

# slan



scottish local authority news

April 2021

## Renton Campus begins to take shape

**Borderlands deal signed  
up to widespread acclaim**

**Major post-covid Sports  
Facilities boosts**

**PLUS: Over 40 pages  
of local authority news**







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April 2021



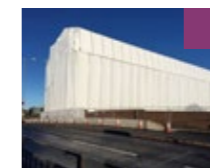
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Published by West Argyll Technical Publications Ltd

**MANAGING EDITOR** Robert McCall  
**DIRECTOR** Lynsey Moore  
**DESIGNER** Megan Raine  
**ADVERTISING SALES** Allan McCarthy, Libby Galbraith, Phil Campbell

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# Ground-breaking Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal formally signed



The long-term benefits of the Deal will reach all parts of the Borderlands area, driving inclusive growth and delivering significant and lasting benefits for individuals, businesses and communities.

**UK Government's Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, added:**

"The Borderlands Growth Deal will realise a new era of regeneration and opportunity as we build back better from the pandemic.

The Deal is truly distinctive, covering the largest geographical area of any regional growth Deal negotiated with the UK and Scottish Governments and it is the first cross-border deal.

£85 million in the region over the next 10 years that will build strategically on the region's natural assets, resources and entrepreneurial spirit to drive sustainable economic growth.

"The Ad Gefrin Visitor Experience and Distillery, and the Carlisle Station regeneration project are just two examples of schemes already benefitting from the Deal which will create jobs and improve regional connectivity. We're levelling up across the UK by investing in jobs, driving economic growth, and strengthening our cross-border links,"

It will bring a transformative step change for the businesses and communities of the Borderlands by increasing productivity, growing the working age population, and delivering a more inclusive economy. The projects of the Deal aim to deliver up to 5,500 jobs and £1.1 billion of additional GVA with a sustainable and inclusive approach to growth.

"Projects the Scottish Government is supporting through the Deal will focus on reinvigorating town centres, expanding business sites and premises to stimulate business growth and job creation, maximising the region's appeal as a leading outdoor and adventure tourism destination and equipping people with the skills they need to forge successful careers and contribute to their communities.

**UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart MP, summed up the scale of it all:**

**Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson MSP, said:**

"The Deal is focused on local people and local priorities, enabling the Borderlands area to create sustainable jobs, re-invigorate the economy, and build strategically for long term growth and prosperity."

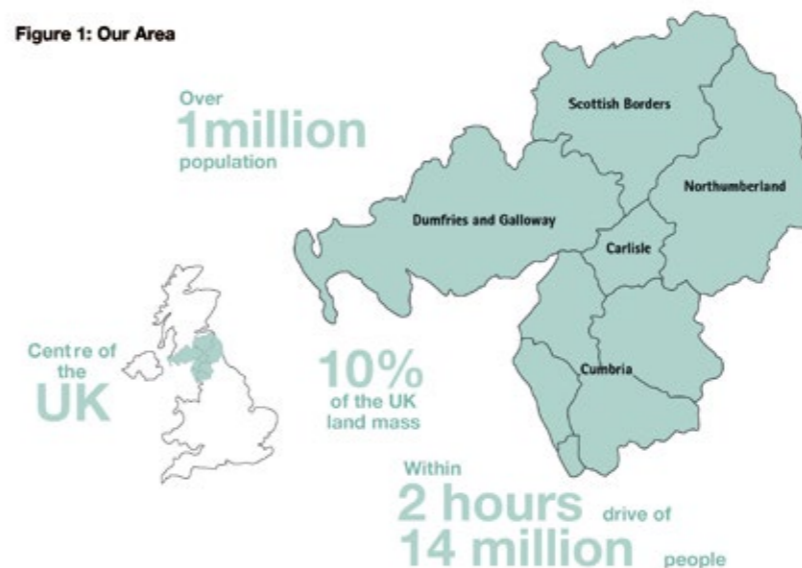
"I am pleased to be signing the Borderlands Growth Deal, confirming that the Scottish Government will invest

"The benefits of the UK Government's £265 million investment in the deal will be felt by communities across the whole of the Borderlands region and beyond. Exciting projects like the Mountain Bike Innovation Centre and a Dairy Innovation Centre in Dumfries, Dairy Nexus, will build on regional strengths to create jobs and prosperity, while improvements to digital and transport infrastructure will ensure that we build back better from the pandemic.

"Across Scotland we have committed more than £1.5 billion to City Region and Growth Deals."

The Borderlands Partnership is made up of Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council.

Figure 1: Our Area





**Councillor John Mallinson, Leader of Carlisle City Council and Borderlands Partnership Board Co-Chair, said:**



“It’s fantastic to announce the signing of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal bringing fresh investment from Government of up to £350million to our region, alongside local contributions of over £100million. The Deal is an ambitious approach to cross-border working between Governments, local authorities and other partners which will boost economic growth by helping existing business, encouraging new ventures and bringing a wealth of improvements to our region.

“The Deal will also provide crucial support to our region’s recovery from the Covid-19 emergency and ensure we set in place strong foundations on which to build back better and greener, delivering inclusive and sustainable growth.”

**Councillor Mark Rowley, Executive Member for Economic Regeneration & Finance from Scottish Borders Council, who hold the other co-Chair position, said:**

“The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal will have a transformational impact on the whole region, with the aim of creating 5,500 jobs, bringing in over 4 million extra tourists and improving mobile and digital connections thanks to the funding from the two governments and the additional investment the deal will attract.

“The unlocking of investment in our towns will generate a predicted £1.1billion uplift in the region’s GVA and the partners will be able to deliver individually and collectively a range of projects which will not only improve the area for existing residents but also encourage more to move here, which will help address some of the common challenges we face.”

The Deal will deliver across four themes: improving places; enabling



infrastructure; encouraging green growth; and supporting innovation, business and skills. Each theme has an agreed set of projects which will help deliver a step change for the businesses and communities of Borderlands by increasing productivity, growing the working age population and delivering a more inclusive economy.

£20 million funding is included for an exciting redevelopment of Carlisle Station and the surrounding area, to act as a gateway to the region. Work to assess the benefits and challenges of extending the Edinburgh – Tweedbank Borders Railway to Carlisle will also be progressed, including feasibility at the appropriate stage of business case development. The Deal will support the delivery of a new Berwick Theatre while the skills and innovation work will include the development of a Mountain Biking Innovation Centre in the Scottish Borders. Funding will also support the development of Chapelcross in Dumfries and Galloway, as the region’s clean growth strategic investment site for low carbon energy generation and energy efficient businesses.

The Deal will deliver an investment of up to £31million in green energy projects and £7million to develop skills needed by the regional economy, along with much needed improvements in digital and mobile connectivity across the region. The importance of the region’s towns will be the focus of the £50million Place Programme, which, along with significant investments in

tourism and business infrastructure, will help position the Borderlands as a vibrant and attractive place to live and visit.

Delivery has started on some of the Deal projects, following the release of early funding by the UK Government. This includes top up funding for a Digital Voucher scheme supporting businesses and private customers to install high speed broadband; funding for the development of the Borderlands Energy Masterplan; £5million towards the building of Lilidorei, a large-scale new play village to enhance the visitor offer at the Alnwick Gardens, the start of the work to redevelop Carlisle Station and a £3million investment towards the Ad Gefrin Visitor Experience and Distillery in Northumberland.

The £350 million investment from the UK and Scottish Governments is made up of £150 million for Scotland (£85 million from the Scottish Government and £65 million from the UK Government) and up to £200 million for England from the UK Government. This will be supported by over £100million of funding from local partners.

For more information, visit the partnership website at [www.borderlandsgrowth.com](http://www.borderlandsgrowth.com)

# Health benefits of WALKING AND CYCLING in Scotland



**46%** decreased risk of developing heart disease and

**45%** decreased risk of cancer if you cycle to work



**£94m** is the yearly cost of physical inactivity to the NHS in Scotland



**1/3** lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes if you are physically active







# Mountain Bike Project pushes ahead as stand-out element of new Borderlands Deal

Ministers of the UK and Scottish Governments and representatives of the five councils of the Borderlands Partnership signed the deal, which aims to drive inclusive growth and deliver significant and lasting benefits for individuals, businesses and communities, including the creation of up to 5,500 jobs.

**For the Scottish Borders investment will include:**

- £19m for an ambitious project to create the world's first Mountain Bike Innovation Centre, integrated adventure Bike Park and Trail Lab in Innerleithen (further details below)
- £11m Destination Tweed tourism project based around the River Tweed

- Funding to further develop the 7Stanes mountain biking network across the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway
- A share of £20m for town and community improvement projects through a Place Programme in the south of Scotland
- Funding for improved business infrastructure in Hawick and Coldstream
- Funds to support rural innovation and skills
- Projects to tackle gaps in digital and mobile infrastructure
- £10m to deliver the feasibility activity around extending the Borders Railway from Tweedbank to Carlisle
- Funding to support the generation of low carbon energy

- Pilot projects covering woodland, upland and agricultural areas to trial new approaches to valuing and protecting our natural capital to capture the benefits of our environment in a sustainable way

**Councillor Mark Rowley, Scottish Borders Council's Executive Member for Economic Regeneration and Finance, said:**



"The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal has been worked on by the various partners for a number of years and this level of investment and joined up partnership working has never been more important than it is today, as we look towards our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This deal can transform the Scottish Borders, allowing multiple, large scale projects to be taken forward by the

Council and a wide range of partners, delivering new jobs and sustainable growth which will help support the region for decades to come.

"Significant investment into our towns and communities, our tourism infrastructure and our environment means that this deal will see the benefits shared right across the whole of the Scottish Borders."

A key element of the Borderlands Growth Deal for the Scottish Borders is the development of a new mountain bike innovation centre in Innerleithen that will support Scottish, UK and international businesses to develop innovative products and services within mountain biking and across the cycling sector.

In addition, a Tweed Valley Bike Park and Trail Lab will be created in what is thought to be a global first in terms of combining tourism and innovation. An adventure bike park will deliver infrastructure to attract and sustainably manage visitors to the Scottish Borders.

Borderlands Growth Deal will invest £19million in the project, which is predicted to contribute £141m in Gross Value Added (GVA) and over 400 new jobs in the South of Scotland.

The project partnership includes South of Scotland Enterprise as project sponsors Scottish Borders Council, Edinburgh Napier University and Scottish Cycling, through Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS).

**Ed Shoote of DMBinS, the Senior Project Manager of the Mountain Bike Project, said:**

"It is fantastic news that the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, including the Mountain Bike Project, is pushing ahead.

"The vision is for the south of Scotland to be recognised as the European leader in mountain biking and this is an important step forward.

"There is still a lot of work to do to realise this vision and we will continue to work with the project partners and the local community to deliver the best project for the region."

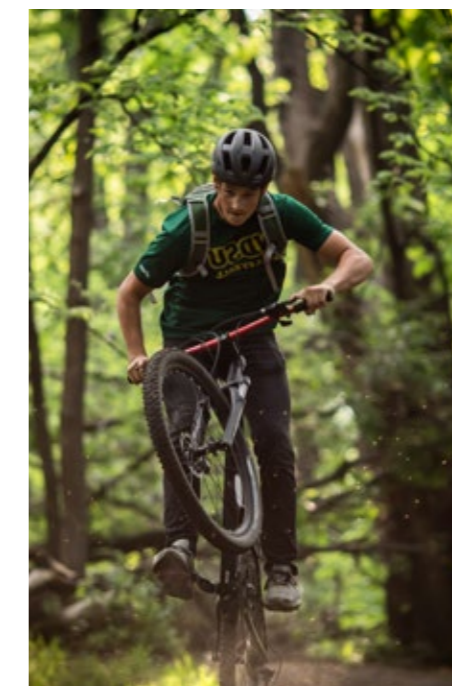
**Councillor Mark Rowley added:**

"This project is a fantastic example of how projects funded by the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal can deliver multiple benefits, in this case attracting new businesses and jobs to the area and also attracting tourists from across the UK, Europe and beyond, building on the already well-established reputation of the Tweed Valley as one of the world's top mountain biking destinations."

**Professor Nick Antonopoulos, Vice Principal for Research and Innovation at Edinburgh Napier University, said:**

"Today marks another important milestone for Edinburgh Napier and its partners in our journey towards making the South of Scotland the mountain bike capital of Europe.

"The Borderlands Growth Deal will build on the fantastic groundwork of the Mountain Bike Centre of Scotland, hosted by Edinburgh Napier University who have been supporting cycling innovation since 2012.



"This investment will take the work of Mountain Bike Centre of Scotland to the next level, helping to drive innovation and support product research and development, whilst working with local and international companies.

"Together, these projects will power commercial activity, attract inward investment and deliver positive outcomes in terms of public health and supporting carbon neutral products and processes.

"We are also hugely excited by the potential research opportunities for Edinburgh Napier colleagues across a range of academic disciplines, including exercise science, health and wellbeing, engineering, inclusion, product design, artificial intelligence, big data and tourism."

**South of Scotland Enterprise Chair, Russel Griggs OBE, added:**

"This is a transformational project which could really put the South of Scotland on the map as a global leader in the mountain biking industry.

"The potential wider economic and community benefits for the local area are significant in terms of inward investment and jobs, as well as bringing further UK and international tourism to the region.

"I am delighted the South of Scotland Enterprise will be working with various partners to realise this ambition."

The Borderlands Partnership is made up of Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council.







# New £15.1m Renton Campus is taking shape

Construction of the new £15.1m Renton Campus is progressing well, with contractors well on track to complete the first phase of the project later this year.

Work to the structure of the campus building has now been completed and fitting out of the interior, including partitions and mechanical and electrical work, has begun.

New CGI images show how the finished campus including a state-of-the-art Primary School, Language and Communication Base and Early Learning and Childcare Centre will look.

The modern facilities include terraces for outdoor play and learning on each floor which are accessible from the indoor learning & teaching zones;

breakout nooks for teaching in small groups; open plan dining areas; a tiered common seating area; and bright playrooms with floor to ceiling windows.

Two class bases with a shared low stimulus room on each level of the campus will be dedicated to pupils within the Language and Communications Base with further support accommodation such as the Sensory Room.

In addition, a new multi-use sports pitch and playground area will be built on the site of the current school,



which will be demolished once the new building is complete.

Pupils from Renton Primary School, children at Riverside ELCC and staff have been involved throughout the project, participating in different design and construction activities to support the curriculum. A recent well received engagement session took place with staff using virtual technology and realistic modelling to provide a live flythrough experience so that staff feel familiar with their new surroundings before the move to the new campus.

The progress comes despite significant delays due to the impact of Covid-19, which saw the site closed for three months last year.

The principal contractor for the new build, Morgan Sindall Construction and Infrastructure Limited, continues to implement strict health and safety working practices on site to ensure work can continue safely, including increased hand sanitiser stations and physical distancing.

**Councillor Iain McLaren, Convener of Infrastructure, Regeneration and Economic Development, said:**



"I am so pleased to see such progress on the Renton site despite the unforeseen delays last year. The campus is really starting to take

shape, and the new CGI images show what a fantastic facility it is going to be for the young people of Renton and the local community as a whole."

