1. INTRODUCTION
As you may be expecting, it is not possible to meet in person for our Hydro AGM and so Zoom has been arranged for April 23rd 2021 at 7pm. The link appears in the email sent with this Chairman’s Report.

Whilst there are disadvantages to not meeting, it will be good to see shareholders living outside the area and I think when back with face-to-face meetings; we should include a virtual attendance screen.

Overall, 2020 was a “swings and no steady roundabouts” year with two storms named Ciara and Dennis causing flooding in February and an eight week drought from mid April. The hydro team are however getting better at draining down and removing stone: following the prolonged heavy rain in early November, they installed the steel plates at the inlet, drained down and had the excavator on site for stone removal, and all done in less than two days.

The high river flow causes the weir to “drown out” and the essential water level difference is lost, so the turbines stop - as they do when the river is very low, given sufficient water has to remain to feed the two fish passes and keep the weir top wetted, so quite varied output at both extremes.

2. REVENUE
Damage is done during the floods, with a great deal of repair work to undertake, but lost power output tends to be for relatively short periods, and it's the long dry spells that show up on the revenue graph, affecting total revenue with a nominal £187,000 in 2020 compared to £208,000 the year before.

The mid 2020 sunny weather was also a bonus in providing some relief from the Covid situation and the areas of exposed rock were well covered with bathing towels and sun worshippers – mostly socially distanced.

The £208,000 of 2019 allowed routine maintenance as well as capital expenditure and has left sufficient to continue to pay shareholders at 4% in the next seven days.

It's not all doom and gloom, but future years may be more difficult, as Council rates are now without relief, Corporation tax on profits will increase as we write off the main capital cost, and given the plant and equipment is not new, maintenance and replacement costs will increase.
HLH are purchasing back shares from shareholders at a rate of about £80,000 per year. We have to do this during the Feed in Tariff period and ensure that the full borrowing of £1.4M will be paid back over 20 years.

The interest not paid to shareholders is gifted to the Halton Lune Trust for worthy local causes and a list of the projects funded in 2020 are shown at the end of the Report, with more to be seen on the Hydro web site. We are also going to put a listing on the LCD information screen outside the Hydro building.

HLH are therefore again inviting shareholders to register selling back their shares to the Company through 2021, in order to reduce borrowing and to increase the ability to support the charitable income of the Trust.

It would be particularly helpful if smaller shareholders (£500 or less) could surrender their shares, while larger shareholders could surrender a portion. If you would be interested please let the Company Secretary know by emailing secretary@haltonlunehydro.org. A claim form will then be provided, to enable the share transfer process.

Surrendering your shares does not however mean you need to break all ties, as we now offer a £1 “Retention share” to anyone who wishes to retain a voting interest in the hydro - and we thank the six current “Retention” shareholders for their ongoing interest in the project.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL

a. Fish Counting
The fish counting data is analysed and compiled by director Maria Angeles Solera, for monthly submission to the Environment Agency, along with automatically recorded water abstraction data compiled and submitted on a quarterly basis.

This relies on three separate things: the resistivity strips (outside, in the fish pass channel), the fish counter itself (hardware and software programme) and the logger (software programme used to verify the counts). We have had a few issues with the logger this year, so that even though we have the counts, there are some periods of time when we cannot verify them. This has slowed down analysis and submission of counts, which would normally be available on the website by now, but we hope to have 2020 data completed by the AGM.

b. Fish Trapping
The EA requirement for 5% of fish counted to be trapped for health checks operated through 2020 supervised by director Kevin Frea. This takes place from the beginning of seeing fish movement at the end of May to October when autumn leaves block the fish gates, so 21 sessions with much appreciated assistance from the “early morning” volunteers.

The EA have joined the team on a couple of occasions and are currently considering a reduction in the trapping system, so as to reduces stress on fish trapped, so we await instructions that will become a variation to the Licence should there be significant change.
c. Abnormally High River Flows
I mention removal of stone in November earlier, and a matter now of what to do with a pile of rather high quality stone that we could pay to have taken off site and crushed to use on roads.

It all comes from the river banking upstream that’s seriously eroded to the point of losing the footpath; caused by exceptionally high river flows impinging on that area of banking, after the bend in the river. My only request at the moment is that young persons don’t throw the stones back in, as we have to take them out again and it does not take many to restrict the hydro outlet.

We also have the new flood defence barrier and gate between building and wall to prevent the high water flow from washing the footpath into the river during more serious floods. It should do the job, although we have no real wish to test it.

As always, may I thank the hydro team on behalf of everybody, for early morning fish trapping health checks and those keeping everything in good shape alongside doing the job of daily “Duty Officer”.

Halton Lune Trust 2020 Donations to Worthy Causes

- A £5,000 contribution to £40,000 refurbishment of the The Halton Community Centre
- £800 of £2,240 for materials to help the British Canoeing NW repair the damaged access footpath.
- New goal posts costing £475 for the Halton Juniors Football Club
- War Memorial garden make over by the Halton Gardening Club £1,000
- £2,100 as a contribution to the £4,796 for planting a community meadow at the Hermitage Field, near the Crooke of Lune.

.......................... John Blowes MBE CEng, Director and Chairman