

The Road to the Isles Facilities Group are delighted to be able to report that we were finally able to open the new facilities at West Bay in Mallaig on 1st July. They are not completely finished - there is still some signage to be installed and a couple of other teething issues to be resolved, but we felt it was important to make them available as soon as we could. The building will be open daily from 7am until 9pm, and all payment is contactless – we have no facility to accept cash.

Toilets are 30p - through the paddle gates, with a one-way system entering on the right-hand side of the building and exiting on the left. There are 5 unisex cubicles and separate urinals. There is also a disabled toilet with baby change and a separate access on the road side of the building. The shower costs from 50p to £2 depending on the length of time (but you do need the 30p to get through the paddle gate on top of this!). At the moment, the fence isn't up round the elsan/fresh water point so we are just asking for donations towards this but it is likely that in future the charge will be £5.

It has been a long, hard slog to get to this point – over three years since we submitted our expression of interest to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund in April 2018. We're really grateful for all the support along the way, and hopeful that the facilities will meet expectations now they are finally open! There have been some comments about some of the choices we have had to make along the way, particularly about the fact that payment is contactless, and that the cubicles in Mallaig are unisex. We had to make a decision on the payment method last year, when everyone was being encouraged to go contactless, and so, to future proof the building it seemed sensible to adopt this method. We were also keen not to have significant amounts of cash on-site – as volunteers we can't necessarily be there every day to empty cash boxes, and we felt it was unfair to lumber the cleaner with this responsibility. The whole building has been designed to be as efficient as possible, with urinals off to one side when you enter (designed so no-one can be seen), and five unisex cubicles – all fully enclosed so effectively five individual wee rooms. This is in part to minimise queueing. At peak times there can be 300+ people from the Steam Train and a number of coaches all looking for somewhere to spend a penny (or 30p!). If people are really uncomfortable with the concept, then there is the option of using the disabled toilet, which has a separate entrance, but is also effectively unisex!

There is a very long list of people that we need to thank for helping us get this far, and we are very grateful to each and every one of you! The majority of our funding came from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund and from LEADER, but we also received funds from the Highland Council through their Discretionary Funding; the Gower Trust; and from Mallaig and Morar Community Centre Association. We have to say a particular Thank You to Angus MacDonald, who lent us funds from the Moidart Trust to enable us to cash flow the whole project.

We have had huge support from the wider community locally, and also from the caravan and camping community – both with financial donations and words of support. At times when we were struggling to believe we would ever get to the finish line, these reassured us that we were doing the right thing!

We're also moving forward with plans for the car park at Silver Sands. We have identified another site, and are ready to start some feasibility work into how it can be developed.

The playpark project has also made lots of progress recently. Various funding applications have been successful, including one to the People's Postcode Lottery for £13k, so in total they have now raised over £35k. The revised design for the Playpark is in Mallaig Co-op at the moment so that the community can comment on the proposal, and there are plans for a fun day on Sunday 15th August.

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