**Councillor Karen Conaghan, Convener of Educational Services, said:**



"I am delighted to see this project moving forward so quickly - pupils in Renton will be in and making use of the modern facilities before they

know it.

"The various spaces shown in the new images are sure to support the many different ways in which children and young people learn, and the outdoor terraces in particular will give staff and children a great additional resource.

**"The new and improved environment will without a doubt enhance the educational experience of local young children for many years to come."**





# Work to begin on ground-breaking outdoor learning nursery at Duthie Park

Work on an innovative outdoor learning setting for pre-school children gets underway at Aberdeen's much-loved Duthie Park at the end of March.

Preparatory work is commencing currently at the park's East Lodge which will be the hub for the ground-breaking project which will see the city's first outdoor nursery.

The pilot project is one of the highlights of Aberdeen City Council's £23 million investment transforming nursery settings across the city in preparation for expanded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) hours for children below school age.

Outdoor nurseries are being embraced nationally in the public and private sector as a part of a strategy informed by the success of the same approach worldwide, with Scandinavia in particular championing the benefits of outdoor learning. Practitioners in Aberdeen have already collaborated

with similar settings in Spain through an external grant funded project, as well as developing a community of practice based on outdoor teaching between ELC provisions in the city

**Councillor Jenny Laing, Co-Leader of Aberdeen City Council, said:**



"We have undertaken an extensive study on the benefits of outdoor, play-based learning and we are now ready to apply this learning in Aberdeen and ensure our young children reap the rewards.

"We are delighted to see so many of our new ELC settings coming onstream and we are proud of our infrastructure

investment. Innovation is every bit as important and the Duthie Park is the perfect location to focus on for our pilot project. Hazlehead Park will also see an ELC outdoor learning setting as we look to utilise our wonderful greenspaces to offer more new and exciting options for parents and children."

The creation of outdoor nurseries and hybrid nurseries – combining more traditional nursery provision with extended outdoor learning – is viewed as an important part of a wider city strategy, the key aims of which are to enhance physical, emotional wellbeing and social development.



Images by Halliday Fraser Munro

# Work to begin on an extension to Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar

The school building opened in August 2015 with four classrooms and two nursery rooms, and was designed to allow the addition of up to four classrooms to meet future demand if required.

Robertson Construction Northern Limited have been appointed as the contractor for the project which is designed and managed by Highland Council's Housing and Property Service. A temporary classroom unit has been located in the school grounds for use until the new classrooms are ready for occupation in October.

**Councillor John Finlayson, Chair of the Council's Education Committee, said:**

"Great news in challenging times is always welcome. Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar is a fantastic asset to Lochaber and with growing demand for Gaelic medium education it is imperative that the facilities are available to meet the requests of the community."

**Chair of the Housing and Property Committee, Councillor Ben Thompson, said:**

"It is great to hear that construction will shortly begin at Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar to facilitate additional capacity. Demand for Gaelic medium in the Lochaber area is increasing year on year. Having the ability to meet demand is crucial and the extension will allow the school roll to increase in due course. The building was designed with growth in mind and it is encouraging news that after only 6 years' expansion is now required and happening."

**Chair of the Gaelic Committee, Councillor Calum Munro, said:**

"The addition of a two-classroom extension to Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar signifies the success of Gaelic Medium Education in Lochaber and I'm delighted that this will allow the demand for GME to be met and the school roll to increase. This is another great landmark in Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar's story and is a testament to the school staff's dedication and also to the community's desire for their children to acquire Gaelic, to have an education which reflects Gaelic culture and to realise the benefits of bilingualism from a young age."

**"With this innovative project we are looking to put into practice the academic research that demonstrates that outdoor learning improves attainment, develops motor skills and benefits physical and mental health."**

Costing £1.4m the Duthie Park nursery is scheduled to open in summer and will also include provision for indoor space in adverse weather in the redeveloped East Lodge to allow for adverse weather.

Staff ratios will be enhanced from indoor levels to ensure the highest standards of health and safety are maintained and all staff will be trained in outdoor provision and committed to continuous development of their outdoor ELC practice.

**Gordon Milne, managing director, Robertson Construction Eastern, which is delivering the transformational nursery settings through**

**Procurement Hub Major Projects Framework, said:**

"The introduction of the city's first outdoor nursery further illustrates Aberdeen City Council's commitment to provide first class learning environments for pre-school children. We are proud to be the contractor of choice for the delivery of this important project and look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Council."

**Managing Director at Halliday Fraser Munro, David Halliday said:**

"Working with local communities in the Aberdeen area plays a huge role in our organisation and having already successfully delivered a number of facilities for Aberdeen City Council, we are delighted to be marking the start of the next adventure on Duthie Park later this month.

These state-of-the art ELC facilities are a real attribute to the people in the area and an excellent addition to the greenspaces round about us. Duthie Park will no doubt create an accessible centre for all of the community to enjoy."



# Highland Council provide 'inspiring stories' to Education Scotland Collection



Six submissions from The Highland Council were successful in being featured in Education Scotland's 'What Scotland Learned: 100 stories of lockdown' publication.

The submissions include Lundavra Nursery, Speech and Language Therapy, Early Years Education Support, Badcaul and Scoraig Primaries, Wick High School, and on behalf of Comunn na Gàidhlig.

The booklet is a collection of inspiring stories about how practitioners across Scotland responded to the Covid-19 crisis. The six submissions are featured under various themes such as relationships, learning and teaching, school and community and health and wellbeing.

**Chair of Education Committee, Councillor John Finlayson said:**



"I am delighted that so many submissions from Highland were included in this collection and again they highlight the great work, resilience and supportive ethos that continues to be evident in our schools. While the six submissions outlined all deserve praise, I know they are only the tip of the iceberg, in terms of what is happening right across our over 300 schools and early learning centres."

**Lundavra Nursery** continued to engage with their families and provided support by giving advice around any concerns,

signposting to relevant professionals and through supportive conversations. They achieved this by creating a closed Facebook page to be able to reach families during the national lockdown. After 2 weeks, 90% of their school roll were engaging on the page with only 7 children's families engaging through email.

**Speech and Language Therapy and Early Years Education Support** jointly planned online Continued Professional Development (CPD) sessions called 'Words Up Wednesday' which ran weekly for the last 6 weeks of term, delivered by the Speech and Language Therapy team. The sessions were targeted at early level practitioners and participants joined from across remote and rural Highland areas.

**Early Years Education Support** had a second successful submission in the booklet which highlighted their innovative approach to training and improvement using interactive bite-size sessions tailored to the changing needs of early years staff during the pandemic.

**Badcaul and Scoraig Primaries** during lockdown focused on activities to build community between the schools and to reinforce they were together despite being apart. Events included a remote author visit, a bake-off competition, a talent competition, sports week, and

taking part in the World's Largest Art Lesson. The schools also created a quilt by asking each of the 14 pupils to create individual pieces which were then transformed into a Little Loch Broom Schools Quilt by a member of the community.

**Wick High School's youth workers** delivered daily, online, after school activities on the school's Google Classroom. These included: Monday Motivation (weekly fitness challenges and goals), working with a local art centre to produce a lockdown film with young people, researching art history and designing window panes for a community art project, a weekly online quiz, and a vlog/blog for young people to review films they had watched.

As outreach on behalf of **Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG)**, The Highland Council created a number of Gaelic-medium (GM) films for young Gaelic speakers and learners of Scottish Gaelic. These films were largely based on the cultural and natural heritage of Gaelic Scotland. In addition to the videos, Facebook Live GM sessions were delivered.

# St Sophia's refurbishment to use innovative building practices

St Sophia's primary school in Galston is set to become the UK's first refurbishment of a school building to a EnerPHit (Passivhaus) standard, with detailed design work now well underway.

help deliver the Council's carbon reduction commitment.



**Councillor Fiona Campbell, Cabinet Member for Skills and Learning said:**

"In June 2019, a decision was taken at

Cabinet to support the wishes of the St Sophia's school community and to extensively refurbish the school.

"This very successful school, which sits right at the heart of the local community, will benefit from a significant programme of works. I am delighted that the design process is now underway and that our primary consultant, architects Hamson Barron Smith, are bringing their expertise to this project. Together with our team from Facilities and Property Management, they will ensure that the school is sustainable, flexible and economical to run, now and into the future.

**"This innovative project will ensure that our young learners will have the opportunity to learn in an environment that matches the hopes and aspirations of the school community."**

**Sarah Lewis, Associate Director at Hamson Barron Smith said:**

"Sustainability underpins everything we do – whether it's our approach to design and consultancy, or the way we run our business. We work tirelessly with our ambitious clients who strive not only for excellence in architectural design, but to provide truly healthy, comfortable and energy-efficient buildings."

This exciting two year project will be designed and delivered in partnership with the Council's appointed architects Hamson Barron Smith, who are leading exponents of the Passivhaus / EnerPHit benchmark performance standard.

The project aims to achieve some of the largest energy reductions in any school renovation to date by utilising the internationally recognised standard. The build, which is due on site in April 2022, will focus on increased building fabric efficiency, adhering strictly to rigorous design and construction principles, developed by the Passivhaus Institute in Germany. This is a leading edge project in Scotland, which will







# £1.4m pitches revamp kicking on

**PITCH improvement works worth £1.4 million are kicking on at six schools and sports facilities across Inverclyde.**

The 3G surface at Inverclyde Academy, pictured, is the latest to be overhauled by contractors working on behalf of the council.

Work is also currently on the go to replace two artificial pitches at Parklea in Port Glasgow, including upgrades to base of the stadium pitch which will meet the quality standard set by world football governing body FIFA.

Both projects follow the recent replacement of two pitches at Notre Dame High, an upgrade from a 2G to a 3G surface at All Saints Primary, both Greenock, with rejuvenation works also completed to two playing fields at Port Glasgow Community Campus and the pitch at St Columba's High in Gourrock.

The total investment is just over £1.4m, including nearly £500,000 for the All Saints and Notre Dame pitches from FES, the company which provides the facilities management services to those schools.

The local authority is also finalising plans to carry out improvements to surfaces at Lady Octavia Sports Centre and Wemyss Bay Primary in the near future while FES is planning further works at Clydeview Academy and Notre Dame High.

**Councillor Jim Clocherty, Inverclyde Council's education and communities convener, said:**



"It's been well-documented that Inverclyde has one of the best schools estates in Scotland, if not the UK, thanks to the council's

unprecedented £270 million investment in our educational establishments.

"Sport and outdoor learning are just as crucial as what goes on inside the classrooms and that's why it's important that pitches at our schools and leisure facilities are kept in top condition to support our pupils, teaching staff and the wider community with keeping active.

"I'm sure that once the current restrictions are lifted these pitches will be put to good use by students, residents and sports teams across Inverclyde when it is safe to do so."

Groundworks have been taking place at Inverclyde Academy ahead of the planned installation of the new 3G 'carpet' next week.

That project alone is expected to cost just under £250k.



# Short, medium and long term action plan agreed at Education Committee

At a recent meeting of the Council's Education Committee, Members agreed on The Highland Council's Education and Learning three-year draft action plan covering short, medium and longer term priorities. This plan is currently the focus of consultation with all of our Highland schools, and ongoing collaboration with schools will underpin its future development.

**Chair of the Education Committee, Councillor John Finlayson, said:**



"Looking towards the future, our focus is on collaboration, and enhancing the capacity of the system to continue to develop and improve outcomes, including engagement and collaboration with Education Scotland Action.

"The pandemic, and our move to remote learning, can easily begin to focus discussion on the urgent short-term priorities. While these are important, this report and discussion today has shown that we also have an eye on education and learning beyond the pandemic. We continue to work towards improving the quality of the education and learning experience for our current and future generations of Highland learners."

## Short-term priorities

These priorities have been identified for immediate action while schools are open for vulnerable children and the children of certain key workers only:

- Managing remote learning expectations, including curricular progression and assessment strategies
- Supporting complex needs during remote learning period, including safeguarding
- Collecting data/tracking and monitoring progress with learning during remote learning period
- Communication with families and wider school communities
- Supporting transitions
- Supporting health and wellbeing
- Operational support for schools with staffing
- General operational support for Senior Management in schools

## Medium and long-term priorities

Some of these priorities have been scaled back due to the pandemic,

however some are relevant even while remote learning is taking place and work on these will be ongoing (much work has already been done).

Areas of work include: Leadership and Empowerment, Performance Analysis and Improving Outcomes, Assessment and Moderation, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), Curriculum, Safeguarding, e-learning and Highland Virtual Academy (HVA), Inclusion and Health and Wellbeing.

Once schools return to face to face learning, the pace of implementation of these priorities will accelerate, though at all times the wellbeing and workload of staff in schools will determine the phasing of improvement activity.

**Executive Chief Officer for Education and Learning, Nicky Grant said:**

"We have circulated our latest position statement which sets out clear parameters and expectations following Scottish Government guidelines, putting the health and safety and wellbeing of our children, young people and staff at the forefront of the return.

"Officers and head teachers have been focusing on a timeline of support for staff, children, young people and parents. This includes a framework of principles that meets the Highland context for curriculum delivery. We will also focus on Health and Wellbeing, Educational experiences and mitigating against the gap – clear communication for all will be important."

**"We continue to work towards improving the quality of the education and learning experience for our current and future generations of Highland learners."**



# Council's Co Leaders hail completion of city's new multi-million pounds nursery settings

Aberdeen City Council's Co Leader's recently hailed continued progress on construction of the 27 upgraded or new buildings to support additional early learning and childcare (ELC) provision as three more sites are due to be completed soon.



Tillydrone Exterior

Tillydrone Nursery is due to be completed early this month, Northfield is due to be completed by the middle of March, joining Kingsford Nursery which completes this week. Following final utilities connections and Care Inspectorate registrations work will proceed towards a formal hand over to the Aberdeen City Council New facilities at Seaton, Tullos and Quarryhill were also completed the turn of the year.

New facilities at Tullos and Quarryhill were also completed the turn of the year.



Northfield Playroom

Despite the impact of the coronavirus lockdown and the interruptions caused by local and national Tier 4 lockdowns, the new builds across the city comprising Aberdeen City Council's £23 million investment project have made good progress.

Council Co Leaders Councillor Jenny Laing and Councillor Douglas Lumsden expressed their delight with the progress being made.

**Councillor Laing said:**



"It's great to see our huge investment in our children's futures reaching fruition with more new nursery sites, each with first class facilities, either being completed or nearing competition. Each of these facilities also support outdoor learning which has always been an important objective of entire building programme. "It is a testament to the work of our teams and our contractors that work

has been able to resume at a good pace despite the challenges of the pandemic and we are delighted that young families and entire communities will be benefitting from the marvellous new facilities in the very near future."

**Councillor Lumsden added:**



"It's great to see more of our refurbished and new nurseries becoming ready for use. Our brand-new modern nurseries demonstrate our commitment to enhanced Early Learning and Childcare hours and families and staff will soon be able to see for themselves the fantastic new facilities we are providing."

