

Caledonian Canal Customer Forum 11.5.13

Venue: The Moorings Hotel, Banavie

Scottish Canals attendees:

Jon Hargreaves	Chairman
Tania Castell	Board Member
Russell Thomson	Senior Waterway Manager
Josie Saunders	Head of Communications
Mark Smith	Head of Projects - Estates
Ailsa Andrews	Customer Relations Manager, Caledonian Canal

1. Introduction and welcome by Jon Hargreaves, with outline of Scottish Canals' first year as a standalone organisation.
2. Brief review of the 2012 season by Russell Thomson which included vegetation management programme, an increase in seasonal staff numbers, towpath repairs and spot dredging planned maintenance works. Amongst the unplanned works undertaken were emergency repairs to Gairloch lock gate and the Corpach Sea Lock cill. Also in the last year there were c1200 transiting boats, 123 events including Go Wild on the Canal and a wedding at Corpach, 1800 registered paddlers – an increase of 50% on the previous year, and ongoing work with the Scottish Waterways Trust resulting in 185 local school children achieving their John Muir Trust awards.
3. Ailsa Andrews discussed the review of access to the canal toilet and shower blocks for walkers, cyclists and paddlers – these are now accessible, with the loan of a SC key, for £5 per person for the duration of a person's visit to the Great Glen (normally 1 week). A new swipe card access system is being trialled on the 4 new composting toilet blocks installed as part of the Great Glen Canoe Trail – cards are loaned for £5 per person too. If the card systems are successful SC may choose to change keys for cards on facility blocks as they provide useful user data and better security than the widely available keys.

4. Outline of plans for 2013 / 2014 season by Russell Thomson which included works to the sea lock jetties at Clachnaharry, improvements to water and power supplies at Laggan, a gate ram replacement programme, renewal of Corpach cross-lock hydraulic pipework, further dredging and a partnership project with Destination Loch Ness and Highland Council at Foyers Pier. There will be 4 new commercial boats based on the canal in 2013 – a trip boat at Banavie, a restaurant boat at Muirtown, a second activity barge and a long-distance trip boat.
5. Josie Saunders introduced herself as the Head of Communications and advised that SC was reviewing its communications to be more strategic. Amongst her current projects she is currently assisting with the development of a Scottish Govt document about their expectations for SC as a standalone organisation, and reviewing SC's methods of engagement with key stakeholders.
6. Mark Smith of the Estates team gave a brief presentation about proposed developments along the Caledonian Canal including activity hubs at Banavie and Fort Augustus, camping pods and the refurbishment of heritage properties, in conjunction with the Vivat Trust, for use as holiday lets.
7. A short question and answer session followed.

Q When will the electricity and water supplies be improved at Gairloch?

Within the current financial year, although exact programme dates have yet to be determined.

Q What return rate is required on investments by Scottish Canals?

A 12 % return rate is required for SC commercial capital projects.

Scottish Govt is advised of all spend in excess of £30k.

Q What are the plans for Foyers pier?

In an £128k project (£110k from Highland Council, £10k from SSE and £8.5k from Destination Loch Ness), works to the pier will be carried out to improve its integrity, add fendering, carry out landscaping in the

area and provide some interpretation. Scottish Canals will take on the lease from SSE.

Q Are Sail Caledonia allowed to sail in the canal reaches, because they caused real problems last year?

No, there is no sailing permitted in the canal reaches under our bylaws. The organisers of Sail Caledonia will be reminded during their pre-event meeting with us. If customers experience these issues again, they are asked to advise the local lock keepers or supervisors at the time so that prompt action can be taken.