

Notes of Caledonian Canal Customer Forum 29.4.17

Venue: Fort Augustus Village Hall

Scottish Canals' attendees:

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| Russell Thomson | Head of Customer Operations |
| Ailsa Andrews | Customer Operations Manager, Caledonian Canal |
| Josie Saunders | Head of Corporate Affairs |
| Mark Smith | Head of Tourism and Destinations |
| Jo Spragg | Customer Service & Business Support Team Leader |

1. Welcome and Introduction by Ailsa Andrews
2. Russell Thomson gave an overview of Customer Operations across the Scottish Canals network including:
 - Revenue and income split - Scottish Canals' earned income now outstrips government grant contributing to the organisation's financial sustainability with income from boating representing 6% of total earned income
 - Top 20 priority works for Scottish Canals' major assets – works Scottish Canals will be undertaking as funds become available
 - Linlithgow emergency preparedness – as one of the Top 20 Assets, details were shared of the £1.2m project to drain 5km stretch of the Union Canal to carry out investigative works and minor repairs as well as inform future works. Some 700 people attended two open days where details of engineering and environmental works were explained.
 - Ness Weir refurbishment – Another Top 20 Asset project, a c£1.6-2.5m project to strengthen Ness Weir will get underway in early summer 2017
 - Works around the Lowland and Crinan Canals were detailed
 - Volunteering on the Lowland Canals – Scottish Canals' plans to grow the number of volunteers who deliver activity which directly improves the assets and customer experience
 - Inverness west link project – an update was given. Canal bridge works will begin in 2019. There will be further work during a winter closure in 2020/21 and two days closure during the summer of 2021 whilst bridge deck is installed.
 - Large craft speeding – details of the new Operating Protocol and management of large craft was shared with customers and will be given to all large private and commercial vessels

3. Ailsa Andrews gave an overview of the last year on the Caledonian Canal and the major activities expected in 2017. These included:

- Boating statistics had stayed relatively static with 1170 visitor licences sold. Income down slightly on previous year but similar to 2014/2015. 71% visiting boats from the UK, 29% largely from northern Europe but a few from further afield including USA, NZ and Australia. 19 commercial operators based on canal brought in £209k in 2016/17 – increase of 29% on previous year. Two new operators on the canal last year – Fish Loch Ness and Scotia Charters (overwinter). 1530 registered paddlers on Great Glen Canoe Trail last year – down 30% on previous year.
- Large scale projects – Clachnaharry sea lock gate refurbishment was carried out by Scottish Canals' staff. Hosted the World Canals Conference in Sept 2016.
- Operational problems at Aberchalder Bridge, which is owned by Transport Scotland – significant heat-related breakdown issues throughout the summer. Escalated concerns via BEAR Scotland to Transport Scotland. Interim repairs carried out and long term solution being sought.
- A review of the works completed by the teams in each of the canal's three districts and by the maintenance team in 2016 /2017
- A look at the season ahead including Ness Weir refurbishment, SWT canal college, new wharf for Jacobite Cruises, public toilets at Dochgarroch, probable new hotel barge and Thomas Telford Corpach Marina.

4. Josie Saunders spoke about the following items:

The Pricing Consultation, which closed in February 2017 attracted feedback from 68 individuals and groups who raised 721 issues across 16 different categories. The outcome of the consultation will see Gerald Eve/GVA's recommendations, including prices, being adopted in full with Scottish Canals taking additional steps to ensure any price changes are reasonable, transparent and affordable. These include:

- No customer paying more than an extra £100 per year, plus inflation
- Inflation being set by the Consumer Price Index
- Standardised Terms & Conditions being created for all residential boaters, all leisure boaters etc
- Monthly/upfront payment being available at the same price
- No mooring being transferred with a boat sale
- Security of tenure given to residential customers with a min 1 year agreement or longer if required
- Five yearly review of the data used to set prices carried out
- Changes being introduced 1st June 2017 and 1st April thereafter
- Full price being implemented if £100 or less with CPI added on

- Phased price increases limited to £100 pa plus CPI (1.6% in 2016)
- Navigation licence remaining £195 + CPI uplift
- Transit licence fee being cut by 25% on Lowlands
- 25% discount being applied to transit fees for non-commercial activity carried out by charities

Facilities Charter being introduced by Sept 2017 to set a standard of what facilities customers can expect to receive from Scottish Canals at all locations

5. Mark Smith outlined the following commercial projects taking place on the Caledonian Canal:

- Muirtown Basin and development aims in the surrounding areas in partnership with Highland Council
- Torvean development as part of the Trunk Link Road works in partnership with Highland Council
- Review of holiday cottages revenues £230k p.a. Bothies have 90% occupancy over the summer and average of 60% year round
- Fort Augustus and Laggan area development aims including the former McVeans supermarket site. Aiming to create a new visitor centre in Fort Augustus as part of the destination development opportunities – it will include retail, café, Visitor Information Centre. Due to open in March 2018.
- Banavie development opportunities to further develop the area and maximise its potential as a visitor destination.

