
**British Waterways Scotland
Scotland Group**

Continuation of Meeting held on 25 November 2004 at 1300 hours

Open to Public & Held in The Conference Room

At The Falkirk Wheel Visitor Centre

Lime Road, Tamfourhill, Falkirk

Representing British Waterways: Susan Achmatowicz
Campbell Christie (Chairman)
Nicola Christie
Ian Darling
Professor George Fleming
George Greener
Guthrie Hutton
Eva McCracken
Kenneth MacKenzie
Rod Michie
Richard Millar
Richard Millham
Sandra Purves
James Simpson
Jim Stirling

Patricia Rettie (Minutes)

Other Attendees: **As listed in Appendix 1**

Introduction & Purpose of Meeting

Campbell Christie, Chairman of the British Waterways Scotland Group (BWSG) opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and introducing himself and the other members of the panel, who were Jim Stirling, Director British Waterways Scotland and Richard Millar, Manager, Lowland Canals.

CC explained that the meeting would take the form of a short presentation by Richard Millar, followed by discussion and question time.

CC then gave a brief overview of the formation and concept of the British Waterways Scotland Group. He explained that it was a non-statutory Group formed in September 2000, following the formation of the Scottish Parliament and how the Group meets several times a year in areas where the canals have an impact on the community, allowing people with an interest in the canals to come along and join the discussions.

This was followed by CC giving a brief outline of the matters discussed at the BWSG meeting, which had been held that morning. These included a presentation on boat usage in Scotland, discussion around Business Planning, Education, the Fountainbridge Development in Edinburgh, development around The Falkirk Wheel, increase of freight movement on the canals, the Strategic Transport Authority, the Water Framework Directive and the Scottish Canals Steering Groups. The minutes of the that meeting and this public meeting will be published on the Scottish Canals Website at www.scottishcanals.co.uk

Richard Millar then gave his presentation on the Lowland Canals showing what has been happening on the Lowland Canals and boating trends. RM explained that whilst long-term licences have increased, short-term licences are slightly down in number, and that this is partly due to the poor summer weather. RM showed that there has been an increase in long-term moorings, a high level of activity in the charitable sector, the Canal societies have had a busy year and commercial activity is also increasing with trips across Scotland in partnership with canal side hotels, Pedro cruisers and holiday hire boats all operating throughout the season. This creates jobs locally employing people, at weekends to prepare the boats for the next hire.

Progress continues to improve the quality of the Lowland Canals with some 1,700 hours of weed cutting carried out this year, a new facility block at Lock 27, 1,200 metres of pontoons installed, benefiting local communities through spend whilst boats are moored. There have been some improvements to slipways and Grangemouth is now a busy basin with a good community spirit demonstrating what the canals are all about.

A demasting crane has been installed at the River Carron, opening up the canal to salt water users. BW has invested in a study of the River Carron to improve navigation and commercial development is also being looked at.

The development at Auchinstarry will offer a new mooring facility for boaters and will be open from late December of this year. Edinburgh Quay will open in March 2005. This is another very important destination on the canal network and the development of the Fountainbridge Brewery site will add to this. Work has started on the Port Dundas re-connection. This is due for completion in March 2006.

There is also potential for marinas on the Union Canal at Hermiston, Ratho, Broxburn, Linlithgow, Winchburgh and Muiravonside.

The second Scottish Boat Show, held at The Falkirk Wheel in August was a success, bringing between 16,000 and 17,000 people to the site. The Boat Show was opened with the Maryhill Leisure Puffer coming down through The Wheel. This leisure puffer makes an attractive addition to the holiday hire fleet.

RM finished by saying that the result of all this is providing activity on the water through a mix of private, charitable and commercial contributions together with increased popularity of use of the towpaths all working together to create a vibrant canal corridor.

CC thanked RM for his presentation on the exciting developments that are taking place on the Lowland Canals and opened the meeting to questions.

Donald MacKinnon, Forth & Clyde Canal Society raised the issue of the roads lobby in Cumbernauld on issues surrounding the extension to the M80 and its encroachment on the Kelvin Valley. He informed the meeting that the Minister has been asked to look at this again and that his concern is the possible impact on the canal.