**Gordon Milne, Regional Managing Director for Robertson Construction Eastern, said:**

"As the delivery partner of choice for Aberdeen City Council's Early Years programme, we could not be prouder of the first-class facilities the Council is adding to its education portfolio. This project exemplifies collaboration between customer and contractor, and we continue to make excellent progress in the delivery of the remaining facilities which are currently on-site or in the design phase. "We look forward to hearing about the pupil's response to the recently completed facilities, and to continuing to play our part in assisting the Council achieve its extended Early Years Learning and Childcare hours."

**Managing Director at Halliday Fraser Munro, David Halliday added:**

"We are committed to delivering quality and efficiency for the education and community sectors. Investments like this one from Aberdeen City Council are a great example of how we can not only help improve children's learning outcomes but also their health and wellbeing.

"Working alongside Aberdeen City Council has given us the opportunity to further demonstrate our continued innovation in supporting the early years sector, with practical and innovative facility design.

**"We are delighted to continue to support the development of inspiring places for our communities to live, work and learn."**

The City Council's £23 million building programme will see 27 new or upgraded local authority nurseries across the city to cater for the enhanced provision including two new innovative outdoor learning settings at Hazlehead Park and Duthie Park.

All local authorities were asked to develop an Early Learning and Childcare delivery plan to guide expansion plans supporting the increased in hours to 1140 per child in August 2021 from the current 600 hours. The Aberdeen City Council plan highlights a focus on the provision of outdoor learning to support wellbeing, on accessibility to increase uptake, on delivery of family learning to fully capitalise on the expansion programme, and on the provision of a 'localised offer' to meet the needs of families within each community.



Caption: Centre pictured Mrs Angela Selkirk, Head Teacher, Auldearn Primary, with nursery pupils Arthur and Flynn

# Head teacher and children cut ribbon on Auldearn's new £1.1m early learning facility

**Auldearn Primary Head Teacher Angela Selkirk has officially received the keys to the school's fantastic new £1.1m early learning facility.**

The school's new Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) building was recently handed over to Highland Council by contractors Morgan Sindall. The nursery will cater for 48 children.

Mrs Selkirk was joined by Arthur and Flynn, the eldest and youngest children from the nursery to help cut the ribbon.

**Mrs Selkirk said:**

"Our new provision will allow us to deliver 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare and also provide Out

of School Care for our primary aged children.

"This will make a huge difference to our families. Our children now have a purpose built, quality learning environment with excellent indoor and outdoor space giving more opportunities to explore, investigate and learn."

**Chair of Highland Council's Education Committee, Councillor John Finlayson, said:**

"It is great to see another capital project that supports ELC expansion and Out of School Care, open in the Highlands and I am sure the whole Auldearn community will be delighted, that their new facility is now open to further support the work of the school and community."



# Improving Biodiversity in South Ayrshire

South Ayrshire Council are introducing a new pilot to develop wildflower meadows in South Ayrshire, reinforcing their commitment to improving biodiversity in the area.

Annual and perennial meadows, alongside areas with an altered grass cutting regime, will feature across eight sites and will help to create a more diverse habitat for wildlife and plants. The pilot sites will be in a variety of locations including parks, general public space and housing areas.

Interest in wildflower meadows has increased over the last year as normal maintenance was not possible during periods of lockdown, and vast amounts of diverse plant material were able to flourish.

The sites will be prepared towards the end of this month, and Park Rangers will keep a close eye on each one to evaluate which area has the greatest biodiversity benefit.

**Councillor Ian Cochrane, South Ayrshire Council's Portfolio Holder for Environment said:**



"Biodiversity is an integral part of our action to address the impact of climate change on our native species. I'm really pleased that

we're encouraging the development of wildflower meadows to create a friendlier environment for plants and wildlife."

"We want to make South Ayrshire a better place to live, and promoting a sustainable and green environment is a key part of our future. I'm looking forward to seeing how these meadows develop over the next few months."

**"We want to make South Ayrshire a better place to live, and promoting a sustainable and green environment is a key part of our future. I'm looking forward to seeing how these meadows develop over the next few months."**



# More time to help guide planning protections for sites of historical value

Consultation has been extended to allow people additional time to comment on planning protections for important areas of East Dunbartonshire.

Representations can now be made on the Historic Environment Designations Review up to 31 May 2021. Visit [www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/historicenvironmentreview](http://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/historicenvironmentreview) to get involved.

The consultation is part of the process towards adopting a new Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) - which will guide the future use of land in East Dunbartonshire. Further planning guidance on the historic environment will be published following this technical review.

People are being given the opportunity to access - and comment on - reports covering Conservation Area Boundaries and Townscape Protection Areas, and Local Gardens and Designed Landscapes. There are also appraisals of existing Conservation Areas.

As well as local residents, the Council is engaging with Historic Environment Scotland, local groups, community councils and businesses. Online meetings were held in January and a number of representations have been received.

**Councillor Vaughan Moody, Joint Leader of the Council, said,**



"The aim of the Historic Environment Designations Review is to ensure that a consistent and robust evidence base is in place, complementing

the Proposed Local Development Plan 2. It's vital we capture as much feedback as possible to ensure the right protections are in place for the right areas - helping us to continue to safeguard local historical and environmental assets for years to come."

**Councillor Andrew Polson, Joint Leader of the Council, added,**



"Many thanks to everyone who has already been in touch as regards the ongoing Historic Environment Designations Review consultation. The

deadline has been extended to 31 May 2021 to allow all views to be

represented before a report is prepared and brought back to Council."

Visit [www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/historicenvironmentreview](http://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/historicenvironmentreview) to access background information and reports, and provide comments. The Council is encouraging the use of a representation form - available via the website - which has been specifically created for the consultation. However, representations submitted in other formats, such as e-mail and letter, will also be accepted.

## Useful Links

E-mail [development.plan@eastdunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:development.plan@eastdunbarton.gov.uk) or call **0300 123 4510** (9am-5pm, Mon to Fri) for further information.

[www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/historicenvironmentreview](http://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/historicenvironmentreview) to get involved, access background information and reports, and provide comments.



# Highland Council welcomes Land Use Partnership pilots in region

The Highland Council's Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and Chair of Climate Change Working Group, Councillor Trish Robertson has welcomed the Scottish Government's recent announcement that the Highland Council area will be 1 of 5 areas being piloted as Regional Land Use Partnerships to help develop an approach to land use in support of Scotland's green recovery and transition to net-zero.

A Scottish Government announcement said that they "...will work with the pilot groups to test approaches to partnership governance that best suit the local situation and priorities. This will help inform future decisions on

wider establishment of Partnerships. And that: "The Partnerships will help national and local government, communities, land owners and stakeholders work together to find ways to optimise land use in a fair and inclusive way – meeting local and national objectives and supporting the journey to net zero."

**Councillor Trish Robertson, welcomed the announcement, saying:**



"We are very pleased that the Scottish Government has recognised the scale of the size of the Highland area – approximately the size of Belgium – and allocated 2 of the 5 pilot partnerships within The Highland Council area. We are delighted that The Highland Council area is to become a Regional Land Use Partnership pilot

area and also the Cairngorms National Park. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government to fully understand the scope of the pilot as a means for moving Highland towards an exemplar Carbon Action region in partnership with our communities."

**The Regional Land Use Partnerships will be piloted in:**

- Cairngorms National Park
- Highland Council
- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
- North East Region (Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils)
- South of Scotland (Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders Councils)



# Scottish Water Industry the Most Trusted, Says Which? Survey

The water industry in Scotland is the most trusted sector with customers, according to research by respected consumer rights body Which?

It has published its Consumers in Scotland 2021 report, which collates survey data on the views of people, and the research found a greater proportion of trust in the water industry in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

Water came out as the most trusted industry, with 60% of Scottish people saying they trusted their water suppliers to act in their best interests.

This year's Scottish figure compared with 49% of people in the rest of the UK saying they trusted their water suppliers to act in their best interests.

**Which? said in its report:** "We asked consumers how much they trust 10 of the largest industries that they interact with regularly and found that levels of trust vary dramatically across industries. 66% of Scottish consumers said that they trust the water industry quite a lot or a great deal, whilst just 6% said they don't trust it very much or at all, giving a net trust value of +60 percentage points.

"The only industry for which consumer trust is higher in Scotland is the water sector, as the average for the UK is brought down by lower trust in England.

"It is known that one factor associated with greater levels of trustworthiness

is benevolence, which means wanting to do good for the consumer aside from being motivated by profit. It may be that the regulatory framework in which Scottish Water operates as a statutory corporation has led to greater consumer trust."

The Which? survey findings follow success for Scottish Water earlier this year in the Institute of Customer Service survey, called the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), which is the main tool that we use to benchmark how well our customers think we are doing when they compare us with other companies that they receive services from.

We saw customer satisfaction increase in the national survey – by just over 2 points and Scottish Water came out as the top water company in the UK, with the ICS now recognising us as one of the top 50 service providers in the UK – a first for Scottish Water.

**Peter Farrer, Scottish Water's Chief Operating Officer, said:**

I'm delighted that, once again, Scotland's water sector, which includes Scottish Water and our partners and suppliers, has been recognised by Which? as being the most trusted sector by Scottish consumers.

"Every day, Scottish Water delivers 1.44 billion litres of clear, fresh drinking water and removes 983 million litres of waste water, which it treats, recovers resources from, and returns safely to the environment. Its services support 2.56 million households and 152, 806 business premises across Scotland.

"This Which? survey builds on the achievement of some of our best ever customer service results recently. Over the past ten years domestic water and waste water charges have been reduced by 10% in real terms and they are now among the lowest in Great Britain while compliance with strict drinking water quality standards is at record levels.

"We are proud to be one of the UK's top performing water companies and are determined to improve our performance even further."







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## North Sutherland Coast Redesign: Steering Group hears positive way forward for a new care facility in Tongue

Members of the steering group behind plans to provide enhanced care provision to serve the North Coast Sutherland area recently heard positive news regarding the provision of a new care facility in Tongue. Officers from NHS Highland, The Highland Council and representatives from Wildland provided an update on progress on the project, following the decision by the Highland Council to provide capital funding of £5m within its capital programme for the project.

**Local Councillor Linda Munro, Chair of the Council's Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee said:**



"I am delighted that this transformational project has reached a significant milestone with capital funding now allocated by the Council, and discussions moving forward between the Council, NHS and Wildland to allow a final position to be reached on the delivery model for the new facility. This is a much welcomed and critical development for the communities of the North Coast."

**NHS Highland's North Area Manager Michelle Johnstone said:**

**"This is a positive step forward and will enable progression with the care hub for the North Coast providing health and social care services for the community."**

**Wildland CEO Tim Kirkwood added:**

"We have worked positively with both NHS Highland and Highland Council to bring forward a proposal for a Care Home that everyone can be proud of. It is great to reach such an important milestone. We look forward to playing our part in realising the healthcare hub ambition as soon as possible, our aim is to make it the best it can possibly be whilst capturing such "added value" the development can bring as a whole."





# Current Social Care model unsustainable

A Health and Sport Committee report into the future of social care has said those delivering and receiving care must be at the heart of social care reform with the current model described as unsustainable.

The Committee say a national conversation on the future of social care is needed and that the myriad issues facing staff must be addressed in the development of any new system. The Committee's report says the problems faced by the care sector have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee express concern over the lack of value placed on social care and social care staff, in stark contrast to NHS staff. The report emphasises the ongoing difficulty the sector faces in attracting and retaining staff; citing a lack of training and staff development opportunities, alongside low pay as the key reasons for this.

A number of problems with the current care model are highlighted by the Committee including the continued lack of progress on health and social care integration. They also recommend the Scottish Government seek alternative models of commissioning and procurement with the current ones described as 'counter-intuitive'.

The Committee describe the current model of crisis driven, reactive care as unsustainable and say more must be done to shift the focus to a preventative model, involving local communities in the future planning of health and social care services.

**Lewis Macdonald MSP, Convener of the Health and Sport Committee, said:**

"Throughout this inquiry the message we have been given from those receiving care, and from paid and unpaid carers, is that they have not felt listened to and have been undervalued. That's why it is essential that they are at the centre of much needed reform of the social care system.

"There is no doubt the current model of care is unsustainable, with some of the issues facing the sector exposed by the pandemic. We want to see a nationwide conversation held into the future of social care and we hope that the findings of our report, and the independent review, can help in shaping this future.

"We are grateful to all of those from across the care sector who provided evidence to our inquiry and gave their keen insight into how it is experienced in Scotland.

**"I'd like to put on record our thanks to the tireless and passionate workforce, both paid and unpaid, who undoubtedly deserve better."**

In 2019, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the future of social care. Following this initial evidence gathering, their scrutiny of social care and support required to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Radical changes needed to deliver primary care fit for the 21st century, says Holyrood Committee

A radical revision of primary care is essential to ensure the next generation of citizens receive the care they need, according to the Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport Committee.

In a report published recently, the Committee say the traditional 9-5, 5 days a week service must become a thing of the past, replaced with a new model shaped around users' needs. They urge the health service to fully embrace technology, enabling better data sharing and monitoring, to deliver a 21st century system fit for patients.

The Committee's report is the culmination of a two-year inquiry into the future of primary care. The innovative inquiry was centred around members of the public with their views shaping the inquiry. The first phase of the inquiry, published in July 2019, revealed the public's desire and support for a transformation in how services are accessed and delivered.

The inquiry has highlighted the growing costs and demands on the health service due to an ageing population and their more complex health needs, as well as an obesity epidemic and stark health inequalities in Scotland's most deprived areas.

The Committee's report questions the Government's commitment to recruit at least 800 more GPs by 2030. They say the emphasis should instead be placed on committing to appropriate recruitment of professional staff across multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs), including both GPs and other professions, which can deliver the intended benefits to primary care as a whole.

**Speaking as the report was published, Committee Convener Lewis Macdonald MSP said:**

"It is clear that when it comes to primary care the status quo is no longer an option. Existing ways of delivering care are not only financially unsustainable but have failed to keep pace with modern life.

**"We need to radically rethink primary care so that we can ensure our citizens receive the best possible care for generations to come."**

"We must move away from the automatic provision of prescriptions and towards social prescribing. There must be widespread adoption of a preventative model of delivering care and the health service must fully embrace new technology."

"A fundamental shift is also required in how the public and health professionals view General Practice. Instead of GPs being seen as the provider of all services, a new approach should be adopted where other health professionals, who are often better placed and equipped to help and support people can do so."

He added: "Our inquiry has been driven by hearing directly from the public about the primary care services they want, need and require and the Committee wants to thank all who took part in our public forums and shared their views."

The Committee say a focus on prevention needs to be prioritised

and mainstreamed, but for this to be a success it goes beyond just the health service. They identify the importance of local communities in delivering good health outcomes and say there is a clear desire amongst the public for connected communities, with spaces that give people opportunities to become active and socialise, and to connect to the local natural environment.

For further information on this inquiry please contact David Cullum, Clerk to the Health and Sport Committee – [david.cullum@parliament.scot](mailto:david.cullum@parliament.scot)





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## West Dunbartonshire ICJ supports 300 residents diagnosed with cancer

A pioneering service for people affected by cancer in West Dunbartonshire has supported more than 300 people in its first year.

