

Scottish Waterways for All
Minutes of Meeting - Wednesday 28th October 2020 at 11am
Held virtually using Zoom

Attendees: Ronnie Rusack (Chair), Patricia Bowie (Vice Chair), Graeme Harvey (Treasurer), Sue Bedford-Visser (Secretary), Stuart Rennie, Richard Millar, Don Williams, Neil Kitchener, Sandra Purves, Richard Davies, Josie Saunders, Paul Gunning, Chrisy Southgate, Gordon Daly, Mark Smith, Carol Bell

Apologies: Jonathan Mosse

Everyone present agreed to the meeting being recorded.

1	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting</p> <p>The minutes of 26 August 2020 were approved.</p>	
2	<p>Action Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC 's Director of Policy and Governance David Blair to be invited to a future meeting of this group (28th Jan 2021) • The 3 recent presentations have all now been shared to the group • Discrepancies with dates recently noticed on the slide about the Crinan – this has now been updated • RR has received reports from both the Crinan and the Caledonian • Zoom discussion and whether SWfA should buy our own package – GH is happy to continue to facilitate for now. We will monitor, depends on how long we may need to continue to meet virtually. One reason for SWfA having its own Zoom account may be the number and frequency of sub-group meetings, depending on how theses take off. 	RM
3	<p>Scottish Canals Update including stoppages – Richard Millar</p> <p>RM is keeping a close eye on the situation with Covid and how things are worsening again. ScotGov have been clear that construction work can continue, good news as this year some £20M of investment is going into canal assets. Teams are socially distancing.</p> <p>The stoppage programme was shared before the meeting. There are some challenges, especially at Stockingfield as a closure here was not anticipated. But contractors have been spooked by the breach at Muiravonside and are going the extra mile to ensure the canal and canal users are safe.</p> <p>Muiravonside – the haul road is in now and the stoppages programme shows that navigation is expected to be back by end March 2021.</p> <p>The implementation of online booking for the Caledonian and the Crinan canals has been pushed forward as it involves less face to face interaction and it is more efficient. Also facility block improvements on these two canals.</p> <p>Water resources have been challenging over the last quarter, with drought over the summer followed by some significant rain events.</p>	

