

**Scottish Waterways for All**  
**Minutes of Meeting - Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2020 at 3.30pm**  
**Held virtually using Zoom**

**Attendees:** Ronnie Rusack (Chair), Patricia Bowie (Vice Chair), Graeme Harvey (Treasurer), Sue Bedford-Visser (Secretary), Richard Millar, Jonathan Mosse, Don Williams, Neil Kitchener, Sandra Purves, Richard Davies, Josie Saunders, Paul Gunning

**Apologies:** Stuart Rennie

Everyone present agreed to the meeting being recorded.

<p><b>1</b></p>	<p><b>Minutes of Last Meeting</b></p> <p>The minutes of 29th July 2020 had been amended and were approved.</p>	
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>Action Points</b></p> <p>1. RM had spoken to RD re the online booking system, specifically the challenges with booking Saturdays. RM was grateful for the feedback and the problem was fixed immediately. Post Covid, some 218 boats have now passed through the Crinan and 70% of those had booked online. It had been anticipated that there would be 30-40 online bookings in the first year but with about 150 so far this can be considered a great success.</p> <p>RM has also had discussion with JK re the Crinan who had suggested posters about online booking in Oban and certain other areas.</p> <p>Online booking on the Caledonian is expected to launch on 1 Sept. and SC are keen to drive this Covid-safe way to book, especially as it has already freed up about 2 weeks of staff time that could be spent on canal maintenance.</p> <p>JS added that an improvement will be made before roll out on the Caledonian in that stickers will be issued to those boats booking online so that they can be more easily spotted and waved through more quickly at the sea lock.</p> <p>2. JM's previous comments on training. This will be discussed later in the agenda.</p> <p>3. RM confirmed that SC would be glad to include the Destinations Director in a future meeting of this group</p> <p>4. JS had been actioned in previous minutes to issue the presentation on invasive species as Julia does not get these minutes. This is still out-standing and RM nominated PG to action this. NK suggested that ID cards for the most common species would be useful.</p>	<p><b>RM</b></p> <p><b>PG</b></p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Review of progress made by SWfA</b></p> <p>PB said that, Covid notwithstanding, it was not felt that the group had progressed as far as had been hoped. Main action points should be reviewed and refreshed.</p> <p>RM agreed. The repetitive agenda needs to move on and bring others' expertise into the room, such as JM's training presentation. A move to a more genuine partnership.</p>	

	<p>JM expressed concern that even when things were “brought into the room” they then disappeared into a black hole. He cited Chrisy Southgate as a good example of action, keeping things on the agenda until they got dealt with. He commended what she has achieved with regard to Health &amp; Safety issues. RM agreed that this was a good example of partnership working.</p> <p>It was suggested that CS was invited to a future meeting to talk about how this has been working.</p> <p>RD raised the fact that SWfA incorporates LCVG and the recent financial report was based on that group. However, we do not discuss volunteering at SWFA meetings. It would be good to have a regular report on volunteering and what has been done, which may give rise to ideas for other things they could do (such as drive weed cutters).</p> <p>RM supported the idea of a Volunteering sub-group which should include looking at training and the deployment of hand tools, plant and machinery. He proposed Carol Bell should be involved as well as Jeannette Roberts, SC’s head of H&amp;S who is keen to find new ways of working. He thinks we could make some really good progress on this.</p> <p>RR said that CB used to give reports. He would be happy to sit on a sub-group for volunteering and the smaller weed cutters would certainly be suitable for volunteers. The right training and an increase in volunteers could see the canals transformed.</p> <p>PB suggested KB and reps from F&amp;C and LUCS may also want to get involved in this. SP pointed out the need to involve the other organisations as they know where things need done.</p> <p>GH said that these days there seemed to be much less co-operation between the various canal-based organisations who he felt stayed on their own patch and did not communicate with others. He remembered the 1970s when the various groups communicated much better.</p> <p>RD suggested we ask someone from the IWA’s Waterway Recovery Group to take part in a future meeting. As long as done by Zoom we could ask them to talk about how volunteering is done down south, perhaps with a view to a visiting work party next year.</p> <p>RM said this must be on the agenda of a volunteering sub-group. IWA are keen to be involved. An event reminiscent of those of the 1970/1980s would give momentum to our calendar for 2021.</p> <p>Re Navigation issues, DW submits a link to LCA’s minutes of the Navigation and Safety committee to SBV for circulation to SWfA members.</p> <p>PB asked whether a sub-group for Operational issues was needed. RM was not convinced of the need. He has a presentation to give on the breach at Linlithgow and would also give early indications of future stoppages.</p> <p>PB proposed that a smaller group comprising RR, CT, RM, SR and PB look into how we can make SWfA more effective overall. RM suggested CB and JM also join this group from a training / Third sector perspective.</p>	
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>Scottish Canals Update – RM</b></p> <p>RM gave a presentation on the recent breach at Muiravonside. The presentation will be made available to the wider membership of SWfA.</p> <p>A bid has been submitted to the Scottish Government for Emergency funds to fix the breach as well as Resilience funds to invest in infrastructure such as widening weirs and strengthening embankments to cope with future climate change challenges.</p>	<p>PG</p>