Macmillan Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ), which is a partnership between West Dunbartonshire Council and Macmillan Cancer Support, offers all newly-diagnosed adults the opportunity to meet with a dedicated support worker on a one-to-one basis.

The worker will then help the patient access a wide range of support, from benefits advice and emotional support to help at home or with other practical needs.

As well as supporting over 300 people who have been diagnosed with cancer, the team has generated £427,000 in benefit entitlement for service users, by supporting them to navigate and understand what they are entitled to.

In addition, the team has secured practical items for vulnerable service users including two new central heating systems, three new boilers and 17 new white goods for residents who required them due to changes in their circumstances.

All of the items have been provided to West Dunbartonshire residents free of charge through the Macmillan Warm at Home scheme.

In addition, the service has made numerous referrals to Occupational Therapy to ensure people are allocated any item that will support them through their cancer journey, including grab rails, chair lifts, new steps and new showers.

Counselling and clinical psychology referrals have also been made to help people receive the psychological support they need following their diagnosis.

In partnership with West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust's Live Active Programme, the ICJ team have also provided opportunities to help service users improve physical fitness, as well as build friendships and resilience.

**Councillor Diane Docherty, Convener of Housing and Communities, said:**

"I am so pleased to hear that Improving the Cancer Journey has helped so many of our residents. Receiving a cancer diagnosis can be an extremely traumatic experience and the long term effects of treatment often have a huge impact on a person's health, wellbeing and independence. The aim of this service is to step in and support any person going through this, ensuring they know exactly what help they are entitled to, so that coping with the non-medical effects of the illness is slightly easier."

Every cancer patient in the area is advised of the service by letter within six weeks of receiving their diagnosis.

If they want to accept support, their needs and concerns are discussed before a care plan to support them and their family is designed.

The team have adapted to allow them to continue operating and providing support during the pandemic, temporarily moving the service to an online and telephone consultation and referral.

**Councillor Caroline McAllister, Vice Convener of Housing and Communities, added:**

"Advances in treatment for cancer mean more people than ever are surviving this illness – but that means it's vital they are supported for as long as they need.

"While the face-to-face element of the service is currently unavailable due to the pandemic, the team has gone to great lengths to continue to ensure that any person who receives a cancer diagnosis in West Dunbartonshire and wants some additional support can reach out and get that easily."

For more information or to request support from ICJ, please visit: [www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/working4u/money-advice/cancer-journey-service/](http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/working4u/money-advice/cancer-journey-service/)



# Highland's Lead Nurse accepted into QNI Scotland programme

Highland Council's Lead Nurse for Looked After and Care Experienced Children has been accepted for the Queens nursing programme and is working towards the prestigious Queen's Nurse Award.

Helen Gilpin was nominated, and through a rigorous selection and interview process, has been accepted onto the Queens Nursing Institute for Scotland Programme.

This institute is the most prestigious nursing institute in the UK and was established by Queen Victoria in the late 1800's.

Very few nurses are accepted onto the programme and Helen is the only nurse from across Highland and Argyll and Bute.

The programme lasts a year and she has chosen to present and study her knowledge on improving health outcomes for care experienced children and young people.

**Chair of Highland Council's Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, Councillor Linda Munro said:** "On behalf of the Committee I'd like to wish Helen well on her studies and this acknowledges some of the expert resource we have in Highland to support outcomes for Care Experienced Young People and Children and comes at a good time when we are looking to move forward with delivering on The Promise."

The Promise sets out a vision and blueprint for transformational change.

At its heart are five foundations:

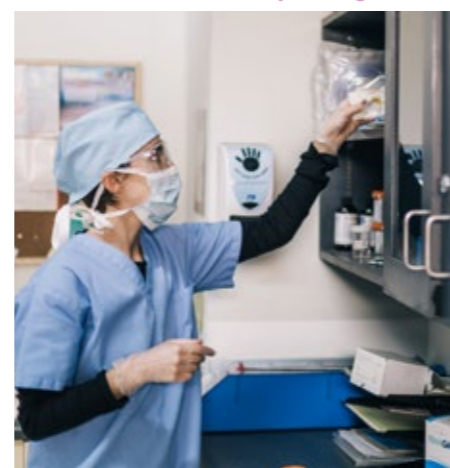
- **Voice:** Children must be meaningfully heard and listened to in all decisions about their care.
- **Family:** Where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they must stay.
- **Care:** Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters when safe to do so.
- **People:** The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community.
- **Scaffolding:** Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

**Jane Park, Head of Service (Health), Highland Council, said:** "Helen is an experienced nurse who served the Skye community, as a school nurse, for many years and more recently brought her expertise and skills to support the health of care experienced children and young people across Highland. As a service we are incredibly proud of Helen's contribution in Highland and her acceptance to the QNIS programme is very well deserved."

**Chair of Highland Council's Education Committee, Councillor John Finlayson, said:** "I am delighted to hear that Helen has been selected for this opportunity and as I know her from my days as a Head Teacher, when she was both a parent at my school and also our school nurse."

"I can confirm she truly deserves this opportunity for the work she has done both as a school nurse and as the Lead Nurse for Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young people, in Highland in recent years. I look forward to hearing from Helen about this opportunity and also reading the results of her studies at a later date."

More info around going through the programme and being a Queen's Nurse can be found at [www.qnis.org.uk](http://www.qnis.org.uk)



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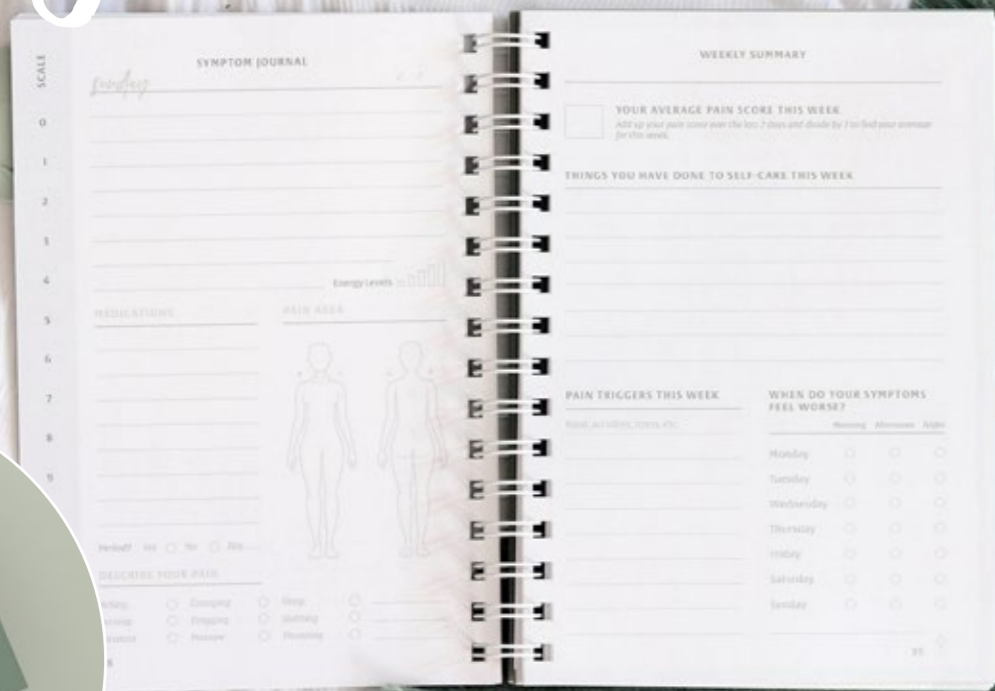
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# What you should and shouldn't say to someone with a mental illness

**Instead of "You'll be fine" try "I'm here for you"**

When I am told that I will be fine, it stirs a bit of anger in me because the thought in my head is, how can you possibly know that I'll be fine. You can't promise a good future but you can promise to be there for your loved ones

**Instead of "It'll get better" try "We can make things better"**

This is very similar to the above, they essentially mean the same thing but being proactive and making immediate changes when someone's hurting can help. Pick up some ice cream and comfort loved ones, don't pawn off their feelings.

**Instead of "You need to move on" try "How can we make things easier, now?"**

A big thing I preach is to not try to move on because why would you? We should be allowed to miss our past or a person and instead focus on adjusting to a new life which can be hard. Finding ways to make this easier rather than being impatient with a person's grief is so important.

**Instead of "You're overreacting" try "Your feelings are valid"**

This is very important. When a person is hurting, especially if they have a mental illness, you need to remember they are not overreacting. You cannot imagine what's going on in their head and why. Remember they are hurting, their wound isn't visible but it is very real and valid.

**Instead of "Calm down" try "We will get through this"**

Many people mean well when they tell someone to calm down, though it can sound very half-hearted. When you tell someone to calm down it isn't really listening to them. Help them get through their panic attack and give them time to do so, there is no rush in recovery.

**Instead of "Don't worry" try "I'm here and I'm listening"**

Don't worry is the worst thing to say to someone who has anxiety. Some people cannot help but worry and get nervous about even simple things. To them, they are trying to protect themselves and that shouldn't be something negative. Instead of pushing them away, listen to them and help them fight that fear.



by Charlotte Underwood, mental health blogger.

Words are very important when it comes to mental health, how we use them can dramatically impact someone's mood and without realizing it, we can become a trigger to a relapse.

Before I understood mental health and before I knew I was suffering, I was guilty of responding with quick-fire phrases to calm someone down. The kind that we are taught and told so often that it becomes almost robotic. It's because of this, sometimes telling someone that "They'll be ok" can sound an awful lot like "I don't care, please shut up" when you are hurting.

I think the best way to help someone is to listen to them, to really let them know they matter and adapting our words for these situations can be a great thing. So, I've listed the typical responses that I have had when I've been talking about my feelings and what I wish I was told instead.



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## Ravenscraig Connections all set to improve

Proposals for new cycling and walking routes through Ravenscraig are being published for the public to give their views.

North Lanarkshire Council are working with Sustrans and Ravenscraig Limited to improve connections between Ravenscraig and neighbouring communities and to expand the active travel network.

### The two key elements of the project are:

- a south-north link to connect Craigneuk, via "The Castings" housing development, off Meadowhead Road, with the Regional Sports Facility (RSF) and new public park, and
- an east-west link to connect Craigneuk, via "The Castings" housing development, to New College Lanarkshire Motherwell Campus.

It's proposed the paths will have lighting, seating, landscaping with wildflower areas and woodland planting, play features along the route, fencing and CCTV where possible.

"As the Ravenscraig site develops with new housing, business, retail, schools

and leisure, we want the area to be accessible for everyone for walking, cycling and wheeling," said Jonathan Speed, Senior Project Manager at North Lanarkshire Council.

"These active travel routes will provide direct, off-road links from the south to the facilities within Ravenscraig, as well as connecting to a wider network of paths to Motherwell, Wishaw and Carfin.

"The project is an important part of the Ravenscraig masterplan, and we would like to hear from as many people as possible during our consultation to ensure the proposals meet the need of residents."

The project is being funded by Transport Scotland and Sustrans, through their 'Places for Everyone' programme.

Feedback from the consultation will inform the final plans for the project, then the council will apply for planning permission. Subject to the necessary approvals and securing funding, it is anticipated work to construct the first of the two active travel routes would start later this year.



## New Greenock cycle route on track

Work has started on a new dedicated cycle lane along a busy Greenock route as part of a near £600,000 package of improvements to encourage active travel.

The bike trail will run from Container Way in the town centre along to Battery Park.

Inverclyde Council started work recently and it will be carried out in phases until April, with traffic management in place throughout.

The cycle lane is one of the first projects being delivered by the local authority after it successfully bid for £585k of funding from the national 'Spaces for People' initiative, which is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered through charity Sustrans Scotland.

**Councillor Michael McCormick, Inverclyde Council's convener of environment and regeneration, said:**



cycling, wheeling and re-discovering the beauty we have here on our doorstep in Inverclyde.

"As horrible as the pandemic has been, one of the few positives to take from it has been the huge surge in the number of people getting out and about walking,

"There will be some short-term disruption while work on the cycle route takes place but every effort has been made to minimise any inconvenience.

"I'd like to thank people in advance for their patience and understanding and I'm sure the cycle path will be something cyclists and walkers alike will feel the benefits of when it is completed in the spring just in time for the start of, hopefully, much better weather in which to enjoy the great outdoors."

The 'Spaces for People' scheme is aimed at improving walking and cycling infrastructure to assist with physical distancing in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Other local projects are being developed by the council taking into account feedback provided by residents during its 'Safe Streets Save Lives' consultation last year.

A common theme identified was for clearly defined cycle routes to separate cyclists and pedestrians.

The dedicated cycle lane will also allow additional space for pedestrians to walk on the footways whilst keeping a

two-metre distance from others, in line with the ongoing safety restrictions.

The existing shared foot and cycle path between Battery Park to the Esplanade will be widened with bolt-down kerbs and bollards installed to create a dedicated cycling lane.

It will initially be a temporary extension but may be made retained depending on usage numbers.

Similar changes will be introduced along the Esplanade itself, widening the existing cycle lane, and on Campbell Street the footway will be widened to accommodate the new bike path.

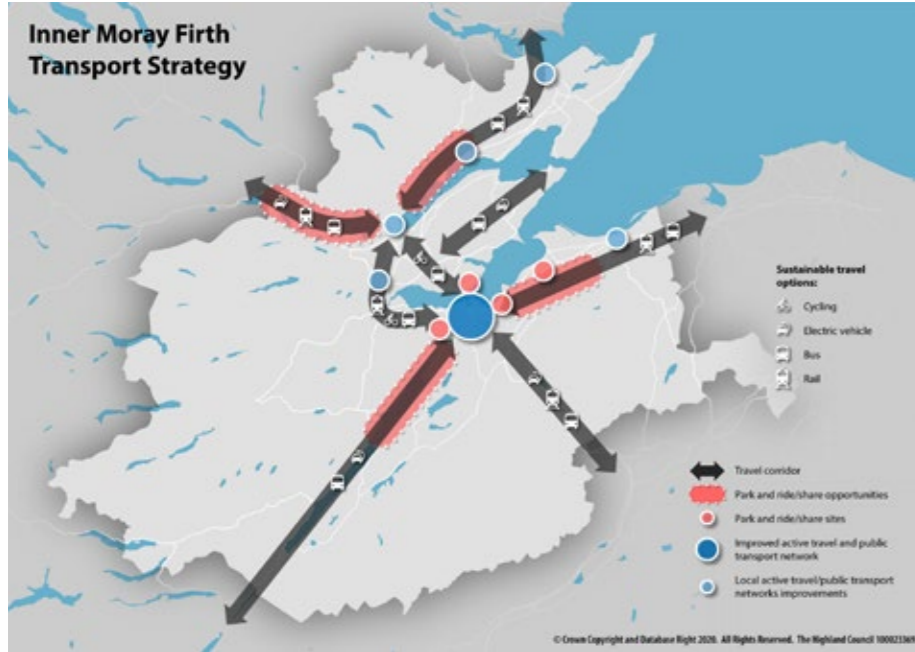
These will be permanent measures with no loss of parking.