<p>Volunteering – Carol and John are back onto this and there has been positive volunteer activity despite the challenges of Covid.</p> <p><u>Action: RM to send figures on volunteering days to SBV to include in the minutes.</u></p> <p>Weed cutting – investment from ScotGov for another weed cutter (now on order) will see 4 weed cutters and 3 Truxors working next year.</p> <p>Garscube Bridge, which will bring access into North Glasgow, has just opened with a lot of positivity. The engineering behind it is very interesting and it is a pleasure to watch.</p> <p>Lots of positive volunteer activity. Volunteers have re-decked a lot of the pontoons on the Lowland canals.</p> <p>The Friends of Monklands Canal came together to do a lot of work during lockdown, improving the aesthetics and condition of the Monklands Canal mainly between Blair Bridge and Bargeddie – they have an impressive number of followers on facebook. Truxor training has been arranged for four volunteers and MS is aiming to get them working with SC teams.</p> <p>The Boat House at Auchinstarry has been successfully let again. A great community asset.</p> <p>The cottages previously managed by Natural Retreats are back with Scottish Canals. Aim is to get them back on the market as soon as possible.</p> <p>A deal with Scottish Water will generate income from surface water discharge.</p> <p>GD asked if boats will be able to turn at Stockingfield? A full-size narrowboat will not be able to, only smaller boats.</p> <p>GD also asked about the recent problems with Bonnybridge lift bridge. RM thinks that the problem has now been sorted.</p> <p>NK said that there was an opportunity to look at the winding hole before Stockingfield – it is likely to be shallow, only suitable for a narrowboat with a 3ft draft. Contractors Balfour Beattie has agreed to look at this and will try to identify a suitable place along the canal.</p> <p>RD said he can understand the closure over the winter however the prospect of the canal being closed for 6 weeks over the summer is not acceptable. Surely the contractors can find a solution that does not involve closing the canal.</p> <p>NK said that had not been clear from the (Navigation) meeting whether 6 weeks would be long enough, but they should be clearer in about 3 weeks time. RM said that the dates were still to be confirmed, and that it may be later in the year. SC will work with the boaters on this, and would encourage them not to affect the peak season if at all possible. NK will keep the liaison going with LCA.</p> <p>RD asked that Forth Yacht Clubs Association be advised about next summer’s stoppages, as should the hire boat companies to allow people to plan ahead.</p> <p>GD also said that yachtsmen are now planning next year’s crew so the sooner the better.</p> <p>JS said that as part of the Stockingfield programme SC has a database of people they keep in contact with which is quite extensive, and this includes marinas.</p>	<p>RM</p>
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	<p><u>Action: Richard/Josie to inform Cathy at Forth Yacht Clubs Association to make sure they are well briefed as soon as full details of Stockingfield closure are known.</u></p> <p>NK also felt the wording describing the Stockingfield stoppage was unclear and asked if further clarity could be provided.</p> <p><u>Action: Josie to review wording of the stoppage programme in relation to Stockingfield</u></p> <p>(Full knowledge of the timings will also help to bring clarity here and is forthcoming).</p>	<p>JS/ RM</p> <p>JS</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>LCA presentation on Dredging – Neil Kitchener</p> <p>NK gave a presentation, illustrated with photos, to show the relationship between dredging and weed growth on the Union. It highlighted that the build up of silt caused by inadequate dredging is creating a hazard to navigation, encouraging weed growth and restricting the width of the channel, most notable on the Union.</p> <p>RM noted that the channel shape presents a challenge on the Union due to its variance in places (trapezoidal to dish) and that while built to 5ft depth, it currently sits at approximately 3.5 ft. Dredging to a depth of 5ft would allow the canal to take more rain water in the event of storms such as the recent one which caused the Muiravonside breach, a powerful argument to take to ScotGov for further investment.</p> <p>RM pointed out that we are currently living with the legacy of the dredging done for the Millennium Link, when it was left at 3.5 ft.</p> <p>A £9m backlog of dredging is noted, with the first £1m agreed with Scottish Government for the current year and dredging already carried out at Bowling (6,000 tons) and with spot dredging on the Union Canal.</p> <p>Scottish Canals has the appetite to progress, and is looking into a blended model between contractors and the SC team to tackle further dredging on the F&C and Union Canal.</p> <p>RR noted that working on the reed banks has been effective in the past, citing in particular the stretch between the Clifton and Bonnington aqueduct. This helped the channel stay clear for a length of time afterward. RM responded that there is a delicate balance to be struck with this approach since the reed roots can help bind the lining of the canal and their removal can potentially lead to high level leaks.</p> <p>GH wondered if plastic lining might be used – as in some of the Dutch canals, suggesting that perhaps this could be considered as and when there are stoppages where the canal is emptied. GH thought he remembered being told that when the stretch between Woodcockdale and Preston Road was emptied (circa 1992) that it would be sheet lined but he didn't think that happened. RM said that LUCS photo archives will show what was actually done. GD pointed out that sheeting is not that simple.</p> <p>We are behind the curve on core assets. A £74M backlog of which £10M is dredging.</p> <p>PB said it would be useful to have an update from Mark Smith.</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>Volunteering Activity Update - Richard Millar</p> <p>RM had chaired what had been a very useful and positive meeting involving MS, CB, JM and KB.</p>	