	<p>RD congratulated SC for their rapid response to the breach. He asked if there were lessons to be learned for the future. Also asked if in addition to Capital bids to the Scottish Government there was the option for additional Revenue funds for, eg, enhancing the monitoring of water levels or inspection of embankments.</p> <p>RM said that all embankments are monitored. The embankment at Muiravonside had its last, timely, principal inspection in May 2018 and it was by no means the worst. He explained that their priority was to protect towns, cities and major reservoirs but that did mean that sometimes investment in areas in the countryside was delayed. He felt that SC’s Asset Management Strategy was prioritising investment in the right places.</p> <p>RM added that he had included in the funding bid the option to turn to Union into a Smart Canal, as with the F&amp;C, giving the ability to shed water ahead of storms, but that increased the bid substantially. RM asked for the total figure that has been applied for not be minuted as this is confidential but it is not lacking in ambition.</p> <p>RD raised the question of the group providing political support for an increase in the Revenue budget. RD also expressed concern for the future of the hire fleet whose access to the canal network was now very restricted.</p> <p>RM welcomes support from the group regarding revenue and said letters are always helpful. A letter from the Chair would not go amiss. It should be noted that climate change is to main factor in the breach and not a revenue budget issue.</p> <p>DW asked if embankment assessment took railways into account? RM explained the A to E categories, which are followed by a number to indicate level of strategic risk according to the implications of a breach. Edinburgh is, for example, highest at 5, and the embankment at Muiravonside was considerably further down the list, after strategic sites such as reservoirs, a D2 risk (with the benefit of hindsight this should perhaps have been a D3).</p> <p>For the last 8-10 years under the last chief executive SC has been holding back on investment, operating with a capital budget of £1.5 – 2 million. This has now changed, with a capital budget last year of £6.5 million and £12 million this year. This level of investment needs to be sustained over the long term as the Asset Management Strategy now shows a need for some £74 million of investment.</p> <p>DW asked about the insurance implications of the repair work.</p> <p>NK queried whether the breach was caused by a surge or by overtopping, also questioning the adequacy of the weirs: are they blocked or not wide enough? RM said that weirs, culverts, bed valves were working – but would they work in the future? In his opinion the breach was caused by an element of overtopping accompanied by dynamic flow.</p>	
5	<p><b>Proposed Stoppages</b></p> <p>RM shared slides on proposed future stoppages. Currently in draft but happy to share with the group.</p> <p>RM gave an overview of the current heavy investment programme across all canals this winter.</p> <p>On the Caledonian, there is investment in the west, middle and eastern ends. Some of this is about new gates as at Cullochry and Gairloch. Similar challenges to those met at Fort Augustus as in the welds on the gates and so keen to replace gates there. New actuators and improved operations in the plan.</p>	PG