The foot/cycle path from Brougham Street to Laird Street and Grey Place will be widened with bolt-down kerbs and bollards installed to create a dedicated cycling lane.

This will be temporary but could also be retained depending on usage levels.

For more information email: [roads@inverclyde.gov.uk](mailto:roads@inverclyde.gov.uk)





## Public asked to have their say on sustainable transport as part of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan review

The Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted Highland communities in unprecedented ways and continues to do so. Amongst the multiple adverse impacts of this global crisis are some important lessons for how we recover and look to the future.

The review of Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan is now underway and gives the opportunity to reflect and identify the best ways of tackling issues of sustainable transport.

Indeed, Transport is highlighted in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan Main Issues Report as being one of the major contributors of greenhouse gas emissions in the region, yet most trips are so short they could be taken in more sustainable ways, such as by bus, bike or walking.

Neil Macrae, Partnership Manager at HITRANS considers that "the widespread restrictions on people's ability to move around has limited the geographical size of our world but has simultaneously awoken our appreciation of local green and open spaces. It has also shown us how well, or not, these assets are linked by safe, convenient walking, wheeling and cycling routes. As well as this heightened awareness of the availability of local places and spaces to take daily exercise, major decreases in traffic volumes resulting from lockdowns have highlighted how much space is given over to roads, how much noise and air pollution is reduced when cars volumes are reduced and how much safer our streets are for getting around, for our children to play and for everyone to enjoy."

Part of The Highland Council response to the pandemic is the Spaces for People project. This work aims at making streets safe and convenient for essential workers to get to their workplaces by walking, wheeling or cycling, and ensuring enough space is available for people to physically distance in high footfall places. Emerging evidence from this work supports the case for a transition to more sustainable transport. It highlights that there is a real opportunity to create a fairer, healthier transport network that supports a range of ways of moving around, beyond the motor vehicle.

Sjoerd Tel, Infrastructure Co-ordinator for Sustrans Scotland highlights:

"We are making 20 minute neighbourhoods basis for #lockdownrecovery. 20 minute neighbourhoods make it easy, quick and convenient to travel by active modes or public transport first and reach the shops, destinations and community facilities that you need to on a day-to-day basis. This helps to reduce dependence on cars, and helps to improve the quality of important places, like town and city centres, and therefore increase footfall, economic vibrancy and sustainability.

As we look to tackle the effects of the pandemic on our town and city centres, particularly in the retail sector, the evidence points towards a transformation centred on making these places attractive destinations for people. This means footfall can increase and these important cultural and economic centres can become 'sticky places'.

In Inverness, projects underway to deliver much-needed housing coupled with the Victorian Market and Inverness Castle redevelopments mean there will soon be more people living and moving around the city centre. How we plan and grow our transport network therefore needs to be carefully considered to ensure where we live, work and play is fit for purpose, fair, healthy and supports a sustainable pandemic recovery.

# Council confirms distribution of additional £20M investment for roads infrastructure

Members at a recent meeting of The Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee have agreed the distribution of an additional £20M for the road maintenance programme and also agreed to continue with the current distribution method for the £7.2M base allocation.

The Committee have endorsed five categories of investment to allocate the additional £20M:

- Investment in the road network at a strategic level
- Investment in the road network at an area level
- Investment in the road network at a ward level
- Investment in specialised road maintenance vehicles/plant
- Investment in Active Travel



A budget of £3.7M per annum will be allocated to strategic road maintenance schemes with the aim to target some of the larger, more costly schemes, where significant investment may be required to improve the existing road network, or towards strategic projects which tie in with investment from developer contributions and potential match funding for improvements.

A budget of £3.6M per annum will be distributed across the Operational Areas using the same historic methodology which utilises the road condition survey results (SRMCS). Area Road Managers will consult Members on their proposals for the next two years.

An allocation of £100,000 per annum will be allocated to each council ward. Projects will be at the discretion of ward Members and decisions will be reported to the relevant Area Committees for approval in line with governance arrangements.

£0.5M will be allocated, annually, towards the purchase of specialised vehicles which will assist in the general maintenance of the road network. Wherever possible, fleet investment will focus on delivering the most up to date low carbon plant and machinery.

It is anticipated that there will be further opportunities to promote active travel initiatives over the next two years, so members agreed to an allocation of £100,000 per annum to

support any potential funding bids As for the £7.2M base allocation - £5.2M will be distributed between the Areas for road resurfacing and surface dressing works with £650K allocated for bridge maintenance, £500K for match funding to support bids made under the Strategic Timber Transport Schemes, and £850K for schemes involving road markings, signage, safety fencing, winter drainage and footways across all geographic areas.

The Highland Council has the longest road network in the UK with 4,000 miles of local roads, 1,000 miles of footpaths and 1,400 bridges spanning a region covering one third of Scotland.

Chair Councillor Trish Robertson said:



"The increased spending on roads infrastructure reflects our commitment to invest as much as we can on improving our road network.

This is a high priority for us, our communities and fundamental to connectivity and the entire economy of the Highlands.

"We have the largest network of roads of any Local Authority and our staff have to deal with some of the most severe weather in the UK so this investment is very welcome and will go some way to addressing work that is needed."





# New study reviews options for former Ayr Station Hotel

An independent feasibility study for the former Ayr Station Hotel, has just been published.

The study was commissioned by Transport Scotland on behalf of the Strategic Governance Group and Steering Group which also comprises South Ayrshire Council, Network Rail and ScotRail. It considers and reviews various options for the privately owned B listed building, ranging from full restoration to demolition.

The study includes the results of a public consultation which was carried out in August/September 2020. Public opinion focused on issues such as the importance of town centre living to boost vibrancy, the benefit of a new transport hub, and interest in conserving the building.

It explores a number of options which were expressed during the consultation such as turning the building into private apartments, social housing, office accommodation and even retaining the majority of the building as a hotel. A number of these options have been ruled out in the study as they would require significant private or public

funding ranging from £10-£25m, this would be in excess of 200% and upwards, of the final value of the property on completion.

However, the study says that there has been private sector interest in recent weeks, and an option for the refurbishment of the building for student accommodation will be considered.

Other options which the study says should also be considered are those containing provision for a new train station. Ayr station is critical to the economy of the town and is integral in any ambition for growth and regeneration.

Prior to the pandemic, the station was used by over 1.5 million people, making over 5 million journeys a year. The study says there is undoubtedly demand for an improved and expanded station with better connections to other transportation types such as buses, cars and bicycles.

The train station option could also include a business centre, retail, café, restaurants etc.

Unlike other options, public funding for an improved train station could be made available, although the study makes it clear that this funding would specifically be for the new station.

**Councillor Peter Henderson, Leader of South Ayrshire Council said:**

“I welcome this study, as it gives us viable options as we consider the future of this privately owned building. It’s at such a prime location, a major gateway into Ayr and it can’t be left to crumble away. Unfortunately the lack of input from the current owner makes any progress a challenge, but I feel this study gives us the impetus to find a solution which will help transform the town.”

**Lawrence Shackman, Head of Rail Projects and Technical Services at Transport Scotland added:**

“This feasibility study is a very positive and important milestone in aiming to resolve the issues surrounding the Ayr station hotel building. The strong

evidence it provides for options for the building’s future is testament to the collaborative working by the Strategic Governance Group members. It also offers opportunities to enhance the economic prosperity of the town centre and communities south of Ayr.”

**Liam Sumpter, Network Rail Scotland route director, said:**

“We are working closely with the council, government and our rail industry partners to find a long-term solution for the former hotel. This feasibility study helps set out options for the building and will play an important part in driving change at this site.”

James Ledgerwood, Head of Economic Development & Communities for ScotRail said: “The publication of this study represents a significant step forward in determining a future use for the building and the wider locale. A future use must reflect the importance of the location to Ayr and surrounding communities in the region. The deterioration of the former station hotel has had a significant impact on the quality of service and facilities ScotRail can offer our passengers

travelling through Ayr station. We are committed to continue working with our local and national partners on providing a long-term solution that maximises the economic and social value of the rail network for Ayrshire.”

The Strategic Governance Group will now consider an option which under private investment could see the building turned into student accommodation, and the transport hub options which could see elements of the existing building retained.

You can view the independent feasibility study at [www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/station-building/](http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/station-building/)



Photo © Aaron Bradley (cc-by-sa/2.0)





# Town Centre Funding project agreed for Nairn

Highland Councillors at the Nairnshire Committee today have unanimously agreed to award Nairn BID a total of £28,052 Scottish Government Town Centre funding to deliver projects in Nairn town centre that will help create much-needed economic stimulus for the area.

Projects need to have started by the end of March and grant spent by the end of September.

Councillors agreed to award Nairn BID the full allocation of town centre funding available for a range of environmental improvements in the town centre.

These improvements will include the provision of new signage, notice boards, interpretation boards, location maps, street furniture, flower displays, and decorative vinyl on shop windows (situated at prominent locations on the High Street).

The aim of the project is to improve footfall in the town centre by improving the aesthetic appearance of the area to help make it more appealing for visitors and the local community. In addition, the project aims to promote “buy local” to support local businesses to thrive and grow.

**Councillor Tom Heggie, Chair of the Nairnshire Committee said:**



“Members welcome Nairn BID’s aspirations for this project and we sincerely hope that the town centre funding investment will also encourage

further retail investment in the High Street to help secure its future.

**“Nairn BID’s project will provide a much-needed boost to the local morale and wellbeing of Nairn town centre and will also provide much needed work for local businesses.**

“I am very pleased with the response from Nairn BID and their ability to

work collaboratively with the Council and other community groups which bodes well as a potential model should further Scottish Government funding become available again. Hopefully if more funds come on stream, Nairn will be able to respond swiftly with more ‘shovel-ready’ projects for application.”

Nairn BID’s proposal to councillors was chosen for its eligibility and deliverability, within the timeframe, and the BID’s ability to provide local community benefit and economic boosters as quickly as possible.

# Councillors award over £137,000 Inverness Common Good funds for local projects

Three organisations have been awarded a total £137,240 of Inverness Common Good funds by City of Inverness Area Committee, for local projects to aid community well-being and economic recovery of Inverness.

Inverness BID has been awarded £91,113 for partnership working with the local authority and other organisations for providing floral displays in Inverness (£61,100); delivering the multi-agency ‘Operation Respect’ programme (£9,113), Inverness Gull Project (£11,200) and Inverness Community Safety Partnership (£9,700).

To help the tourism sector recover in the area – Visit Inverness Loch Ness was awarded £30,000 to enable a 2-year marketing project commencing in March 2021 and running till February 2023. The organisation will run a targeted virtual media marketing programme using social media, websites and a range of digital platforms.

Key sites and visitor focal points within the city business improvement district area such as the Victorian Market, Falcon Square, and Eastgate Centre will be included, along with key tourism and hospitality businesses that will impact the economic recovery of Inverness.

High Life Highland’s Inverness Botanic Gardens were also awarded £16,127 towards their innovative “Apples for All - Ubhlan dha na h-uile” project at Bught Apple Park.

This project will create a community orchard around and within the perimeter of Inverness Botanic Gardens by planting a mix of Scottish heritage apple, plum and pear trees.

Apples for All will be maintained and developed by Inverness Botanic Gardens, The Grow Project (adults with learning disabilities) volunteers, and community groups and schools will be invited to get involved.

**The aim of the project is to promote local, sustainable and healthy eating. Access to gardens for people who don’t have any and to provide healthy living opportunities and skills for the Grow Project members, local young people and community volunteers.**

In addition to planting and garden maintenance of the orchard the purchase of an apple press will facilitate seasonal activities such as community juice-making sessions.

# BiFab Acquisition by InfraStrata

The Comhairle strategy during the administration process was to seek an outcome that delivered year-round economic activity with long term sustainable employment and where the anchor tenant has freedom to market Arnish Yard as a distinct facility and primary location for its operations. It is too early to judge whether the acquisition by InfraStrata plc delivers on these aspirations.

**Councillor Donald Crichton, Chairman of Sustainable Development said,**



“It is essential that history does not repeat itself and that any new leaseholder has a robust, costed and sustainable business plan. We

will be writing to the company to seek early engagement and reassurances around their strategy for the next period and to get an understanding of the proposals which they have outlined.

“It appears at this stage, that InfraStrata will have a license to occupy Arnish and that during the license period, they will seek to negotiate terms of a new lease with the landlords, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). HIE should be clear that they will only grant a lease if InfraStrata can evidence a robust business plan that demonstrates that there will be year-round economic activity with long term sustainable employment at Arnish. We will be seeking engagement with HIE to see if we can develop a collective position around the headlines of that lease”.



# Spotlight on City Region Deal progress

Members of The Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee have welcomed the opportunity to review progress of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal which continues to play a pivotal role in delivering significant investment through a variety of ground-breaking projects.

The Inverness and Highland City Region deal is a joint initiative supported by up to £315m investment from the UK and Scottish governments, The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and University of the Highlands and Islands, aimed at stimulating sustainable regional economic growth over a 10-year period. The Deal is currently in year four.

Members were advised that good progress continues to be made despite some delays on specific projects, largely as a result of COVID.

Planning permission has now been granted for the FIT homes development in Nairn and work can commence to prepare for the building of 10 specially designed assisted homes to provide accommodation for tenants with various medical needs that allows them to be supported while maintaining their independence.

Planning permission has also been granted for the Life Science Centre and invitations to tender have been issued.

Works to transform Inverness Castle into a flagship tourism attraction are continuing at pace and participation in

the Spirit of the Highlands initiative has been very positive with over 100 entries received so far.

The Dingwall Newton Room has hosted its first pupils from Dingwall Academy and planning has started on the Inverness Newton Room at the UHI campus.

Construction work on the final phase of the West link project continues following the installation of the new canal crossing bridge and associated road works. The original planned completed date was December 2020, but due to the pandemic and the 3 months cessation of construction projects this has been delayed to March 2021.

Members were advised that the impact of Covid-19 is being felt with some delays and issues arising from previous restrictions but a variety of mitigation measures were able to be put in. Although the current temporary level 4 has not materially affected the construction industry, there are some issues around access to sites, obtaining materials and increased safety measures which may affect timescales but every effort will be made to get projects back on schedule.

**The core overarching aims of the Deal remain to:**

- help to rebalance the population through the aim of attracting and/or retaining an additional 1,500 young people in the 18-29 age group;
- create 1,125 direct jobs with a further 2,200 jobs in construction;
- help to upskill the labour market to move to a high wage high skill economy adding an extra £100m pa to the regional economy;
- deliver 6,000 homes over a 20-year period, of which 1,600 will be affordable; and
- deliver private sector investment of £800m over a 20-year period in the region.

After going through the progress report, members of the Committee agreed the Annual Report for 2019/20 which will now be published.

**Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Councillor Trish Robertson said:**

"We are now completing year four of the ten-year City Region Deal and excellent progress is being made across a diverse range of projects as we aim to capitalise on the substantial opportunities and investments.

"As the Covid pandemic continues it is having an impact on the City Region Deal projects, but all partners are working hard to adapt to current constraints and finding new creative ways to deliver. I am sure that great progress will continue to be made throughout these challenging times and we look forward to receiving more updates as projects move forward."