	<p>Volunteering activity has been positive in light of the wider circumstances, with variation in activities. Current challenges include embedding volunteers and having them more readily accepted by SC's operational staff. Conversations are ongoing with the unions to help them understand how volunteering can be a core part of the future. Scottish Canals currently has trainers who use SCOTS, a competency-based assessment style, but the challenge is finding them time to deliver training.</p> <p>The sub group has discussed volunteer involvement in using hand tools, painting, and helmsman activity (moving boats) as well as bringing in training on the Truxor. RR said that hand tools should include mechanised tools, strimmers, lawnmowers.</p> <p>The sub group has set out the initial aim of meeting every 3 weeks to keep up the momentum and trying to move forward with SCOTS training to grow the scale of activity as the season approaches next year.</p> <p>Further aims include identifying further funding opportunities, developing small hours volunteering opportunities (such as during a lunch break) and environmental volunteering with the vision of the canals as a linear park and green space for community benefit.</p> <p>SR noted that any strategy to secure funding must be a well-planned campaign, and very targeted with its timescales. Story and appeal are key, and should be supported with video production/multimedia and involve some degree of preplanning by spreading the word before launching the campaign in earnest, to ensure momentum is built from the offset. JS said she had some videos that could be useful and is putting together a big Comms plan around volunteering. The social media group can help – fortunately SR is on both groups.</p> <p>RM spoke about hidden volunteering and cited Dr Allah, a Syrian refugee, as an example of the good outcomes that can be achieved for volunteers. A hydrology professor, he had worked in the office for 7 months and has now been employed by Severn Trent Water.</p> <p>Covid provides an opportunity to get people onto the canals and involved in environmental volunteering. More people are likely to become unemployed and look for volunteering opportunities. Possibly reach out to Glasgow Kelvin College.</p> <p><u>Action: TT and CB to get a wish list of tools and look at a budget. MS to do this by the end of the week.</u></p> <p>CB said that they do already have some power tools now and are going to start rolling out that training quite soon.</p>	
6	<p>Social Media Sub Group – Stuart Rennie</p> <p>The first meeting of the group was held last week and was a useful meeting. Nicola Sturgeon of SC stood in for JS and was very helpful and knowledgeable.</p> <p>Important to decide what audiences we are trying to reach, as different channels will suit different audiences. Existing channels are somewhat fragmented.</p> <p>CB suggested it would be helpful if Facebook was enabled on SC work phones and a single all-encompassing volunteer facebook group was started. Nicola has also proposed a social media workshop for SC staff, with SWfA members also welcome, to help drive these ideas forward.</p> <p>The current IWA website probably does not meet our needs and SR will work on the Volunteer Awards website so that it is both public-facing as well as including a private space for SWfA members.</p>	

7	<p>LCA Navigation and Safety report - Don Williams / Chrisy Southgate</p> <p>DW said that excellent progress was being made on the action tracker.</p> <p>The minutes from the most recent LCA Navigation & Safety meeting are available at the following online at: https://www.lowlandcanalsassociation.org/meeting-minutes/sc-healthand-safety-qa/</p> <p>The annual report is also available at https://www.lowlandcanalsassociation.org/meeting-minutes/aggmreports/</p> <p>Recurring themes on communication – need to do better.</p> <p>DW highlighted the lack of clarity on closures, especially at Stockingfield.</p> <p>JS –said DW’s points are well made; the stoppages programme is updated monthly and sent out monthly, and is also on the website, but acknowledged that there are still challenges around this. PB urged JS to get input from DW, NK and others on how to do this better.</p> <p>GH said that DW, CS and NK do a great deal of work and he would like his to be acknowledged and minuted.</p> <p>CS said that sometimes SWfA get information that the Safety and navigation Committee do not get. She asked that the same information be shared to both. This should be solved now that CS is now on the SWfA’s email circulation list.</p> <p>RM said that SWfA to tend get a view from RM whereas the Safety and Navigation Committee get information from TT’s viewpoint.</p>	
8	<p>Updates from Crinan and Caledonian Canals - Ronnie Rusack</p> <p>RR read our DE’s report. The challenges around DE’s concerns were noted and Richard undertook to continue to work with David to address these as constructively as possible.</p> <p>In relation to one of David’s concerns, GH suggested the idea of negotiating with the local technical college for students to do refurbishment on the cottages in Muirtown with SC supplying the materials. CS has contacts with the Highlands College and is aware of a programme of youngsters being introduced to a range of trades, and suggested it would be a good time to engage.</p> <p><u>Action: Chrisy to forward contact details to Richard Millar.</u></p> <p>DE’s report to be circulated with these minutes</p> <p>RR also read out JK’s report on the Crinan.</p> <p>Fewer issues were reported but disappointment was expressed that knotweed hadn’t been properly addressed this year. Joe also wanted to commend Russ (lock keeper) for his diligence and thoughtfulness to boaters throughout the season.</p> <p>RM highlighted that c. £4m of investment is going into the Crinan imminently. The canal will be drained at the Ardrishaig side, with locks 1-4 (and hopefully 5) being replaced. A clear winter programme is in place with operational team and contractors established. Julia Johnstone (Scottish Canals) is aware of the issues with knotweed (and Himalayan Balsam) but the lack of seasonal staff compared to previous years has proved challenging in terms of tackling these.</p>	CS

