Coming soon (in time for the Boat Rally) will be the ability to buy transit licences online. Will be done in-house.</p>	

Comment [SB1]:

	<p>GD made the point that if more day boaters are to be encouraged to come onto the canals, more slipways will be needed. JS said that they are aware of this but are constrained financially in what they can do.</p> <p>GD recalled that a while ago he had met with RR and others at Winburgh with regard to a slipway but that doesn't appear to be on the plans for the area around the new marina. (There was email correspondence after the meeting as a follow up to this issue). CG made the point that slipways also made it easier for maintenance teams to get into the canal.</p> <p>GH said that he would like to see more emphasis on the health benefits when promoting use of the canals. JS said that SC is on this, especially after last month's guest presentation from Glasgow Caledonian University as we now have hard evidence of the health benefits. There has very recently been acknowledgement that the research paper in question has been accepted as an academic paper. JS has requested the slides from the presentation so that she can send them to everyone.</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>Financial Procedures now that SC is an NDPB – RR & CT</p> <p>RR asked whether there had been dramatic changes? CT said that in the last 6 months there has been better understanding of each of the trading accounts and business viability to take to the Board. SC has been given guidance not to divest of businesses in cases where lives might be on the line. Not perfect yet but getting there. Discussions with Scottish Government have been very good. An extra £5 million of capital budget offered, and £8.5M revenue budget. Circa £2.5 M deficit anticipated by year end. Will not see SC opening cafes, skate parks or similar in the next wee while.</p> <p>Accounts are in the process of being audited and will soon be in the public domain. Provision for a £7 million VAT liability. The accounts look quite scary but behind that the operating budget is better.</p> <p>RD said that it sounds encouraging but could commercial and core activities be separated? CT said that the Boaters' Report (final version now circulated by JS) supplements the accounts and provides this more detailed information. Next year's budget will be clearer in the actual accounts. RM added that the accounts are vastly improved to how they were before.</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p>Updates from Groups</p> <p>i. Dredging – RM</p> <p>RM said that dredging had been covered earlier in the meeting. SC is in the final stages of agreeing with their accountants what constitutes a capital dredge.</p> <p>Looking at what can be done with the dredged matter so that it doesn't go to landfill.</p> <p>SC is about to take delivery of a large dredging pontoon to take the big excavator purchased a year ago so that they are not just dredging from the bank.</p> <p>PB asked if she can get some priority for Edinburgh Quay and the Calder so that Lochrin Bell can be moved.</p> <p>RR asked if the pan-European Directive on dredging goes out of the window with Brexit? RM said no, but it gives us the opportunity to make a UK decision later that may be cheaper and easier. This may change in the future but it is at the back of a long queue.</p>	

	<p>GH said that co-operation is needed with other environmental agencies – citing the flooding down south. RM said he was in discussion with SEPA on a regular basis.</p> <p>ii. Vegetation Management – RM RM covered this earlier, as this was one of the first things to do to support social distancing on the towpath.</p> <p>There has also been about £10k's worth of tree cutting and tree risk assessments as there has been a lot of tree damage recently.</p> <p>CG mentioned some specific problem areas where cut weed had travelled and accumulated. She will send a list to TT, also highlighting some very shallow areas.</p> <p>SR said he had seen American Skunk Cabbage at Linlithgow.</p> <p>iii. Third Sector Engagement – JM/CB/RM No report</p> <p>iv. Council Engagement – All No report</p> <p>v. Boaters – DW/JS Some boaters are self-employed and have been hard hit by the effects of Covid-19.</p> <p>Some boaters are shielding – no answer for them until the last day of July, but likely to say to continue. They have no garden. DW said no reply had been received in response to an email letter sent to SC. CT said that she was disappointed that the email had not been responded to and RM asked DW to resend it.</p> <p>RM said that he was aware that some boaters are shielding but that public land and space need to be available for public use. It is a constant balance.</p> <p>JS had downloaded materials for boaters to put in their windows to ask people to keep away from their boats and wondered if an extra shielding poster could be added?</p> <p>RD commented on the problems of the interaction of the towpath and the moorings and wondered if the residential moorings might be better on the non-towpath side. One problem is narrow channels and not many basins.</p> <p>vi. Wellbeing – JS JS said slides from the recent presentation are to be issued.</p> <p>vii. Asset Management – SR No report</p>	
7	<p>Crinan Canal Update</p> <p>RM said there had been a few challenges during lockdown as some boaters had been caught in the canal, now released in phase 2. 45 boaters had been trapped in their winter moorings, now able to move to summer moorings.</p> <p>The lock gates at Arisaig – all hands to the pumps to open and run as best they can. Investing heavily</p>	