# Town Centre Funding projects agreed for Badenoch and Strathspey communities

Highland Councillors at the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee have unanimously approved 7 projects that will be offered a total £111,724 Scottish Government Town Centre funding to help deliver economic stimulus in the eligible settlements of Aviemore, Granttown-on-Spey, Kingussie and Newtonmore.

Projects need to have started by the end of March and grant spent by the end of September.

Councillors today agreed that the following 7 successful projects will be offered Town Centre Funds:

**Aviemore Village Green** – £29,300 to Aviemore Community Enterprise for further hard landscaping works to the village green including: re-surfacing paths, access ramp, improving access for all abilities, and new stone-built seating to make the area more useable and create a more attractive environment.

**Aviemore War Memorial** - £24,504 to Legion Scotland (Aviemore Branch) for environmental improvements to the War Memorial site including: groundworks, natural stone planters, steps from main street to memorial, new paving, a Poppy sculpture, memorial poppy wreath stand and a stand and electrics for Christmas tree.

**Granttown Square** - £7,570 to Granttown Initiative for the supply and installation of new electrical ducting and cabling to replace existing faulty network in the Square. In turn this will stimulate greater use of the space for outdoor events.

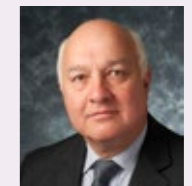
**Caberfeidh Horizons, Kingussie** - £22,000 to Caberfeidh Horizons for

further physical improvements to the community hub including a new front door and 8 replacement windows.

**Gynack Gardens, Kingussie** - £10,350 to Kingussie Community Development Company for further environmental improvements to the garden. Proposed works consist of: new bench seating, extension and planter; power supply for Christmas tree; new fencing; relocation of the roe deer sculpture to beside the river bank; mature flowering specimen for North end (bus stop); two new all ability picnic benches; Spring woodland bulbs provided for the Primary school to plant; installation of additional safety barrier opposite school; maintenance of wild flower meadow; and removal of the avenue of 10 old Cherry trees.

**Market Stance Playing Field, Kingussie** - £10,000 to Kingussie Camanachd Club to assist in the upgrade of the Market Stance Playing Field. The project is to fence the boundary, install floodlights, and do some ground works and grass seeding.

**Newtonmore War Memorial** - £8,000 to Newtonmore Business Association to improve accessibility to the War Memorial by carrying out improvements to the paths.



**Councillor Bill Lobban, Chair of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee said:**

"I am absolutely delighted that my fellow Members have agreed to these Town Centre funded projects across our area in Aviemore, Granttown-on-Spey, Kingussie and Newtonmore. The applications are all from groups within the heart of our communities and they will provide a much-needed boost to local morale and will also provide much needed construction work for local businesses.

**"I am delighted with this Scottish Government funding and should future funds become available again, I urge local communities to have projects shovel-ready so that they can apply."**



Image © Martin Briscoe



# Isle of Skye and Raasay Investment plan website and online survey now live

A new website and online survey have now 'gone live' to allow people in Skye and Raasay to air their views on future investment and what they see are the priorities for the area.

The Skye and Raasay Investment Plan webpage (<https://www.highland.gov.uk/skyeraasay>) will be the focal point for people to get involved and share information gathered so far.

Representatives from key groups across Skye and Raasay met on 28 January 2021 to launch the process of preparing the new Investment Plan for the area.

That workshop was attended by over 60 people who are actively involved in delivering improvements in the area and was aimed at gathering initial views on the issues which needed to be addressed.

The website and online survey will help prepare for future engagement events that are scheduled to continue after the lockdown, including Community Councils and local interest groups.

The aim is to produce a Draft Investment Plan to the Skye and Raasay Area Committee in the spring.

People can visit the online survey at Skye and Raasay Investment Plan (<https://www.consult.highland.gov.uk/kse/event/36021>)

**Chair of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee, Councillor John Gordon, said:**



"It is key that communities have as much engagement into this plan as possible, as this will shape Skye and Raasay for years to come and will also have the potential to

release funding which is so needed across our two islands.

"The input so far has been positive with many stakeholders getting involved. The approach of everyone working together is working well and also important going forward. I want to encourage as many people as possible to have their say and to engage with this plan."

**Eilean a' Cheò Councillor John Finlayson and Chair of the Highland Council's Education Committee, said:**



"It is important we get as much feedback as possible as we look to move forward the Skye and Raasay Plan which includes so many ambitious projects, including school and

early learning projects, which can only be realised through partnership working with key stakeholders and communities."

**Chair of the Gaelic Committee and Eilean a' Cheò Councillor Calum Munro, said:**



"The development of an investment and infrastructure plan for Skye and Raasay provides many opportunities for Gaelic language and cultural development.

"Gaelic is an integral part of the lives of many in this area. It has a large part to play in our aspirations for sustainable tourism and many of the economic and infrastructure outcomes of the plan will help us sustain our Gaelic communities through employment and housing.

"I'm delighted that Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig were represented at the initial stakeholders' event and they have an important part to play in influencing the future of Gaelic in Skye and Raasay."

## Useful Links

The Skye and Raasay Investment Plan webpage  
[www.highland.gov.uk/skyeraasay](https://www.highland.gov.uk/skyeraasay)

Visit the online survey at Skye and Raasay Investment Plan  
[www.consult.highland.gov.uk/kse/event/36021](https://www.consult.highland.gov.uk/kse/event/36021)

# AMCF Projects offer innovation and opportunity to businesses

Two advanced manufacturing aerospace projects to support small to medium-enterprises (SMEs) in the west of Scotland have officially launched, following investment from the Advancing Manufacturing Challenge Fund (AMCF).

The Aerospace Digital Visualisation Suite (ADVS) and Supply Chain AeroSpace (SCA) aim to create transformational change in the aerospace and space sectors through opportunity and innovation. Both projects have been established following a successful bid to the AMCF by South Ayrshire Council (SAC), together with its partners Ayrshire College, the University of Strathclyde and Ayrshire Engineering Alliance, securing £2 million investment in ERDF and match funding from SAC.

The ADVS is based at the Aeronautical Engineering Training Centre at Ayrshire College's Ayr Campus. It offers SMEs access to innovative Extended Reality (XR) technology, helping them enter or expand their presence in the aerospace sector. Using cutting edge XR - incorporating Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) - and digital visualisation, the ADVS helps companies to innovate, develop skills and improve productivity. The services of the ADVS are available to eligible SMEs at no charge.

The SCA project supports SMEs to improve their productivity and competitiveness through the introduction of innovative manufacturing technologies via the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS). It also works with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and Tier One suppliers to identify supply chain opportunities for SMEs to join the aerospace and space sectors, or grow their contribution. Like

its sister project ADVS, the services of SCA are available to eligible SMEs at no charge.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the launch of both projects took place virtually in early February 2021, under the banner of Advancing Manufacturing AeroSpace. Hosted by the Centre for Engineering Education & Development (Ceed), the online event was well attended by industry experts and representatives from academia, as well as local government and SMEs.

**Councillor Siobhian Brown, South Ayrshire Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture, said:**



"We are delighted the Aerospace Digital Visualisation Suite and Supply Chain AeroSpace projects are now operational, offering a superb resource to help companies innovate, develop skills and improve productivity. Together these projects will play a key role in strengthening Scotland's manufacturing industry, while making a significant contribution to Prestwick's aerospace sector and complementing the Ayrshire Growth Deal."

**Gavin Murray, Director of Curriculum at Ayrshire College said:**

"Ayrshire College is thrilled to be hosting, albeit virtually for the time being, the Aerospace Digital

Visualisation Suite (ADVS) within our Aeronautical Engineering Training Centre on our Ayr Campus. There has already been a significant level of interest and engagement with the facility, which bodes well for the future. The ADVS is very much up and running and providing vital support to the Aerospace sector. I would encourage all SMEs to engage with the team to maximise opportunities for their businesses."

South Ayrshire Council is the Lead Organisation for both projects. The Steering Group is supported by NMIS, with colleagues in the Faculty of Engineering in the University of Strathclyde; Ayrshire College; Ayrshire Engineering Alliance; Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service and Scottish Enterprise. The Advancing Manufacturing Challenge Fund is a partnership between the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. A full list of successful projects is available on the AMCF website. Total investment is £15.8 million, with £8.3 million from the European Regional Development Fund, £590,000 from the Scottish Government, and the remainder in match-funding from the chosen projects.

For more information on the ADVS and SCA, including details on how to get involved with either project, please visit [www.am-aerospace.co.uk](http://www.am-aerospace.co.uk)





Image Source: Minerals Local Development Plan

## Local Development Plan nominated for prestigious planning industry award

The East Ayrshire Minerals Local Development Plan has been named as a finalist in the category for Excellence in Plan Making Practice at the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Awards for Planning Excellence 2021.

The RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence are the most established and respected awards in the UK planning industry. Running for over 40 years, they celebrate exceptional examples of planning and the contribution planners make to society.

The Minerals Local Development Plan has a focus on restoration which was key to securing a £2.2 million regeneration lottery grant prior to its adoption.

**Councillor Jim Roberts, Chair of the East Ayrshire Planning Committee and Cabinet spokesperson for the environment and infrastructure was delighted to hear of the nomination.**



He said: "Our Minerals Local Development Plan is a very worthy finalist in this award category and I commend our planning officers and our Member/Officer Working Group for their innovative approach in taking this forward."

"This Plan was borne out of social, economic and environmental disaster following the demise of the opencast coal industry in the area, but far from doing the bare minimum, the Council sought to find creative solutions to actively address the issues it faced."

"The Council has taken the lead in implementing and regenerating, using the Plan as a driver to deliver positive outcomes for our local communities."

"I wish the team well when the winners are declared in a few weeks' time!"

**RTPI President Wei Yang FRTPi said:**

"Many congratulations to all the finalists at this year's RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence – these projects, teams and individuals showcase the very best of the planning profession from all the RTPI's regions and nations and from countries around the world."

**The winners will be announced during a ceremony held virtually in the Awards Room on Evessio at 4pm on Thursday 29 April 2021.**

**"For over 40 years, these prestigious awards have celebrated the exceptional work undertaken by town planners. In the middle of a global pandemic, I believe they are more relevant than ever before, recognising the incredible commitment and dedication of planners who have risen to the challenge of responding to the impacts of Covid-19 on the planning system."**

**"I wish all the finalists the very best of luck"**

## Inverness Castle transformation; Front door of castle building revealed

The front door of Inverness Castle – the original formal entrance – has been revealed recently for the first time in almost 50 years, as part of the transformation of the building to create a gateway for Highland tourism. The former entrance lobby in the Castle has also been reopened to the large ceremonial staircase behind, reinstating the dramatic original entrance that the building once enjoyed.

Until March 2020 the castle had been occupied by the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. During this period, a second court room was installed in the area immediately behind the front door, blocking the formal entrance to the building and an alternative door was used for access to the building. However, as part of the ongoing works at the castle, this relatively recent addition to the castle is being removed. This work is being carried out as part of the enabling contract, a programme of initial work carried out in advance of the main contract.

It includes checks for asbestos, timber preservation and the building structure.

The transformation of Inverness Castle is supported by £15 million Scottish Government and £3 million UK Government investment through the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal. It will create a gateway for Highland tourism, contributing to reinvigoration of tourism across the area and providing much needed investment for the industry to aid the recovery from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The project will support economic growth throughout the Highland area, creating a sustainable, viable and "must-see" attraction that will celebrate the spirit of the Highlands.

The Inverness and Highland City Region deal is a joint initiative supported by up to £315m investment from the UK and Scottish governments, The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and University of the Highlands and Islands, aimed at stimulating sustainable regional economic growth.

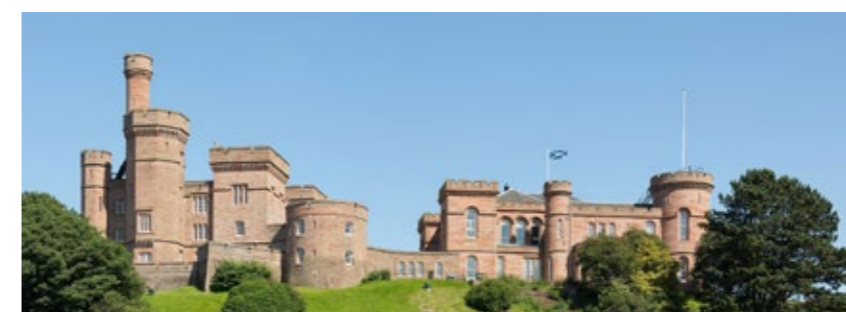


Photo by DAVID ILIFF. License: CC BY-SA 3.0

## Landscaping proposals lodged

Landscaping proposals for the Inverness Castle development have now been lodged with The Highland Council as part of the statutory applications for the planned transformation for Inverness Castle to become a tourism gateway for the Highlands.

The landscaping proposals show how the Castle grounds will become an integral part of the experience for people visiting the attraction in years to come. The designs, which remodel the castle esplanade and external courtyards, are intended to create a new and accessible city-centre destination. They include new hard and soft landscaping, seating areas, viewpoints and feature plantings that reflect the native species of the Highlands. The proposals have been designed to integrate with the castle itself to allow the renovated interiors to connect with the new external areas.

The proposals can be seen on The Highland Council planning portal, within the application for listed building consent and building warrant approval submitted last month by project architects LDN Architects. These applications are in preparation for the main building works contract. This contract will be subject to a tender process beginning in spring of 2021. Enabling works are already underway involving demolition work, asbestos surveys, timber preservation surveys and structural checks.

Note, all timings for the Castle transformation are subject to change, depending on the findings of the ongoing enabling works contract (due for completion in spring 2021) and the impact of the ongoing pandemic.





## Over £¼m for new Inverclyde culture club

A MAJOR new project capitalising on Inverclyde’s vibrant arts sector to make a difference to people’s lives has been awarded more than £¼ million.

The council, in partnership with the Beacon Arts Centre, CVS Inverclyde, Kayos Theatre Group and RIG Arts, has secured £275,000 from Creative Scotland’s new ‘Culture Collective’ fund.

The money will be used to deliver a range of events, experiences and projects over the next 18 months aimed at boosting health and wellbeing, improving local communities and encouraging greater participation in the cultural sector.

**Councillor Jim Clocherty, Inverclyde Council’s convener of education and communities, said:**



“We’re proud to be working in partnership with and bringing together so many diverse organisations to use our unique arts and cultural sector to benefit people across Inverclyde.

“This funding will allow all the partners to work individually and collectively on a wide range of projects ultimately designed to improve our communities and, most importantly, the people who make them.

“It provides some much-needed positivity for Inverclyde after the events of the last year and I look forward to seeing how things unfold over the next 18 months.”

The project will also focus on engaging with people in harder to reach areas, supporting freelancers and developing local talent.

**Pauline Kane, theatre director of the Beacon Arts Centre, said:**

“We welcome the news of Creative Scotland’s Culture Collective Fund for Inverclyde and are thrilled to be a partner in this.

