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Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 24 April, following the RUG 8 meeting of 21 April. I have of course seen the letter to you of 8 May from our Regional Director, Howard Davidson, which followed his meeting with you of 30 April. Thank you also for your time at our meeting of 11 May at your house.

Howard has covered all of the main points from our point of view in his 8 May letter to you and I will try to avoid simply repeating them here. However, I feel I must reiterate that our principle aim is to provide the best service we can with the resources available to us. This obviously includes at least maintaining and if possible improving manning of locks in the high season, and at least maintaining the existing infrastructure and if possible improving it. Howard referred in his letter to our 39 new construction and installation projects last year. In my first inspections of the SE Area locks earlier this year, having previously gained some familiarity with them starting eight years ago, I was very impressed by the new infrastructure I saw. This is testament to the good work done over recent years in closing the Waterways funding gap that was so wide eight years ago.

Regarding the instances of unmanned locks over the Easter period, I am following that up. Clearly, these problems occurred on my watch and I therefore apologise for them. I am determined to avoid future such instances if at all possible. I am also looking into what happened with water levels at certain locations over Easter and on another occasion shortly after Easter.

On the subject of the current re-organisation, the advertisement of the two additional Team Leader jobs was moved on in recent weeks, and Andrew Graham is working now on getting these jobs filled on a permanent basis. In the meantime, as we discussed, Carol Morgan, who has a permanent Waterways Team Leader job in West Area to move to in due course, will continue to work with Nick McKie-Smith until Andrew has two new Team Leaders in place to work alongside Nick. I am confident that Andrew is a good Waterways Manager and that Nick and Carol are good Team Leaders, who are experienced in Waterways management at their level, as Andrew is at his. Beyond that, and beyond what Howard has said in his letter to you, I have nothing further to say on our internal management concerns, which must remain internal matters for us rather than things for discussion in the public domain.

Turning to enforcement work, whilst this did not feature in your letter to me, it did feature in our discussion last week. As I said to you, I am determined to see us do a good level of enforcement work and to achieve good results through it, which means that the recent increase in this, must be sustained. I suspect that the rate at which information on enforcement cases can be released into the public domain will fluctuate even after our enforcement work has been sustained at a high level for some considerable time. This must be the case due to the existence of high and low seasons, and due to the lack of control we obviously have over the time taken by the Courts to bring cases to a conclusion after we have got cases to them.

In closing, I recognise that RUG 8 is well attended by river users, and that those customers of ours are highly motivated to press us to maintain and improve service levels, and to resist charge increases, even as Government funding for the Waterway dwindles. As such, RUG 8 is a potentially valuable group for us to continue to attend the meetings of, provided that these do not entirely overlap with the business of the Waterways Working Group (to which all RUG Chairs are invited), do not become dominated by questions to us on internal management matters that we must decline to answer, and do not involve unreasonable treatment of my staff to the extent that I would prefer them to receive customer feedback by more constructive routes, given my duty of care to my staff. Having said this, I expect that our continued attendance at RUG 8 meetings will seem worthwhile, and I look forward to attending the next meeting in November to take part in one myself.

Yours sincerely



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