

# Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 14 October 2021

## Union Canal Bicentenary

<b>Executive/routine Wards</b>	<b>Executive</b> 7 – Sighthill / Gorgie; 9 – Fountainbridge / Craiglockhart; 10 – Morningside; 11 – City Centre; 2 – Pentland Hills
<b>Council Commitments</b>	<a href="#">46</a>

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that Transport and Environment Committee:
  - 1.1.1 Agrees that the Council work with Scottish Canals and other partners to take forward a programme of items around the bicentenary of the Union Canal.
  - 1.1.2 Agrees that the Council co-fund a fixed-term post with the remit of delivering the aforementioned programme.

**Paul Lawrence**

Executive Director of Place

Contact: David Cooper, Commercial Development and Investment Manager

E-mail: [david.cooper@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:david.cooper@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 529 6233

# Report

## Union Canal Bicentenary

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 2022 is the bicentenary of the Union Canal. There is an opportunity to utilise the bicentenary to celebrate the history of the Union Canal, refresh the vision for its future, and accelerate landmark projects. An indicative programme of projects has been identified.
- 2.2 To help progress the, it is proposed that the Council meet 50% of the costs of a fixed-term post with the remit of progressing the programme, with Scottish Canals to meet the remaining costs.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 The Union Canal is a canal linking Fountainbridge, Edinburgh with the Falkirk Wheel in Tamfourhill (where it links to the Forth and Clyde Canal). Around 16 kilometres of the Union Canal runs through southwest Edinburgh, stretching from Lochrin Basin in Fountainbridge to the Linn's Mill Aqueduct at the River Almond near Newbridge; it is a prominent feature of multiple of Edinburgh's urban, suburban and rural neighbourhoods.
- 3.2 The Union Canal originally opened in 1822 as a means of transporting goods; it was closed in 1965 after being largely supplanted by freight trains and heavy goods vehicles. It was reopened in 2001 as part of the Millennium Link project and is a popular leisure destination, as well as serving important roles in terms of drainage and the natural environment.
- 3.3 The Union Canal is managed by Scottish Canals, a public corporation of the Scottish Government established in 2012.

### 4. Main report

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- 4.1 As the Union Canal first opened in 1822, the year 2022 is the bicentenary (two-hundredth anniversary) of its opening. The Council and Scottish Canals have identified an opportunity to utilise the bicentenary to celebrate the history of the Union Canal, refresh the vision for its future, and accelerate landmark projects.

- 4.2 An indicative programme in connection with the bicentenary is set out below (it is noted that some of the items would be led upon by other parties):
- 4.2.1 Refreshing the existing Edinburgh Union Canal Strategy with a new 10-year strategy with a sharper focus on a smaller number of priorities. It is envisaged that the new strategy would be completed by the end of 2022, with events such as the 2022 Edinburgh Canal Festival used to solicit input from communities, Canal users, and businesses.
  - 4.2.2 Celebrating and commemorating the history of the Union Canal via projects such as a static exhibition, a floating exhibition, a special Canal flotilla, and a special edition of the Edinburgh Canal Festival in June 2022 with events at Fountainbridge and other hubs such as Meggetland, Bridge8, and Ratho.
  - 4.2.3 Supporting the formation of a canal-based “Blue-Green” community development trust.
  - 4.2.4 Securing a new future for the Lockharton Bridge Boat House.
  - 4.2.5 Developing Bridge8 as a multi-activity Canal hub.
  - 4.2.6 Maximising the opportunities created by the Wester Hailes Place Plan and the revamp of Wester Hailes High School to create new focal points for the Canal.
  - 4.2.7 Launching a “Citizen Science” programme with nearby schools to enhance Canal biodiversity.
  - 4.2.8 Completing the WaveGarden and associated infrastructure at Ratho.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the celebration of the bicentenary may provide an opportunity to secure added funding for the delivery of some aspects of the above programme.
- 4.4 To progress the above programme, the Council and Scottish Canals have identified the potential to create a fixed-term post (18 to 24 months) co-funded by the two organisations and, provisionally, hosted by the Edinburgh Union Canal Society (a new organisation established as a successor to the Edinburgh Canal Society that is currently applying for Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation status).
- 4.5 The focus of the programme and the post would be upon the Edinburgh section of the Union Canal, although discussions would be held with other communities along the route of the Union Canal such as Broxburn, Linlithgow, and Falkirk.

## 5. Next steps

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- 5.1 Should the Committee agree to the Council progressing with this, officers would hold more detailed discussions with Scottish Canals about the scope of the programme and of the best route for resourcing and creating the co-funded post.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 The Council would meet 50% of the costs of a fixed-term post lasting 18 to 24 months. This contribution would be matched by Scottish Canals.
- 6.2 The various items set out within the indicative programme at 4.2 would be resourced from a range of sources. It is envisaged that the Edinburgh Union Canal Society would lead on securing funding for some of the items, and that the bicentenary would potentially create additional opportunities to access funding.

## **7. Stakeholder/community impact**

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- 7.1 The project is being taken forward in partnership with the Edinburgh Union Canal Society, a grassroots organisation that promotes the Union Canal.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 [Edinburgh Union Canal Strategy](#)

## **9. Appendices**

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None.