“The funding will allow us to explore new ways of working meaningfully and creatively with our local communities and the area’s many talented creative practitioners, with a focus on the recovery of both Inverclyde and the wider cultural sector.

“We look forward to working with our partners to deliver new cultural experiences and bring about positive change for the wider area.”

As well as reaching out to people of all ages across the district, the project will support over 40 artists.

**Kat Boyle, arts coordinator from CVS Inverclyde, said:**

“This is such brilliant news for Inverclyde.

“Collectively this activity will allow for freelance creative practitioners and organisations to develop their programmes throughout the next 18 months across the breadth of the local authority area.

“Our intention is to create a context for artists to experiment with alternate modes of sharing practice by test piloting new local partnership and community projects that offer a window into new collaborative ways of working including residency and artist exchange process.

“We will investigate key themes specific to Inverclyde: health and social care, with a focus on adult mental health; young people; regeneration of communities; outdoor work; and engaging with areas that have low arts engagement and barriers to access.

“Funding will provide a context for both emerging and established artists to push the boundaries of their practice and think about radical solutions to how we can sensitively collaborate and make work with local communities.”

The Inverclyde consortium is one of 26 from across Scotland to benefit from nearly £6m of funding to support creative practitioners, organisations and communities to work together across the country to help shape the future of local cultural life.

**Kevin Jannetts, artistic director of Inverclyde Youth Theatre (Kayos), said:**

“We are thrilled to be part of the Culture Collective and that Inverclyde has been successful in its funding bid.

“We are excited to expand our working with other local creative practitioners and organisations and our local communities who have been particularly affected by Covid-19.”

**Karen Orr, chief executive of RIG Arts, added:**

“We are delighted to be a part of Inverclyde’s successful Culture Collective bid.

**“We are passionate about using creativity and innovation to influence change and to make a positive difference in people’s lives and their environments.”**

“We hope that our contribution to the programme through; ‘Open Studio’ providing opportunities for young people and nurturing creative talent, ‘Inside Outside’ working with the community to develop green spaces for wellbeing and ‘Creativity in Mind’ helping adults maintain positive mental health will help Inverclyde residents cope and recover from this difficult period.”

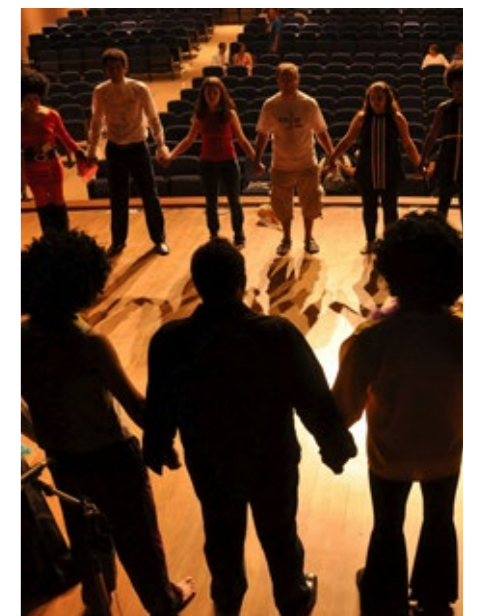
More information about the Creative Scotland funding announcement is available at:

<https://www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/latest-news/archive/2021/02/culture-collective-recipients>.

CULTURE COLLECTIVE FUND



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL







## Doon Academy's community art project is a sign for our times

The young people of Doon Academy have created an inspirational piece of art that has recently been installed on the Masonic Lodge building in Dalmellington.

The artwork, which carries the inspirational words 'Life is tough, but so are you' was created by the young people as part of a community art project led by the school's Expressive Arts department – Miss Fletcher, Miss Black and Miss Donnelly. They wanted to create an outdoor mural that had a mental health theme and provide a positive statement for the local community. It was also the perfect opportunity for their young people to learn from a practicing artist while producing something inspiring that everyone could be proud of.

The young people engaged with teachers, peers, parents and guardians and the local community on the wording for their artwork. Once this important decision was made, the school worked alongside Helen Duncan from East Ayrshire Creative Minds, she organised for Frank Carty from Artisan Artworks to work with the young people for a week, back in 2019. Frank worked with two groups of pupils from S1 and S3, teaching sign writing tools, techniques and materials. The sketches the young people created of the lettering were used on the sign with support from Frank.

During the week the sign was created, the school hosted a community event and were supported by community worker Danielle Winters, who organised for the local community and elected members to attend. This community event provided the opportunity for invited guests and parents to hear about the project directly from the young people and some people even contributed to the project by painting part of the sign. Frank Carty installed the sign, which was completed early in 2020, on Wednesday 27 January this year following planning permission being granted.

**Councillor Fiona Campbell, Cabinet Member for Skills and Learning said:** "This community art project is wonderful. Doon Academy's Expressive Arts department, Miss Fletcher, Miss Black and Miss Donnelly, are to be commended for creating a project for their young people that connects back directly to the local community. They couldn't have imagined when the project started the huge changes and difficulties that all our communities were set to experience. The sign is for our times, I haven't been able to visit in person to see the sign in situ but the

photographs are wonderful and the art is inspiring. Well done to everyone involved."

**Miss Fletcher, Principal Teacher said:** "We are overjoyed at the response to the project so far and are extremely proud of all of the Doon Academy pupils who helped create this piece of community art. We would like to thank the Masonic Social Club for allowing the sign to be installed on their building.

**"The sign is a great example of community partnership with Expressive Arts Staff, Doon Academy Pupils, the Creative Minds Team, Artisan Artworks and the Masonic Club, all coming together to create a piece of art with a message that is more relevant now than ever."**

## Funding to create arts and culture venue at site of former church in Alexandria

Funding to bring a former church in Alexandria back to life as an arts and creative venue has been awarded to West Dunbartonshire Council.

The £750,000 grant from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund will go towards plans to transform the B-Listed former St Andrew's Church, creating studios, workshops, training space, event and exhibition areas and a cafe.

The creation of Viresco Studios and Arts Centre, which is being led by local charity Viresco Studios SCIO in partnership with the Council, will encourage wider participation in the arts, creative enterprises and cultural activity in the area.

The workshop areas will focus on micro manufacturing of materials like wood and textiles, with the aim of encouraging startups to make use of the space.

Seven artists' studios will be created in addition to recreational space which will give local residents the opportunity to participate in creative activities and supporting people to access the wider creative industries sector, with

particular emphasis on developing the young workforce through work placements and experience.

The venue will also have a training kitchen focussed on using local food producers and growers and organising bespoke dining experiences.

The interior will include bespoke furniture and features designed and manufactured by local artists and craftspeople, all inspired by local history and heritage.

The programme will also engage local residents, offering them the opportunity to work alongside artists to bring their own designs to life.

Alongside the award from the RCGF, Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland will be asked to part-fund the project.

The building, which closed as a place of worship in 1995, has been derelict since 2012.



Image Source: [www.virescostudios.org.uk](http://www.virescostudios.org.uk)

**Councillor Iain McLaren, Convener of Infrastructure, Regeneration and Economic Development said:**

"This building has long been a focal point and landmark in Alexandria and bringing it back into use as a venue which will offer so much to the community is a wonderful idea.

"I'm sure that Viresco Studios will be an invaluable resource for local residents and also attract visitors to the area, benefitting the whole town centre.

"Alexandria has a rich history in the textiles industry and I'm pleased this facility will provide the resource for local people to become involved with it in the future.

"I look forward to seeing this project progress."

The proposed development will bring an initial investment of £1m to Alexandria for the restoration, with an estimated £250,000 to be invested in the next five years.

Up to 20 jobs will be created through the building works.

Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell said: "The Regeneration Capital Grant Fund is all about enhancing communities by delivering new or refurbished buildings for local people, and this former church will be a fantastic accessible space for wider participation in a range of arts and creative activities.

"Alongside COSLA we are delivering a further £25 million of investment this year to 26 new projects across Scotland and I am pleased that Alexandria will benefit from a share of this funding."





## Shetland Library's 'most borrowed' in 2020

Shetland Library's 'most borrowed' lists for 2020 were a little different to usual, with a large uptake in eBook reading and audiobooks during the pandemic.

Normally the highest loans are among adult fiction and the top spot for 'physical' loans in 2020 went to Jojo Moyes' *The Giver of Stars*, a novel about packhorse librarians in the USA.

Ann Cleeves, who topped this chart for many years, was second with *The Long Call*, the first of her new series set in Devon. Other popular authors were Elly Griffiths, Val McDermid, Peter May, Graham Norton and Ian Rankin and there was still a lot of interest in *The Sixteen Trees of the Somme* by Lars Mytting, which is partly set in Shetland.

Most borrowed physical non-fiction book was *The Frayed Atlantic Edge* by David Gange, the story of his canoe journey from Shetland to Cornwall, which was launched in Shetland Library in 2019. Michelle Obama's autobiography *Becoming* was also very popular, as was *The Salt Path* by Winn Raynor. In fact, when issues of eBooks and eAudiobooks are added these sit at first and second in the non-fiction ranking respectively.

Top local physical book was *Spy Fever: The Post Office Affair* by Margaret Flaws - perhaps spurred by interest in the closure of Lerwick's main post office, which was big news early in 2020. This is the extraordinary tale of how all the Post Office staff were locked up during the First World War, suspected of spying.

eBooks made a big difference to Shetland lending too however, and once e-loans are added Marsali Taylor takes first and second place in the Shetland rankings. Marsali had done well with eBook loans for some years.

The Library was completely closed for just over two months due to the 2020 lockdown and then gradually reinstated lending of physical books. There was also a publishing hiatus and the UK's biggest book wholesaler, Bertrams, went out of business, meaning the library had to set up new contracts before new stock could start coming in again.

The service introduced a second eBook platform, Borrowbox, last summer and invested in extra stock as well as promoting the service heavily. This meant many people of all ages tried eBooks for the first time.

Jeff Kinney and David Walliams again dominated the junior chart but old favourite Harry Potter bested them both thanks to huge audiobook loans. Audiobooks were the big story of the year. Very few are now loaned on CD, but because eAudio can be listened to easily on phones or tablets it has really taken off. Some titles are available on multi-user licences meaning many readers can borrow a title simultaneously.

Overall, the year's real top titles when combining online loans were:

1. J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* – 182 issues, nearly all eAudio
2. Jojo Moyes: *The Giver of Stars* – 146 issues
3. Marian Keyes: *Grown Ups* – 100 issues
4. Michelle Obama: *Becoming* – 95 issues

Demand for physical loans came back very strongly once the Library reopened, and by October 2020 borrowing levels of physical stock was back to pre-lockdown levels. Even now while the Library is operating under extra restrictions again, loans of physical books remain high. Home deliveries alone can account for as many as 800 loans a week.

**Karen Fraser, Executive Manager – Library Services, said**

"Whether online or offline, it is clear that reading is playing a big part in people's lives during the pandemic."

## A selection of new Scottish Fiction available to District Librarians from Spring 2021

### A Most Convenient Lie

by Robert McCall

Available to buy [here](#)

"Jim Boyd finds life uncomfortable in the oppressive British society of 2042, where woke sensibilities and political correctness are the order of the day, enforced by punitive laws. However, when his best friend dies in suspicious circumstances, he is unexpectedly thrust into a position of real authority and to the heart of momentous events.

As he uses that new found power to investigate the mystery of his friend's death, he unexpectedly stumbles across a far greater secret, stretching back for generations and which has manipulated millions of lives. Now, only he can make known the truth, but at terrible cost to himself and his young family.

Can he risk everything that ever mattered to him in one last dramatic throw of the dice, to finally expose the Climate Change Hoax?"

**"The book that will get everyone thinking! I guess there's two sides of every story..."**

– Amazon Customer



### The House Beside the Cherry Tree

by L. Taylor

Available to buy [here](#)

1959 was a different time, when gender roles were fixed and one naive mistake can change everything. Diane found this out the hard way and not only loses her future but also herself and eventually her mind. Diane's husband Richard, barely a man when he put the ring on Diane's finger, struggles to understand and keep the family together. Ultimately it is their daughter, Frankie, who pays the price and learns that not all mothers are as loving as they should be."

### Go Live Your Life

by Yvonne Bostock

Available to buy [here](#)

"A simple guide for young people leaving home - make your own rules for life and here are some ideas and a reminder of the really important things - but written in light-hearted rhyming verse with funky drawings. Sometimes funny, sometimes witty but fundamentally covering just about all areas of life - looking after yourself, believing in yourself, learning to 'fly', live and love your passion and be the success you were born to be. Go live your life is simply a handbook for how to be happy, succeed in life and make a difference in the world.



### The Wolf Mile

by C. F. Barrington

Available 6th May 2021 [here](#)

A forbidden contest. An international game.

Bankrolled by the world's wealthy elite and followed by thousands online, two teams of warriors vie for dominance ... and the streets of Edinburgh run with blood.

Into this secret struggle steps Tyler Maitland, seeking his lost sister, and Lana Cameron, grieving her dead child. When they are accosted by figures in black hoodies and each handed a silver amulet, they recognise the Triple Horn of Odin – the talisman of the Valhalla Horde. They are being recruited into the great game known as The Pantheon. And one day they will change everything.

Now they must risk their lives and join the ranks of seven ancient warrior teams which inhabit this illicit world. Their journey will be more wondrous and horrifying than anything they could have dreamed, taking each of them to the depths of their souls ... and testing them to breaking point as they search for loved ones and for the meaning in their lives.

**Let the Season begin.**







# Playwright and performer wins Burns Humanitarian Award

The founder of a theatre group which helps those battling addiction has won the 2021 Robert Burns Humanitarian Award. Mark Williamson won the prestigious award recently during a special online ceremony.



Mark Williamson, founder of Sweet for Addicts and winner of the 2021 Robert Burns Humanitarian Award.

Part of the annual Burns an' a' that! Festival celebrations, the RBHA is supported by South Ayrshire Council.

Mark is the founder of 'Sweet for Addicts', a non-profit recovery-based theatre group based in Glasgow. Mark formed the group in 2006 and has since worked with hundreds of people as they journey their way out of addiction.

Everyone who performs with Sweet for Addicts has a connection with addiction, whether person or through, a loved one, friend, acquaintance or family member. Mark does not hold auditions, but instead offers everyone the opportunity to be involved in a positive way. Whether that's choosing to go on stage and act,

sing or dance, or to play an important role through the lighting, sound and prop preparation.

Since 2006, Mark has taken Sweet for Addicts to venues throughout Scotland to perform more than 20 plays, many of which he has written or directed.

**On receiving the RBHA, Mark said:** "I would like to congratulate everyone who was nominated, I was stunned to find myself a finalist in such company as Dr Varatharajah Thurairajah and Dr Alexander Paterson, and to win this award is a real honour. I accept this and dedicate it to all who have worked with Sweet for Addicts and to those we have lost along the way."

**Chair of the RBHA judging panel and Leader of South Ayrshire Council, Councillor Peter Henderson said:** "Congratulations to Mark, without his intervention there would be many more people battling addiction across Scotland. Mark goes out of his way to give everyone a chance no matter their circumstances, he is an inspiration to us all."

