

## **PE1693/N**

Scottish Canals submission of the 28 June 2019

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2019 requesting further information. Our responses are set out below each information request for ease of reference:

- Details of the advisory group that has been set up including the terms of reference, when it was established, when it has met to date, how often it meets and who is represented on this group.

### **Scottish Waterways for All Advisory Group**

While Scottish Canals holds open public meetings annually on the Caledonian and Crinan Canals and twice yearly on the Lowland Canals, in 2018 a number of boating customers raised the need for a more strategic forum that would continue to build on the positive relationship with Scottish Canals' management following a change in leadership.

Having listened to customers, in Autumn 2018 representatives from the Lowland Canal Volunteer Group, Keep Canals Alive and Scottish Canals first discussed the creation of a new Scotland-wide advisory group to improve collaborative working, strengthen relations at a senior level and find ways of jointly addressing the strategic challenges and opportunities facing Scotland's canals – including the raising of funds.

A number of scoping meetings took place between Winter 2018 and May 2019 (including 25th January 2019, 22nd February 20th March and 1st May) where the purpose, composition and format of the group were discussed. During this period, it was agreed to name the group Scottish Waterways for All and that the well-established Lowland Canals Volunteer Group (LCVG) would evolve to become the LCVG trading as Waterways for All. A draft constitution and code of conduct were produced, commented upon and amended by all parties and members jointly selected the name of the group.

The draft constitution, while still to be ratified, sets out that the purpose of the group is to be “a network of canal based organisations and individuals with a shared vision of how Scotland's canals should be developed. We believe we can have a stronger voice and be bigger and better together. We will work in partnership to share knowledge, skills and expertise and carry out agreed actions to enable the renaissance of the Scotland's canals by improving operations, engineering, environment, volunteering, planning and communications. This will deliver an enhanced service to all users and stakeholders and ensure the sustainability of the canals for the future.”

Membership of Scottish Waterways for All advisory group was expanded to ensure the Lowland Canals Association, Royal Yachting Association Scotland, Forth & Clyde Canal Society, Linlithgow & Union Canal Society, Inland Waterways Association, Re-Union, Inland Waterways Association, Seagull Trust, Forth Yacht Clubs Association and Bridge 19-40 are also represented.

The group, which is open to everyone, will be managed by a committee of 12 members, including three senior managers from Scottish Canals. A minimum of seven members are needed for any meeting to be quorate and the group will meet four times a year to agree actions against a long-term agreed programme of activity in areas including volunteering, dredging and winding holes, vegetation management, third sector engagement, council engagement in canals, boating/boater engagement & events, litter challenges, health & wellbeing, asset management and small works prioritisation.

Given the group is in its infancy, four office bearers – Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Secretary – are still to be elected but this is due to happen at a meeting on Thursday 1st August 2019 where the group is to be fully constituted, office-bearers elected and the start of a scoping exercise to agree a long-term action plan. Minutes will be published online and discussions are currently ongoing with the Inland Waterways Association about housing the minutes on their website. In the event of a disagreement that can't be resolved by the committee, the matter will be raised by the Chair with the CEO of Scottish Canals.

- Of the £70m repair backlog, how much of this is considered to be 'critical repairs';

Backlog is defined as the monetary value of work required to close the gap between the current performance and the required performance provided by an asset.

Following a substantial analysis of backlog of Scottish Canals Assets, in 2015, the value was estimated to be £70m. This figure was calculated using asset condition, life expectancy and serviceability data. These aspects are continually reviewed and included within the maturing Asset Management approach.

In publishing the Asset Management Strategy in June 2018, Scottish Canals defined a clear strategic approach which in priority order is to invest in:

- Avoidance of Catastrophic Failure;
- Protecting Staff and Visitor Safety; and
- Operability and Functionality of Canals.

The Asset Management Strategy sets out our approach to managing the broad range of assets within a challenging financial environment.

The full £70m requires investment in the canals over the next 10 years to ensure the safety for all canal side communities, users and to facilitate ongoing navigation. As laid out in the Asset Management Strategy the minimum additional backlog investment would be £30m over this period, however, this level of investment would result in closure of some navigations in the foreseeable future as elements of the operational infrastructure would begin to fail compromising the safety of users and operators. The model illustrates that failures would occur across the networks and create initially reduced available navigation and eventual full closures of individual canal lengths. The Asset Management Strategy clearly illustrates the level of losses of direct and indirect economic spend would be significant to Scotland, especially in rural communities.

- The governance arrangements that are in place for the appointment of the Chair who the Committee understands has recently been awarded a third term.

The appointment of the Chair is a matter for Scottish Ministers, as set out in the Transport Act 1962 (subsection 2A) and amended by the British Waterways Board (Transfer of Functions) Order 2012, following good practice in line with the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments in Scotland. The Scottish Canals Framework Document states that the Transport Scotland Accountable Officer's responsibilities include ensuring that there is effective continuous assessment and appraisal of the performance of the Chair of Scottish Canals, in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Scotland. The Chair's current term ends on 31 March 2020 and no decision has been made on the position beyond that date.

### **Point of clarification regarding a point raised by Rona Mackay MSP**

During the Petitions Committee hearing on 6th June 2019 Rona Mackay commented that two of her constituents have had to leave their residential berths in Kirkintilloch as a result of not being able to afford the mooring fees implemented after Scottish Canals' Pricing Review and Consultation. Scottish Canals has since investigated the matter and not only are we unaware of any residential boater having to leave Southbank Marina in Kirkintilloch as a result of being unable to afford the new mooring prices which came into effect in June 2017, we have no record of any residential boater leaving Southbank Marina at all since that date. It is also worth noting that the biggest price increase for a residential mooring at this location was £333.60 as a result of the Pricing Consultation, with the annual fee rising from £1800 to £2133.60 per annum. However, as the yearly increase was capped at £100 plus CPI, the customers most affected won't reach the full recommended rate until next year (2020/21).

On a final note, it is also worth mentioning that I have just had confirmation that my secondment from the Scottish Prison Service has been extended until the end of May 2023.