

## **PE1770/B**

Glasgow City Council submission of 8 January 2020

The Glasgow Water Safety Group is a multi-agency group led by Glasgow City Council that involves Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue, Glasgow Humane Society, HM Coastguard, Clydeport and Scottish Canals. As the name suggests the group provides a focus on improving safety along all waterways within the Glasgow city boundary.

Following the tragic death of their son Christopher in January 2016 in a drowning accident, Margaret and Duncan Spiers have campaigned for enhanced river safety measures along the River Clyde.

As chair of the Glasgow Water Safety Group, I met with Margaret and Duncan in October 2018 to discuss ideas that could assist the collective effort to make rivers and canals safer for the general public. It was clear from our conversation that there were practical measures around the use of lifebelts and related equipment that could be taken forward by the council and its partners.

In particular, the reintroduction of throw ropes attached to lifebelts was something that Margaret and Duncan were focused on. Unfortunately, throw ropes had historically been the target of thieves and vandals with such frequency that replacing stolen or damaged ropes had largely fallen out of practice. During the incident in which Christopher lost his life, the nearest lifebelt to where he entered the water did not have a throw rope attached.

The intervention from the Spiers family prompted the Water Safety Group to look again at the issue of throw ropes, but it was felt that a way to deter theft and vandalism was required. This led directly to discussions with rope makers and from this a distinctive rope with a unique yellow, orange and purple weave was designed, which was applied to 70 lifebelts within the city centre area of the River Clyde last November.

So far there has been a very positive reaction to introducing the distinctive throw ropes with barely a handful of incidents recorded. This is in contrast to a trial re-introduction of standard ropes over the course of last year in which 38 out of 52 ropes were stolen.

Our broader discussions with Margaret and Duncan on water safety have also prompted a number of fresh initiatives along the River Clyde. These have included the introduction of lighter, more manageable throw bags to be used alongside life belts and an anti-vandal signage campaign that highlights the life-saving capability of lifebelts.

In July last year Margaret and Duncan attended a formal meeting of the Glasgow Water Safety Group to discuss their campaign to make our rivers and waterways safer for all.

Members of the group were struck by the Spiers' dignified determination to turn their personal tragedy into something positive. Throughout our engagement with Margaret and Duncan, they have brought forward thoughtful and realistic proposals that we are confident will make a difference to water safety in Glasgow.

They also made clear their desire to see their campaign extended across the rest of the country. If our experience in Glasgow provides any basis for wider understanding, then the petition from Margaret and Duncan Spiers is at the very least worthy of the most serious consideration.