

Lake Administration Committee 16.6.25.

1. Love Windermere Partnership (Presentation)

Nigel Wilkinson (NW, Chair of Love Windermere Partnership): The partnership is driving evidence-led action. We partner with WAFC, Cumbria Tourism, United Utilities, The National Trust, NFU, Environment Agency and The Lake District National Park. Lake Windermere is the key driver for the local economy. Our aim is to improve the water quality through science-led arrangements. £150 million has been invested in the water treatment of the lake.

Ruth Forrister (RF, Partnership Manager): Discussed the Changing Windermere Report. It takes 280 days for water entering at the north end of the lake to drain out at Newby Bridge (south end). It is one of the most studied lakes in the world. The original version of the report has 60,000 words. It has been summarised into a summary report. Windermere is not broken. There are challenges. Nutrients lead to algal bloom. Phosphorus is the leading nutrient. The level has reduced since 1990. (nitrites have also reduced). Nutrients mainly come from people: toilets, clothes washing (phosphates containing detergents). Windermere has 7 million visitors annually and contributes £753 million to the local economy. United Utilities are planning a large investment. There is a huge number of privately run sewage treatment works, about 1800 septic tanks and 89 privately run waste water treatment units.

We have a changing climate. The lake temperature has increased by 1.7 degrees centigrade in the last 70 years. The average water temperature is now 11.6 degrees whereas it was 10.4 in 1960. This explains despite a reduction in nutrients, there has been more algal blooms (due to an increase in lake temperature).

NW: Discussed the launch of the report. The four bathing areas, over the last 10 years they all tested excellent. The private treatment plants contribute about 10% to the algal growth. Also there is fertilizer run-off from surrounding fields. South Lakes Rivers Trust is running a project around more regular emptying of septic tanks. This project has been running since 2022.

WAFC is committed to supporting Lake Windermere. We need to promote collaboration between organisations to improve water quality.

We want to connect more of the houses around the lake to mains sewage so it gets treated. We need to risk assess the septic tanks, if they are not properly maintained, then they might discharge high levels of nutrients.

Councillor: Addressing NW: You are the managing director of Windermere Cruises, is there not a conflict of interest?

RF: Yes, we have considered this. Nigel leaves the meetings if there is a conflict of interest. I feel it is impossible to remove all possibility of conflict of interest.

NW: In the past we have had potential customers (for the cruises) in China standing up and saying they wouldn't come to Windermere because of the algal bloom. Windermere Cruises employs 200 staff and it is in our interest to improve the water quality. With regard to the bathing sites, there is no issue with faecal contamination.

A Jarvis (AJ, WAFC Councillor, LD): At times it isn't safe to bath when there is an algal bloom.

NW: We recognise that we need to improve things. If the lake temperature continues to rise, even with lower nutrient levels, algal blooms will continue.

Windermere Parish Councillor: A lot of what you are doing should have been done by the Environment Agency (EA).

NW: The EA is one of our partners. We hold them to account. We have asked them to review those 89 package plants (private sewage treatment plants).

RF: I have been employed by the EA for 18 years. The planning authority also has a role to reduce the number of new houses on the shore. The EA does a lot of monitoring work and also investigates any reports of pollution

NW: There are three large treatment facilities. I have a septic tank, they are complicated. We hope to be able to take 100-200 of these houses with septic tanks and put them on the mains.

S Pender (SP, WAFC Councillor, LD): We have similar issues with Conniston.

P Dixon (PD, WAFC Councillor, LD): I think local people feel overwhelmed by the number of visitors. Might the partnership have a view on a tourist tax?

NW: Love Windermere doesn't have a view on this. The income from tourism for Cumbria is four times that of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

M Brereton (WAFC Councillor, C): I am a member of The Lakes District National Park. Discussed working in partnership, this is more productive than staying in small groups and blaming everybody else. If people keep complaining about the toxicity of the lake, it results in more people being driven away. I am a big fan of partnership working.

NW: Responding to Cllr Dixon, visitor volumes are still 18% below those of pre-Covid.

2. Operational Update

A Harty (AH, Head of WAFC Assets): There is ongoing work on the services provided and how to manage the assets of the lake.