

Campbeltown COURIER

Boats and planes

New seaplane service plans and fresh hope for Irish ferry

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MONDAY could be remembered as one of the days that shaped the future prosperity of Campbeltown and Kintyre.

The first of what is hoped to be regular visits by commercial seaplanes landed in Campbeltown Loch and at the same time, across the water new hope was given to Ballycastle-Campbeltown ferry service at the British-Irish Council summit meeting at Stormont.



Prime Minister Gordon Brown has made his first visit to Northern Ireland since taking office and as well as meeting the Northern Ireland politicians, he also met with Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond and the leaders of the Welsh Assembly and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.

Alex Salmond said there was strong political commitment to the project; Scotland proposes that now the route should include Troon on the Ayrshire coast, as this would increase the passenger number and improve the business case for the service. The whole project ground to a halt during the days of direct rule from London; the Scottish Executive was willing and ready to put up its share of the cost but the then Northern Ireland Secretary of State said no.

'The Scottish Executive has always been committed to the ferry but Peter Hain blocked it when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland,' said Alan Reid MP for Argyll and Bute. At the time of the Northern Ireland budget in Westminster he challenged the figures. 'There is money going begging it just needs the political will,' Mr Reid said. 'I

Campbeltown COURIER

hope the new Scottish Executive is as committed to the ferry as the previous one. We all need to work together to persuade the Northern Ireland executive to pay its share.'

Jim Mather MSP for Argyll and Bute welcomed First Minister Alex Salmond's 'positive focus' on reviving the ferry.

'The SNP made a commitment to restore the ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle and the efforts of the First Minister on this issue are incredibly welcome,' said Mr Mather. 'The suggestion that any service also takes in Troon could help build a truly vibrant economy between the west of Scotland and Northern Ireland.

'I look forward to discussing the potential for reviving the service and how it could contribute to the economic development of Kintyre when I am in Campbeltown next month and to hearing the outcome of these discussions in Northern Ireland and to developing the potential for Campbeltown and Kintyre to work with our Northern Irish neighbours

I'll be meeting with people to consult on the economic, social and environmental future of Kintyre and I am sure progress on the ferry will be at the centre piece of that discussion.

In Campbeltown the community council has begun a campaign to get 'Get CalMac on the case' and see Caledonian MacBrayne run the service.

James Robertson, chairman said: They have the ships and resources to do this and it would make for joined up working with all other ferries around Kintyre and further north.'

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Campbeltown COURIER

A SEAPLANE settled in the town centre in the first of many journeys to Campbeltown.

The nine-seater Cessna 208 is the biggest of its kind to come into the harbour and is also the first seaplane to use the new slip way.

It is one of two planes owned by Loch Lomond Seaplanes. The company is hoping to run a regular service from Campbeltown to Glasgow and vice versa.

The seaplane dropped off a group from Visit Scotland at Campbeltown Airport and awaited the team's departure at the harbour.

Darren Hansen who is a pilot with the company said: 'We just think this is a first class harbour, and a fantastic slip way for us to come in to and this is a great wee place.'

The company is hoping to do a similar service like in Oban where the planes set off from the River Clyde on a regular basis.

'We can take nine passengers on this plane and it usually takes 35 minutes to come from Glasgow,' said Darren. 'We hope to be part of this initiative, it would be nice to get something like this started up.'

Owner of Loch Lomond Seaplanes David West said: 'The company has been running for four years now.'

'If we can get a regular service then we can get into all sorts of stuff. It wouldn't just come out from Glasgow to Campbeltown, it would do Campbeltown to Glasgow too.'

'We are hoping to replace our Cessna 206, which is a five-seater to a bigger seaplane and take on a bunch of staff and pilots too.'