Q & A session

1. Why will the new bridge at Tomnahurich as part of the West Link be another swing bridge?

Russell Thomson talked through the decision-making process, which had considered a tunnel, high bridge (both SC preferred options), and a low level bridge. Engineering, Historic Scotland and cost factors all led to the decision to build a new swing bridge, but with 21st Century engineering reliability should be much improved. The current peak hour restrictions for boaters will be removed.

2. How does SC police speeding on Loch Ness and in the canal? Paddlers have had to be collected from the waters of Loch Ness when they've been swamped.

Russell Thomson confirmed that there are no speed limits on Loch Ness and that consideration of one would not fall within the authority of Scottish Canals.

Ailsa Andrews advised that paddlers are asked to register their trips so that they can receive advice about safety on the lochs and canal and understand what level of experience they should have. Conditions on the open water can be very challenging.

3. How is SC going to enforce the speed limit in the canal? Jacobite, Royal Navy and RNLI boats disregarding speed limit.

Russell Thomson advised that there are two main methods:

- a) for boats on transit from sea to sea they are advised of the speed limit at the sea lock and, from last week, they will receive a written copy of the new Operating Protocol with their licence. If vessels are seen speeding, lock keeping staff will speak to the skippers and may hold the boat back so there is no advantage. In some circumstances we speak to the owners of the boats and ultimately, if there is a persistent problem, can ban them from using the canal in future.
- b) Commercial vessels based on the canal will have the protocol built into their trading agreements, which are currently being renegotiated. If there is a persistent problem of speeds significantly above the limits set within the protocol SC will use the powers in the trading agreement to deal with it.

4. SC could monitor speeds of vessels via AIS

Russell Thomson confirmed that SC does not have the manpower to watch every vessel on AIS and, additionally, only certain boats (over 300 GRT) are legally required to have AIS when operating in Inland Waters

5. A customer's boat was marked by oarsmen during the February Heads event. He had brought this to the attention of Inverness Rowing Club but had received no response. Ailsa Andrews asked him to send her a photo of the marks and she would raise it with the rowing club.
6. Query re: Yotspot and assisted passage at Crinan Canal as Caledonian customer had not seen anything about it when he visited the Crinan in 2016. Russell Thomson undertook to ensure that there were posters at Crinan sites. Ailsa Andrews confirmed information was on the website.
7. Query re: power at the foot of Fort Augustus lock flight. Ailsa Andrews advised that SC would very much wish to have shore power at this site but bringing in the additional power to the area would cost c£70k before any installation of equipment, so it remains a long term aim for when more funding is available.
8. Query re: could the damage to Cullochry Weir have been anticipated? Russell Thomson confirmed that there was a rigorous monthly, annual and principal inspection programme for all SC's structures but with weirs, as with all underwater structures, it's not easy to assess all elements of the condition. There was nothing to indicate that Cullochry weir was failing in any way. One

possibility was that it could even have been the embankment rather than the weir that failed initially. Hence SC's recent review of all water-retaining structures and the forthcoming works to Ness Weir.

9. Query re: CCTV signs at Dochgarroch. Ailsa Andrews confirmed that these was merely a deterrent as there was no CCTV on the site.

10. How much is Scottish Canals paying out for empty commercial properties?
Mark Smith confirmed that SC paid nothing for empty properties as they were not habitable.

11. Query re: Consultation pricing recommendation for Seaport Marina is based on the marina being full but it is not full – too many transit berths and therefore the discount applied as part of the pricing methodology should be greater.
Russell Thomson advised that SC had to leave a suitable number of transit berths for boats on passage but acknowledge that Inverness Marina may have had an impact. Take a long term view as demand can vary from year to year, but once transit berths are given over to long term use they are very difficult to get back. Jo Spragg confirmed that a number of the seemingly empty berths at Seaport were leased to customers and SC cannot 'double lease' these. Ailsa Andrews advised that Seaport Marina was the only place on the canal where visiting boats could be accommodated for stays for several weeks, so transit berth levels had to reflect this.