JS responded that he was not aware that this had been raised again and stated that BW prefer the A80 route because of the impact on the Kelvin Valley. JS will seek further information on this.

Mr Taylor, Boat Owner – Despite the millions spent on the Lowland Canals, he had taken a trip on the Union Canal during which the propeller of his boat was badly damaged. He made the point that he and other people would not take such a trip again until they could be assured that the channel is clear.

RM responded that BW is aware and that there should now be more than 3ft draft. BW are also looking at dredging programme and the weed cutter will be in regular use and checking for obstructions due to articles being thrown into the canal.

Mr Taylor then asked how soon this would happen.

RM responded that he was looking at having these improvements in place for next season.

Robert Hunter, Stirling Council asked if BW was looking seriously at the transportation of timber on the canals, e.g. from Loch Lomond and the potential use of the River Forth. Mr Hunter also asked if the Scottish Executive's Policy Document "Scotland's Canals – an asset for the future" limited BW in any way from applying for European funding which may be available to develop freight traffic potential.

JS responded that BW already is actively participating in transportation of timber in the Highlands and is keen to develop this on the Lowland Canals. He also explained that whilst the Scottish Executive will continue to provide grant funding to meet its statutory obligations, BW also has a part to play in developing new and existing income streams.

Richard Davies, SIWA & F&C Canal Society – Informed the Meeting that he had attended a forum discussing containerised waste traffic a consultancy project. And asked what the BW position was on this.

JS responded that BW are looking at a number of proposals for transportation of freight including waste and are also discussing with Local Authorities. A meeting is scheduled for 7 December 2004, between BW and the Chief Executive of East Dunbartonshire Council.

N.B. This meeting had to be rescheduled due to JS being appointed to the enquiry team following a fatal accident on the Kennet & Avon Canal. The meeting will now take place on 20 January 2005.

Neil Durning, Polmont Community Council – Plans for Redding area Grange Centre, moorings and youth centre to get people back onto the canals. Pubs and restaurants will help to do this.

Alan Corbett Reddingmuirhead & Wallacestone Community Council asked about using the towpath for an organised run to raise funds for the Parkinsons Disease Society using The Falkirk Wheel as a feature within the event.

RM responded that BW are happy to accommodate events around the canals to raise money for charitable organisations and that he would be happy to discuss this further. Following discussion it could be handed over to the events co-ordinator.

John Calder asked what BW were intending to do about the condition of the Union Canal route to the car park at Linns Mill.

RM responded that this is an area which creates a number of problems for BW, but that they would be fixing the pot holes in the car park and will continue to discuss the installation of barrier gates.

J Nimmo, Polmont Resident raised several issues:

He expressed concern about security on the towpath and asked if it was possible to provide a warden. Mr Nimmo used the example of a young mother alone with a child.

RM made the point that a busy towpath is a safe towpath and that there are 12 million visits to the towpaths per year, although some areas are still quiet. BW work with the police in patrolling the towpaths and sponsor bikes and equipment for the police to enable them to move quickly and cover greater distances.

Mr Nimmo asked about the quality of the water in the basin at The Falkirk Wheel and asked, was there water quality control to improve fish stocks.

RM responded that the water in the basin is of a high quality and does support fish. BW is actively encouraging angling back onto the canals and there are groups who meet regularly to review ways of encouraging this.

JS also made the point that the quality of the water should not be confused with clear water.

When people are sailing and stop at a canalside pub where the captain of the vessel has too much to drink, what is the limit, what are the safeguards.

RM replied that there is recent legislation which controls how much people should be drinking in this situation and most people are sensible. To date this is not a major problem. BW will continue to monitor the situation, but it is a police matter.

Whilst acknowledging that The Scottish Boat Show at The Falkirk Wheel looked interesting, Mr Nimmo wanted to know if the exhibitors paid for their stands.

RM stated that exhibitors did pay a fee for their pitch at the Boat Show and that it had been a financial success. In addition an entrance fee of £2.50 was charged for adults and 50p of this went to The Waterways Trust Scotland to put towards projects for creating community activity in the area.

