

The Company of Proprietors of the Neath Canal Navigation (NCN)

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18th September 2017

Subject : Response to reference to Neath Canal in the Review of Tourism Support in NPT.

To : Mr Neil Evans Senior Scrutiny and Member Development Officer NPT.

Dear Neil,

Further to your recent exchange of emails with Mr Rupert Joseland, Chairman of Neath Canal and our telephone discussion; Rupert asked me to respond to you.

Firstly for correctness I hope you don't mind me pointing out some factual errors in the review document. The Neath Canal Company was established a long time ago and was not as a result of St Modwen acquiring the canal as part of a much larger asset transfer from BP in 2009. Also under recommendation 4 of the review please note that the representative providing feedback on Neath Canal is not a representative of NCN but rather a member of Neath & Tennant Canal Trust.

The present major shareholder of the canal is St Modwen and through a long standing management arrangement with NPT CBC, which was pre transfer to St Modwen, the northern section of the canal from Resolven to the south of Glynneath is managed and supported by NPTCBC and the southern section from Resolven to Briton Ferry is managed and supported by St Modwen. Overall the canal company makes an operating loss year on year, in particular since the loss of revenue from water sales arose when BP closed its local facilities but even so both organisations endeavour to maintain the canal infrastructure in working order but most importantly structurally safe. A recent Atkins structural survey, commissioned by St Modwen, over the whole of the canal has confirmed this although things such as lock gates and mechanisms are deteriorating over time and through lack of use and these facilities will require significant investment in the future if the canal is to remain navigable. Unfortunately there is no demand for boating on the canal and hence justifying such expenditure will be difficult against a back drop of annual losses and no boating demand.

The part of the canal infrastructure that is widely used is the towpath. This provides a safe access to the public to their place of work, for walking in general, for joggers and particularly cyclists and the section of towpath from Briton Ferry to Tonna is part of the designated Sustrans cycle route.

For the southern section of the canal the maintenance is carried out, under our instruction, by a small company Groundtech Wales employing 4 men each week, 52 weeks per year. The main concentration of the maintenance team is to keep the towpaths safe for use and involves such things as surface repairs, hedge and tree cutting, grass cutting, removal of fallen trees, knotweed spraying,

towpath stabilisation, litter picking etc. In terms of the waterway, control of water levels, waterway clearance of obstructions and weed cutting are the main activities in addition to basic maintenance repairs to the waterway structures.

The maintenance costs for the southern section alone exceed £100k per year.

In terms of the N&TC Trust using their trip boat on the canal each summer, from Neath town centre to Tonna, then we ensure this section of waterway as a priority is in good order for their use. Unfortunately their boat is in need of repair and as a result they decided not to run it this summer.

So in summary, I hope the content of this letter provides some context to the efforts both St Modwen and NPTCBC provide on a daily basis, in difficult financial circumstances.

Both Rupert and myself are happy to discuss further if you so wish.

Yours sincerely

John Smith

Manager Neath Canal.