

Friends of the Ferries across the Mersey CHAIR'S AGM REPORT 2018

Welcome everyone. Thanks for coming to our AGM this evening.

I would like to start by saying a few words about **Gordon Lindsay**, our founder. His campaign to save the Mersey Ferries captured the imagination of the public and through Parliament succeeded in removing a clause in a Bill which was certainly aimed at their closure. Subsequent pressures resulted in revitalisation in terms of vessel upgrades, new terminals and staff training. Gordon was a very friendly man, and devoted his life to public affairs, both in his professional life and as an elected member of Wirral Council. I sent condolences to his widow Rosemary on behalf of us all.

With regard to **Mersey Ferries Operations** the past year has been very unsatisfactory. Following the unfortunate grounding of the *Royal Iris*, and its repair, there has been a succession of breakdowns on the vessels leading to significant loss of services, inconveniencing many and eroding goodwill.

We wrote to the City Region Mayor Steve Rotherham in June 2017 to ask for the *Royal Daffodil* to be re-instated from "warm lay-up" and for her to be used for charter work and as a replacement vessel in case of breakdowns, etc. We received a reply from the Chief Executive stating that Mersey Ferries considered that the service could be operated by two vessel only, notwithstanding the problems which were evident to all! In January this year we wrote again to the Mayor about a further sequence of service losses, and with the assistance of Frank Field MP received a reply direct from the Mayor. However, the stance of the Mayor and Merseytravel remained the same as stated last June! The latest in this saga is that over this early May Bank holiday a further breakdown meant that there was no ferry service for two days while a vessel was sent on a Manchester Ship Canal Cruise. A dreadful state of affairs which warrants another letter the Mayor.

The only glimmer of improvement is that Merseytravel has announced that design work has commenced on a new ferry vessel, with consultation to take place. We have heard nothing further and wonder if the initial drawings are providing a seaworthy design for the Mersey.

On the river itself, no further cut-backs of the timetable have occurred, and the programme of evening cruise last year has been enhanced for 2018 – a facility long recommended by *Friends*. We have received no recent reports on the condition of the ferry terminals, and hope that regular maintenance will suffice for now.

Financially, Friends of the Ferries is in a sound position at the end of the year, with a surplus of around £3000. **Malcolm McDonald**, our Hon. Treasurer, must be thanked for his careful work throughout the year managing our affairs. Our Annual Cruise and Christmas Draw brought substantial extra income, and our membership is holding up well. More details later in this meeting.

I am grateful for the efforts of our Committee in running the organisation effectively and efficiently. **Joan Roberts**, our **Hon. Publicity and Marketing Officer** with her friend John Timms spends many hours at Fairs promoting *Friends*. **Gordon Ditchfield** organises our Dock and River Cruise and the Christmas Draw, as well as being our Membership Secretary. **David Hocker** is our Secretary, who helps run our meetings, and **Geoff Holmes** produces the two Newsletters per annum. **Andrew Blizzard**, **Terry Edgar** and **Bob Peers** complete our active committee, and I thank them all for the contributions which they make.

The 25th June **Dock and River Cruise** was again very successful, with a significant number of vessels observed in both the river and dock system. Andy Ball and Stuart Wood gave their fluent commentary and certainly enjoy their day with us. We look forward to seeing them on **Saturday 25th August** – a little later than usual, due to limited availability, but at least we have a reasonable tide which hopefully will provide plenty ships to observe. Please buy your tickets tonight – but they are available through Gordon or at each ferry terminal.

Our **Website** will shortly be updated with the Cruise details and correspondence with Mersey Ferries. We can always do with some technical help on this matter, and the Committee will be happy to consider co-opt people who are able and willing to help our organisation.

The **Data Protection Act** is being changed from the 25th May 2018 and we can discuss arrangements on the holding of members' personal data on completion of this report.

Your Committee continues to be vigilant on the future of Mersey Ferries and hopes that the service cancellations can be significantly reduced, by one means or another. We will also be on the look-out for more information on the new ferry vessel. I look forward to seeing you on our Dock and River cruise later this year.

Andrew Hodgson,

Hon.Chair, Friends of the Ferries across the Mersey.
14th May 2018.