	<p>£645,000 at Laggan Spout will get the Caledonian back to depths of the 1960s.</p> <p>On the Crinan, JK has frequently raised concerns about gates on this canal. Here there will be a full closure from 26<sup>th</sup> Oct until end March 2021. The programme includes the installation of gates on the Ardrisaig side and a gate survey on the Crinan side.</p> <p>It also includes dredging and the improvement of a number of bridges plus preparatory work on Cairnbaan Swing Bridge, the only route across the canal. This will necessitate putting in a new route across the canal and so this work is scheduled for 2021/22.</p> <p>Also a substantial list of works on the F&amp;C and Union including access improvements, and bridge work to improve user operation., the Glasgow Integrated water Management System (Smart Canal), delivery of a £13 million bridge at Stockingfield (when the main channel will have to close for 6-8 weeks – dates TBC), Garscube Bridge, works on the Union as well as around Port Buchan, user operation on Leamington Lift Bridge</p> <p>The Falkirk Wheel has been painted and lighting improvements will be added. All these represent considerable challenges for the team that was delivering a £2 million programme and is now potentially delivering one with a value of £20 million.</p> <p>SC have taken cognisance of the recent Todbrook report and identified the need to design new spillways for Townhead and Hillend Reservoirs, substantial jobs for next winter 2021/22. Pre-emptive work essential given the emergency work on Todbrook cost £25 million with an expected further £25 million for repair work, so this is high on RM’s agenda.</p> <p>RD thought there may be some discrepancies with the dates on the Crinan slide. RM asked PG to sort that out. JS added that updates to the Stoppage Programme can be found on Scottish Canals’ website under the section Managing Our Assets/ Stoppage Programme and asked for the link to the website to be included in the minutes: <a href="https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/canal-works-stoppage-programme/">https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/canal-works-stoppage-programme/</a></p> <p>JM queried what was meant by the Sighthill Link? RM explained that this is a fully funded Sustrans project to improve the link between the new housing and the canal at Port Dundas.</p>	PG
6	<p><b>Red diesel - proposed changes</b></p> <p>JM said that RYA, IWA and British Marine are doing a good job in representing boaters’ interests in this regard. He will keep the group up to speed with any developments in this area.</p>	
7	<p><b>Social media presence – SBV</b></p> <p>SBV pointed out that SWfA has no public facing presence on social media.</p> <p>There is however a facebook page for LCVG (127 followers) and one for Keep Cals Alive! (128 followers). They are not managed by the same people. CB set up the page for LCVG and she and John and SBV are admins. RD said that KCA was set up by someone from the Electric Boat Assn but is no longer involved and RD and RR are now the only admins. Posts on both are fairly infrequent, with LCVG concentrating on volunteer activity whilst recent KCA! posts have been about Stockingfield developments and the recent Health research. Neither mention the Volunteer Awards or the Big Splash.</p> <p>RM said that the group needs to decide which groups of people it is trying to reach, for example facebook is perhaps best for trying to recruit volunteers whilst Twitter is likely to be best for engaging with ministers.</p>	