	JK's report to be circulated with these minutes.	
9	<p>RYA Scotland update - Jonathan Mosse</p> <p>Jonathan was unable to attend the meeting and so there was no update.</p> <p>Reference was made to the recent letter from RYA's CEO which has been circulated to this group</p>	
10	<p>IWA update - Richard Davies</p> <p>On behalf of the IWA navigation committee RD has been continuing to monitor the progress of commercial vessels through the Caledonian. RM said that this work has been very helpful.</p> <p>The key finding was that commercial boats are moving through the canal in the usual 2 day period, and posed the question as to whether or not Scottish Canals should amend their message in light of this performance, and questioned if the Caledonian should remain open as a commercial waterway during a future lockdown.</p> <p>Clyde Marine Cruises are offering passenger services in the upper Clyde. RD questioned whether a Clyde to F&C Canal boat trip was commercially feasible. Sandra noted that there was interest in this around the time of the Millenium Link being established. Richard Millar noted that a trip would be possible, perhaps 2-3 hours long at its slickest, but would be influenced by tide.</p> <p>Since his last report RD has seen a few more fishing vessels coming through. Work at Laggan Spout will deepen the canal to 3.5 metres, after which we may see more of the bigger boats coming through.</p> <p>GD said he could throw some light on why there have been fewer fishing vessels going through the canal than usual. He has some fishing connections who have told him that the North Sea has been so productive that they have not been bothering to go through to the west.</p> <p><u>Action: RM and RD to pick up with Hamish Munroe at a future date about the viability of commercial trips from Bowling/Clydebank.</u></p> <p>RD's report to be circulated with these minutes.</p>	RM / RD
11	<p>E-canal map app - Josie Saunders / launch of online transit licences</p> <p>Canal & River Trust produce an Android and iPhone app to be rolled out UK-wide, which contains the specifications of UK waterways. The project is now at the point where it requires input from Scottish Canals as they currently don't have much information on Scotland . They require further information relating to width, depth, mooring points and bridge points and have also asked people to consider what other pieces of information would be useful to know, such as restaurants, hotels, car parks etc</p> <p>The app will include an inbuilt mapping function which will allow user to record obstacles, dredging hotspots and other items of interest. If you have the app you will be able to report a navigation issue through the app which will be sent to SC.</p> <p>LCA has been approached. NK, JM, SBV, PB, KB and S have expressed interest in assisting with Local information.</p> <p>There are gaps in the current Skippers Guide so that can be updated too.</p> <p>CRT are hoping to launch an updated final version on Android by early next year.</p>	

	<u>Action: JS to arrange a session with Mark Smith/Russell Thomson to best capture the relevant information. Suggestions/involvement welcome from any and all in the group.</u>	JS/ MS
12	<p>Update on reviewing and refreshing SWfA operation - Pat Bowie</p> <p>Pat said she had not yet called a meeting of this group as she wanted to see how the new format was working first. She will do so shortly.</p>	
13	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>JS gave an update on the launch of the online transit licences for the Caledonian and Crinan. Social media around this, promoting these canals. People are starting to ask if they can book again for next year.</p> <p><u>Action: JS to share the link for Sue to circulate.</u></p>	JS
14	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next (virtual) meeting of the SWfA management committee will be on Wednesday 2nd December 2020 from 10am to 12 noon.</p> <p>The first meeting in 2021 will be on 27th January.</p>	