George MacAngus, Forth & Clyde Canal Society said that he was pleased to see the work that has been carried out on the canals, but some locks are still difficult to operate.

RM said that BW is aware of the problem and work will be done to improve this for next year. BW will also be looking to improve lock operation year-on-year.

George MacAngus also asked if BW were aware that the new puffer was dangerous when passengers stand at the back of the wheelhouse there is not enough headroom when passing under bridges and people should be informed of this when hiring this boat.

RM stated that BW was aware of this and will be encouraging boat operators to put warning signs on boats.

Bill Purves, Edinburgh Canal Society expressed concern that whilst BW has placed a landmark building on the Union Canal, can BW ensure that future developments will follow a similar style and theme as he would not like to see a piecemeal development evolve.

JS stated that BW has a clear view of how they would like to see future developments and would seek to influence planning where possible, but there are also other views and BW will not be able to insist on their view being upheld in all cases.

Bill went on to say that in the same way that both Edinburgh Old Town and Edinburgh New Town attract tourism because of their architecture the canalside developments should be

designed as a town for the 21st century where the design theme is continued from end to end with developers encouraged to provide quality developments with increasing values that will still be destination points in 200 years time.

Andy Carnduff, Salt Water Group raised the point that the depth of water in the Union Canal was not sufficient. He stated that the need for further dredging of silt from the canal had been demonstrated at Leamington.

RM responded that BW is doing as much as it can on dredging, whilst at the same time aiming to get the best value out of dredging contracts.

Mr Carnduff agreed with Bill Purves that uniformity of architecture along the canal is most important and asked if BW should not be the main consultant for any Planning Application and should they not be trying to get developers to consult with them.

JS responded that BW has no rights other than those of navigation, but does take this role very seriously. Wherever possible BW try to influence development and make it relate to the canal and the use of the canal. BW does not always get notification of proposed developments, but does try to keep track of what is going on.

Gordon Daly, Seagull Trust made the point that all those with an interest in the canals should let BW know when they hear of any Planning Applications that may impact on the canal.

Robert Hunter, Stirling Council said that the transformation has been great along the canals, where BW has had an influence.

Michael Green, LUCS made the point that the canals are scheduled ancient monuments and asked if BW was working with Historic Scotland to influence planning.

JS replied that BW does work with Historic Scotland.

CC made the point that there is still a backlog from when people turned their backs on the canals.

Donald MacKinnon, Forth & Clyde Canal Society said that Robin Evans, Chief Executive of BW had stated, at a previous Public Meeting, that BW would not get involved in a debate about red diesel. Mr MacKinnon wished to point out that this is a major problem for Lowland Canals as the change in taxation will have a major impact on levels of canal traffic.

Billy Mason, Bonny Barge acknowledged that BW has done a lot to improve the canals, but did not help people who have businesses on the canal, he stated that he could not get a meeting with RM.

RM responded that he had more meetings with Mr Mason than any of his other customers on the Lowland Canals. RM went on to say that Ronnie Simpson, Customer Service Manager for the Lowland Canals now has responsibility for looking after the businesses and he also has held several meetings with Mr Mason. RM also pointed out that BW has helped him and is keen to see his business grow, and he is happy to meet with him, but these meetings must be about moving forward, cannot keep going over the same things.

CC explained to Mr Mason that if he is not happy with the outcome then there is a route he can take through the BW Internal Complaints Procedure if he wishes to make further representation.

Jess Bryce, Parkinsons Disease Society made an appeal to all who are interested in the canal to come along and help when they have their fund raising run along the canal towpath.

CC said that RM would assist with this and put notices on boards to spread the message.

CC said that the meeting had been useful with stimulating discussion. He thanked everyone for coming and for their contributions. CC made the point that now that The Millennium Link is complete and The Falkirk Wheel is operating we need to get activity on the canals. People will look back in 20 years and The Millennium Link and Falkirk Wheel will be seen as success stories. Those who live in Falkirk know they have an icon, so keep active on the canals.