	<p>PB suggested a sub-group to look into this comprising SBV, SR, SP and JS and to look into including SR's volunteer website as a means of including private group discussions amongst SWfA members.</p> <p>JS said it was important not just to have members in this group who could discuss and agree the approach but to have a few that could actually do the daily work of keeping these pages updated. She felt that CB should also be part of this group.</p>	
<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>Updates from sub-groups</b></p> <p>RD pointed out that most of these sub-groups no longer actually existed.</p> <p>Updates were as follows:</p> <p><b>Dredging</b> – RM confirmed that the £1 million for dredging which had been spoken about at the last meeting had been approved by the Scottish Government and that they and SC auditors have confirmed the theory that they can capital dredge. So it's a green light for the Caledonian and the Crinan, and spot dredging on the Lowlands (with more to come soon).</p> <p><b>Vegetation Management</b> – no need for a sub-group on this now. RM will include in his updates, and a new sub-group will only be formed if a problem is identified.</p> <p><b>Third Sector Engagement</b> – JM said that he and CB had been operating as a sub-group and had been having discussions. Also, JM had done a training presentation which had not taken the group any further forward. Although CB and John were doing a great job they are not able to develop training and expand on what the volunteers can do. Until SC fund a FT development manager the aspirations for third sector engagement is unlikely to go anywhere. JM made another plea for this post to be funded and feels that this is a priority that would give an excellent ROI.</p> <p>RM feels that this can be resolved, and that Carol and John need to drive this, both have skills and are able to do this. It is hoped that a strengthened sub-group will support this.</p> <p>JS said that on the back of the health research they are submitting various funding bids and where possible including bids to upskill volunteers.</p> <p>RM said that training programmes exist for many of the things that are needed, they just need some small adjustments to be suitable for volunteers.</p> <p>PB suggested that Bill Robertson join this sub-group and RM added that Jeanette Roberts would be key in driving this forward.</p> <p><b>Wellbeing</b> – no need for a sub-group but to go on the agenda as and when things come up. JS reported that the next phase of health research would look at the influence of the canal on various diseases (not just mortality). Also a Health Monitoring Survey is to be launched to track trends.</p> <p><b>Asset Management</b> –No need for a sub-group but RM will report each March/ April on the annual Asset Management Plan.</p>	
<p><b>9.</b></p>	<p><b>Crinan Canal Update</b></p> <p>RM had spoken to JK who had raised some points, overall positive.</p> <p>JK had suggested advertising in various places to promote the new online booking system.</p>	

	<p>JK was positive about the work on Lock 4, but raised some concerns about Lock 6. He also raised concerns about the access to the new jetty at Ardrisaig Lock. RM said that the SC team will look into those issues.</p>	
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>Caledonian Canal Update</b></p> <p>RD said that on behalf of the IWA navigation committee he has been monitoring the progress of commercial vessels through the Caledonian, ie work boats such as North Sea Oil/ windfarm servicing vessels, not yachts. Concerns had been raised that transit was slow and may cause problems but most transit in 2 days. However, RD has not seen any fishing boats at all, perhaps they have turned off their AIS signals, but this is unexplained. RM said he had also been monitoring this and he also could not offer an explanation. Something to keep an eye on.</p> <p>RR volunteered to take responsibility for contacting our two “correspondents in the North” for regular updates.</p>	RR
<b>11.</b>	<p><b>Big Splash Campaign Update – SR</b></p> <p>SR had sent in a short report wondering whether to draw a line under the campaign. £3690 has been raised so far but that figure has not moved for a while.</p> <p>RM wondered if there was a narrative behind what the money was being spent on that may help to perpetuate the campaign.</p>	
<b>12.</b>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p>RD asked about the hire fleet now that it has been moved to Falkirk. Is there any prospect of them having somewhere to go?</p> <p>RM said that they were re-starting in September. And so the weed cutter had been moved at the same time as the hire boats from the Union to the F&amp;C and was pushing into Glasgow, heading west down to Bowling with an expectation that they would get there by the end of August. All resources were being deployed to make the F&amp;C viable.</p> <p>PB was concerned that weed cutting was stopping on the Union, however Trucksters are going to the Union to continue weed cutting. PB asked to be kept informed as she is trying to keep Re-Union’s boats moving.</p> <p>RD asked if RM had a date for the removal of piles at Garscube. RM wasn’t sure but felt that it was probably within the next 3 to 4 weeks (mid Sept).</p> <p>PB asked for endorsement on the new way of working. RR felt that the smaller group was able to be more focused though it is important for others to be involved in sub-groups which would feed into the management group and to lend their expertise when required.</p> <p>PB asked for leads for each of the sub-groups: Volunteering: RR Navigation: DW Social Media: SBV SWfA Effectiveness: PB</p> <p>PB asked leads to ask for help if help is needed to organise a Zoom meeting.</p>	

	RD suggested that there were funds that could perhaps be used for the group to have their own Zoom account – about £15 per month – on a month by month basis. RD and GH would discuss this.	RD and GH
11.	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b></p> <p>It was agreed to move back from having a monthly meeting to having one every second month as previously.</p> <p>The next (virtual) meeting of the SWfA management committee will be on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020 from 11am to 1pm.</p>	