

Oban Community Harbour Development Association (OCHDA) Newsletter 5 (September 2021)



Members' Annual General Meeting

It's well overdue but we will be holding our first Annual General Meeting on Tuesday December 14th 2021, starting at 7.00 p.m.. The meeting will be held at the Corran Halls and it is particularly important that as many members as possible are present. The meeting will hear a brief update from John MacAlister before the issue of electing office-bearers for the next year's work. It seems almost certain that OCHDA's work will come to an end within the following 12 months but this is also likely to be quite a busy period and many other members will be required to help with specific tasks. More on the night!

Business in the Bay

Oban Bay has been exceptionally busy this summer, despite the lack of visitors from N Europe and of most cruise ships. The urgency of the establishment of a new Harbour Authority (HA) has been emphasised by a significant number of reported 'near misses' and repeated oil/fuel spillages.

Traffic analysis has been completed by Tony on behalf of OCHDA and Stakeholders. In summary, with vessel movements up by 300% since the Fisher Associates assessment, over half the vessel movements in the Bay are now to or from the N Pier and only 30% are by ferries. It is clear, therefore, that the hub of the new HA should be the N Pier so that as many vessels as possible are required to make only one contact with a HA on entering/leaving the Bay.

Meetings with Council Officers and Members

As the vessel analysis shows, it is fundamental to safe operation of the new HA that the operation is based on and includes the N Pier and surrounding waters. This has brought an even greater reliance on collaboration with Argyll and Bute Council (A&BC) which is only partially being achieved despite a significant number of meetings with Council Officers and various Members, notably those representing Oban and the Harbour Board, in recent months.

Almost 5 months since the urgently-needed meeting was agreed at the March Harbour Board, OCHDA (Ross and Tony) presented to the Harbour Board Members and Councillors for Oban, Lorn and the Isles on August 2nd. They showed clearly why a Trust Port is the best option, using the Council's own financial information and

information from CalMac, the NLB and the Council relating to vessel movements. Councillors and Officers were clearly not aware of the reality of the situation and some still appear not to recognise the risks of procrastination.

The financial analysis undertaken by OCHDA and agreed as accurate by Council Officers has shown clearly that with even a modest lease charge levied on the Trust Port, A&BC will gain more income and have fewer liabilities than the current operation. From the Trust Port's perspective it is significantly financially preferable to base the operation on the existing Council Harbour Building with its existing infrastructure. The proposed budget for the Trust Port has the establishment of contingency funds as a high priority, compared with the Council's lack of any specific maintenance funds for the N Pier as well as creating a number of additional permanent and seasonal jobs. Nevertheless the proposed Conservancy charges fall well within what was originally considered acceptable.

You might think that this evidence is conclusive. But as you may know the most recent Harbour Board meeting (September 2nd), which should have received a recommendation from Officers over the Council's 'preferred option', agreed a further delay so that Officers can undertake another Option Appraisal before any agreement can be entered into over use of the North Pier. Officers have been unable to explain why this is necessary or what their assessment criteria will be. The result of this appraisal is scheduled to be reported to the Harbour Board on December 2nd, following which the negotiations over any possible lease may begin so there seems little chance of an agreement being in place for any operation to commence in 2022!

Despite regular meetings, the proposed Memorandum of Understanding between OCHDA and the Council has not been agreed. OCHDA members have continued to develop their agreed proposals for the future Trust Port, as demanded by the Council before they will consider collaborating over the use of the N Pier as the base. These are intended to form the basis of the MoU and include:

- Governance structure and recruitment of the Board
- Financial analysis and projections, including proposed conservancy charges
- Harbour Authority proposed limits
- Assets required for leasing from A&BC

Work is in hand on the various safety documents which will be required in compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code, including details of the Marine Safety Management System, Oil Spill management arrangements and arrangements for the Designated Person and Duty Holder.

At the time of writing the Council have yet to respond to OCHDA's proposals.

Funds and fundraising

Whilst we have the necessary funds to pay immediate bills and for the submission of the Harbour Order, it is clear that a significant sum will be required to recruit and remunerate the Chief Exec, the Board members and additional operational staff as well as meeting immediate running costs for the first few months of operation. A plan for a fundraising campaign has been in preparation for some time but we are unable to

progress this without solid assurances from the Council over the lease and staffing arrangements.

OCHDA's position

OCHDA remains committed to the establishment of a Trust Port as the best possible arrangement for Oban. The evidence of vessel movements, financial analysis and proposed budget make clear that this is the best choice for Oban and would safeguard all harbour users' interests as well as being the safest operation.

Nevertheless the key issue of partnership with A&BC remains a complete blockage. The Council's response to OCHDA's proposals seems likely to result in the earlier proposal - CMAL to take over the responsibility for the wider waters of the Bay – being brought about, either enforced as a result of frustration over completing the Trust Port proposal or by Councillors' preference.

Membership & support

In the meantime we continue to welcome new members and you are invited to pass this newsletter on to other interested people in order to encourage them to join.

Full details of how to join and some useful background information is available on our website at www.ochda.scot.

If you are able to offer practical help with any task, or financial support, please contact us at: info@ochda.scot