	in the winter capital programme and design underway.	
8	<p>Caledonian Canal Update</p> <p>RM said that the work on the Fort Augustus lock gates had been done before lockdown. Slip moorings on a walkway on the back of lock 1 is the first approach to towards user operation – won't have to throw the rope up. Reopening date as stated earlier.</p> <p>RD said that fixed moorings at a high-level bridge may not be possible. RM said that had been taken on board and the height which has been proposed is not ideal – looking to work with RYA on these details as RYA is able to lobby whereas SC cannot. PF said that Brian Davenport had struggled to get high level cables at Fort Augustus. All recorded. RM said they didn't want to miss out on tall ships but it all comes back to money. GD said RYAS will be looking at this carefully and fighting it.</p> <p>FD said that anything that blocks any sort of navigation in future is a bad idea with GD adding that bigger cruiseline owners were also to be considered.</p>	
9	<p>Big Splash Campaign – SR</p> <p>SR gave some background to this Just Giving campaign which seeks to support canal-based organisations in Scotland throughout the Coronavirus pandemic. CRT in England have a different approach whereby they collect money then share it out to the charities involved. We are not doing this, and any cash raised will go directly to the charities concerned.</p> <p>14 organisations have signed up to the campaign and are already collecting funds with £1100 being donated in total so far.</p> <p>Now in week 3, wider publicity will start to take off. SR said that LUCS had emailed all previous passengers on their database and had had a fantastic response from that. He is now looking at trying to raise match funding from companies. Any additional funding raised in this way will be shared across the participating organisations on a pro rata basis proportionate to what each one had raised themselves. Activities like a charity walk along the towpath are being considered to gain extra publicity.</p> <p>Donate buttons have also been added to the case studies on the Volunteer Awards website.</p> <p>SR was congratulated on the excellent job he is doing.</p> <p>GD suggested approaching the Rotary for match funding.</p> <p>KB said she had thought about profile raising by means of a charity cycle to the Falkirk Wheel. PB said that Alistair Dalton from the Scotsman/ Evening News has been in touch. SC operational staff are putting up posters on the towpath and JS is sharing on social media channels. She said that she would also put the appeal onto the SC intranet.</p>	
10	<p>A.O.B.</p> <p>There has been internal discussion about the User Group which has been off the agenda for a while but SC are keen to get this back up and running. Hoping to have a Scotland-wide one around July if everyone thought that this was worthwhile. There was general agreement. PG to look at dates.</p> <p>RR asked what was the situation with replacing SC's chairman, and whether this was now on</p>	

	<p>hold? CT said that the recruitment campaign for his replacement would be in Oct/ November this year and that the current chairman is likely to be in place until Sept 2021.</p> <p>RD had a question for CT, looking for an update on when SC Board meetings would be more accessible. The papers from March are now on the website. The next Board meeting is in July. Papers on the website are always a month behind.</p> <p>KB shared information about COVID Ready training / risk assessment that the Sorted Project is thinking about. It's online and run by Gilson Gray Solicitors and Apex Training at a cost of £25 per person. They have asked EVOC to look into securing a charity discount. TSP has been advised by SCVO and their insurers, Keegan & Pennykid, to implement a robust COVID Ready plan. www.gilsongray.co.uk.</p> <p>GD said that the Church of Scotland had a 40 minute free video.</p> <p>RM said the bridge near the Stockingfield site will close the canal for about 6 weeks.</p> <p>DE highlighted the concerns of residents at Seaport Marina as they come out of lockdown. Now other people are using the facilities there but no extra cleaning is taking place. DE also highlighted another issue at Seaport where there is a great deal of noise being made by someone fitting out a canal boat on a residential mooring. CT had promised to visit – when will this be? RM said that cleaning has increased and that signage should be in place – will check if still there. Noise issue to be raised with the local team. CT will get back to DE about a visit.</p> <p>PB asked for agenda items for future meetings to be sent via SBV.</p> <p>For the July meeting, PG to organise SC's environment manager, Olivia Lassiere, to speak on invasive species (a 15 min slot) and to invite another SC Board member to attend.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The date of 23 July originally proposed by SC will have to be changed as it clashes with a SC Board meeting. PG to reconfirm suitable alternative dates for July and August.</p> <p>NK reminded the meeting that SWfA would need to have an AGM soon (in August). A minimum of 14 days' notice of the AGM is required to be issued to all members.</p>	