Also recognised at the award ceremony were fellow finalists Dr Varatharajah

Thurairajah and Dr Alexander Paterson.

Dr Varatharajah Thurairajah, also known as Dr Varathan, treated civilians caught up in the Sri Lankan civil war which lasted for 26 years.

Dr Alexander 'Sandy' Paterson is a medical oncologist whose work is renowned around the world. As well as practising in the UK, US and Canada during his career, he also volunteers in the teaching of medical skills to students all over the world.

As well as the RBHA 2021 title, Mark receives the equivalent of 1759 guineas (approximately £1,800) – a sum which signifies the year of the Bard's birth and the coinage in circulation at that time.



The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award



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# Holyrood to define scrutiny role in response to Brexit

A panel of fiscal, economic and constitutional experts says devolution is now much more complex, with its recent fiscal powers and post-Brexit changes, that the Scottish Parliament must change its approach to scrutiny after the 2021 election.

The panel recommends that to support this work a short, tightly focused independent review of the committee structure should be established, to report back to Parliament as soon as possible.

The focus of the review should be on committee remits in the next Parliament and should include consideration of the fiscal and Brexit-related issues raised by the experts, along with the legacy reports of other committees.

Holyrood's Finance & Constitution Committee, who commissioned the expert panel's analysis, will consider the findings next week.

**Expert panel member Professor James Mitchell, University of Edinburgh said:**

"Devolution is now much more complex and challenging to understand with the powers of Scottish Ministers shared



Image © Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

with UK Ministers in many significant policy areas. For example, in relation to income tax and in many policy areas previously within the competence of the EU. This means that the Parliament will need to be much more aware of how UK legislation impacts on devolved areas including the extent to which it constrains the powers of Scottish Ministers.

"At the same time the Parliament will need to continue to scrutinise policy developments at an EU level. Both in terms of the on-going impact of the UK-EU trade agreement on devolved areas and the extent to which the keeping pace power is used."

**Setting out the expert panel's recommendations, Charlotte Barbour, Director of Taxation, The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland said:**

"The Panel's view is that if there is to be meaningful scrutiny of Brexit-related developments, the Parliament cannot merely continue with the existing approach to its scrutiny function. The future scrutiny burden arising from Brexit is so great that if it is carried out in an ad-hoc manner it is unlikely that it will be done effectively.

"Instead, a more systematic and carefully planned approach is required, albeit with a need for flexibility in order to react to changing circumstances. The Panel, therefore, recommends



Image © Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

that Parliament in consultation with the Scottish Government needs to clearly define its scrutiny role in response to Brexit.

"To support this work, we propose that a short and tightly focused independent review of the committee structure should be established forthwith and report to the Parliament as soon as practically possible.

"The focus of the review should be on committee remits in the next Parliament and should include consideration of the issues raised in this report and the legacy reports of other committees.

"The review findings should help to inform the agreement of the committee structure and committee remits for Session 6."

**The expert panel also made recommendations for the committee that will succeed the Finance & Constitution Committee after the May 2021 election:**

- The Panel's view is that there is likely to be an increased demand for parliamentary time to consider tax legislation and therefore the ongoing work of the Devolved Taxes

Legislative Working Group should be an early priority in Session 6.

- The Panel agreed the successor committee should explore how COVID-19 has impacted the taxation system and consider options for a restructuring of the taxes which are devolved including a human-rights based approach. The Panel recommends that this inquiry should be a priority for the successor committee.

**Finance & Constitution Committee Convener Bruce Crawford MSP said:**

"The calibre of our expert panel speaks volumes. I welcome this insightful, authoritative analysis. There is much for our committee and the rest of the Parliament to consider. I am sure it will be influential on the establishment of committees in the new Parliament."

**The panel members, in alphabetical order, are:**

- Charlotte Barbour, Director of Taxation, The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland
- Douglas Fraser, Business & Economy Editor, BBC Scotland

- Professor Michael Keating, Centre on Constitutional Change
- Professor James Mitchell, University of Edinburgh
- Christine O'Neill QC, Chairman, Brodies LLP
- Mairi Spowage, Deputy Director, Fraser of Allander Institute
- Mark Taylor, Audit Director Audit Scotland
- Dr Hannah White, Deputy Director, Institute of Government.

They were joined by Professor Tom Mullen, Professor Kenneth Armstrong and David Phillips who are Advisers to the Finance & Constitution Committee. Dr Jim Johnston Clerk to the Committee chaired the panel. Support was provided by parliament officials.





Photo © Tom Parnell (cc-by-sa/2.0)

## Council strategy to bring at least 100 empty homes back into use

The four-year Empty Homes Strategy 2021-24 has been designed to assist with housing waiting lists, to help alleviate homelessness, support town centre regeneration and ensure a reduction in problems caused by empty properties.

It follows a previous successful plan implemented by the Council's Housing service, which saw the number of homes being empty for more than six months reduce from 439 in 2019, to 352 in 2020.

To continue the downward trend, the Council's Empty Homes Officer identifies empty properties through various sources including council tax records.

Owners are then provided with advice and information on various options available to them, as well as given financial and practical assistance.

The Empty Homes Strategy 2021-24 was discussed at a recent meeting of the Housing and Communities committee, where elected members approved the target to bring a minimum of 25 empty homes back into use every year in West Dunbartonshire.

Members were also told of ongoing plans from the Scottish Government to introduce compulsory sale orders for vacant homes, which the Empty Homes Officer could use as an additional tool when all other means of engaging with the owner is exhausted.

**Councillor Diane Docherty, Convener of Housing and Communities, said:**



**Renovating empty homes is so important because it helps local economies. As we know, Covid-19 has severely affected local businesses and retailers working in building and construction.**

**"When an empty home is being renovated or repaired, local builders and contractors are likely to be hired, who in turn purchase materials from local suppliers. With Scottish Government figures showing that every £1 spent on renovating property in Scotland generates an additional £1.60 for the economy, this is an important task which will benefit the whole of West Dunbartonshire."**



**Councillor Caroline McAllister, Vice Convener of the Committee, added:**

**"I am so pleased to see the progress being made to bring these empty properties back into use, and our plans to expand on these for the benefit of our communities. Not only will this help with homelessness and waiting lists, but it will also support the regeneration of our town centres."**

## Families pick up the keys to new Council housing in St. Ninians

Families are opening the doors to new council housing in St Ninian's after they officially picked up the keys to their homes.

Stirling Council's commitment to providing more affordable homes for residents across the region has delivered 10 new council houses within local builder Ogilvie Homes King's Meadow development.

The new houses at Monteith Avenue were built as part of Stirling Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP), which aims to provide new high-quality, sustainable, affordable homes for Stirling residents.

To reduce the risk of fuel poverty for tenants, Stirling Council has also fitted solar panels with battery storage across the Monteith Avenue properties.

**The properties being handed over include:**

- 4 x 1 bedroom cottage flats
- 3 x 2 bedroom terraced homes
- 1 x 2 bedroom bungalow
- 2 x 3 bedroom semi-detached properties

**Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor Evelyn Tweed said,**



**"Stirling Council has ambitious plans to invest in and deliver affordable housing across the council area so we are pleased to hand the keys over to our new tenants and I hope they are delighted with these high quality, energy efficient homes."**

**Depute Portfolio Holder, Councillor Alasdair MacPherson said:**



**"I welcome that this project has received grant funding of £590,000 from the Scottish Government and this funding helps us to increase the number of new affordable homes that we can build in Stirling."**

**Depute Portfolio holder for Housing, Councillor Danny Gibson, said:**



**"This development is the first of many that will be completed by Stirling Council and other Registered Social Landlords in 2021 and these new developments will help many people on our housing list to access good quality affordable housing."**

The Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) 2021/22 to 2025/26 set out the Council's approach to invest in and deliver affordable housing throughout Stirling over the next five years.

The Plan has the potential to deliver more than 1,400 homes, the majority of which would be provided by Stirling Council, Forth Housing Association and Rural Stirling Housing Association







## Council wins another top housing award!

The travellers site at Coalpots Road in Girvan, South Ayrshire has just scooped another national housing award!

The site won the 'Excellence in development for affordable housing award' at the CIH Scotland housing awards.

Indeed, the awards keep coming for these innovative chalet style bungalows; last year the site clinched top spot at the Scottish Home Awards.

Completed by McTaggart Construction in August 2019 at a cost of £1.6 million, the housing which was part funded by the Council and Scottish Government,

replaced the former Houdston travellers site in Girvan, which was damaged by flooding.

**Councillor Philip Saxton, Housing and Community Wellbeing Portfolio Holder said:**



"I am delighted with this award, it's further recognition of this important development and the extra effort that went in to ensuring

the homes met all the needs of the travellers. With accolades like this, we know we are delivering affordable housing, which ensures the people of South Ayrshire can grow well, live well and age well."

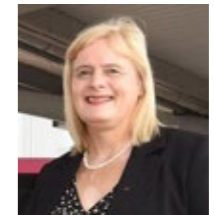
The CIH Scotland housing awards recognise and celebrate the creativity, passion and innovation of housing organisations and individuals across the sector in Scotland, and despite a hugely challenging year, this year's awards received over 75 entries across eleven categories, including communications in a crisis, best frontline housing story and excellence in leadership.



## Community Choices brings £3m boost

More than £3m will be available over the next two years to communities across the Falkirk area as part of the new Community Choices initiative.

The programme, will be used to increase community input into how money is invested in local communities, and was launched on Monday 8 February. Community groups and organisations will have the opportunity to submit a local project idea through an expression of interest.



**Councillor Cecil Meiklejohn, Leader of Falkirk Council said:** "Community Choices gives communities across the Falkirk Council

area greater power to decide how money is spent in their local areas on projects and initiatives that matter most to them.

Groups and organisations can apply to two separate funds: a small grants programme with a maximum of £1500 per proposed project. A minimum of £10,000 will be available to each of Falkirk Council's nine wards in the first year as part of the Small grants programme.

The Capital funding will make available a total of £3m over two years. Proposed projects for this fund must be for a minimum of £5000 and can be used for building something new, improving an asset and purchasing equipment.

An advisory panel made up of nine community representatives (one from each Council ward), four representatives from the third sector and four representatives from Falkirk Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership will ensure that applications meet the criteria before they are put forward to a public vote.

Project proposers will then submit more detailed applications online. The closing date for final applications is 9th April. The public will then vote on which of the projects should receive public funding. Voting will start from 26 April to 14 May.

"The programme will direct spending in a way that improves the quality of life at a local level and supports communities in their activities.

Interested groups and people don't need to have any prior experience of project management or financial expertise. However, they will need to commit to the duration of the projects from initial expression of interest to completion. Applicants can discuss their submissions both before and during the process with Falkirk Council staff.

**"Community Choices gives communities across the Falkirk Council area greater power to decide how money is spent in their local areas on projects and initiatives that matter most to them."**





## Leverhulme Community Hub's allocated £300k

It was announced recently that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has been successful in its application to the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) for £300,000 to upgrade and refurbish the old Leverhulme Memorial School building in Leverburgh, Isle of Harris. The community was successful in acquiring the Building from the Comhairle in 2020 and the RCGF funding awarded will now go towards developing the project.

A Development Trust - Leverhulme Community Hub Ltd (LCH) - will be responsible for delivering the community-owned and run project, to provide an economic Hub in the centre of the village, adjacent to - and in collaboration with - the local shop (An Clachan) and village hall.

Run as a social enterprise it will comprise: a Café/ restaurant; Launderette; Gym; Post Office; and office-space to accommodate a satellite-office of the Comhairle - contributing to the local economy, promoting health & well-being, and enhancing quality of life in the community.

It will also offer a charity shop and museum/historical archive, celebrating local history (e.g. Harris Tweed) and Gaelic language - providing a new 'visitor destination' for the annual 54,000 passengers on the Berneray Ferry and the 130,000 visitors to Harris each year.

**Chair of the Comhairle's Sustainable Development Committee, Councillor. Donald Crichton said:** "We were delighted to learn of the success of the Leverhulme Community Hub in attracting Scottish Government capital funding towards this exciting and innovative development in Leverburgh. Initiatives to grow the south Harris economy are welcome, especially during these testing times."

**Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell said:** "Tackling disadvantage and delivering inclusive growth right across Scotland - including in remote locations - is what the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund is all about. Together with COSLA, we've delivered almost £200 million to date for community regeneration projects."

"This project will see a former school rescued from demolition, and brought back into use to deliver a broad range of vital facilities and services for the community, celebrating the Gaelic language and local heritage, enhancing

the economy and promoting health and wellbeing."

**LCH's Chairman Angus Macleod said:** "Leverhulme Community Hub are delighted to be in receipt of this funding which is a real turning point for the future of the project. For a long time now, we have seen the need in our area for regeneration, more facilities and a place that will bring people together - the Hub will serve all these purposes. We're living in difficult times, and the future is uncertain, but we feel this is more reason than ever to put our efforts into bringing out plans for a multi-purpose, multi-benefit building to fruition. We are extremely grateful for the support from the RCGF, CNES and its officers and our advisors. This brings us considerably closer to putting South Harris back on the map in terms of amenities and community regeneration. It's undoubtedly an exciting time for us all and a bit of hope amongst the worries of the current world."

## Highland Council looking into creation of a Common Good Asset Register for Kingussie and Granttown on Spey

Highland Council hopes a new Common Good Asset Register can be created for Kingussie after investigations identified a number of common good assets belonging to the Badenoch town's Common Good Fund.

In addition, investigation work is also underway in Strathspey to establish assets belonging to Granttown on Spey with the aim of setting up a Common Good Asset Register there too sometime in the future.

After identifying the Kingussie's assets officers have now outlined the next steps in the process which would be required to establish a register including a public consultation.

Investigations into property in Granttown on Spey will be brought before a future meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee.

Members at today's meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee noted the report presented to them which highlighted the list of property proposed for Kingussie in accordance with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

Councillors also agreed to the launching of a public consultation on the list of proposed properties in Kingussie and noted the position regarding the ongoing investigation into properties in Granttown on Spey.

Common Good assets are property including buildings, land, rights (e.g. fishing), artwork, regalia, furniture, stocks and shares and cash funds that belonged to the Burghs of Scotland (pre-1975). They are held by the Council principally for the benefit of the local community within the specified geographical boundary of the former

burgh to which each fund relates and must be accounted for separately to other Council property.



**Chair of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, Councillor Bill Lobban, said:**

"This new focus on assets held in the 'common good' could herald a new beginning for Kingussie and Granttown Common Good Funds and could bring substantial benefit to both towns."

"Obviously, we have only just started the process, but it certainly looks positive for the future."

Both Kingussie and Granttown on Spey's Common Good Fund have only a residual balance at this time and are not currently being operated as active funds.

**Mr Lobban added:** "A strategy will be required to consider how to encourage income generation from the reclassified assets, which will be to the benefit of both towns."

The process for the public consultation is involved and includes the Council being required to publish the list of Common Good Assets on its website, and be available for viewing in Council offices, libraries and hubs.

The Council must also advertise the fact the list is available and notify community councils or other community bodies so they are aware they can make representation. The list must be publicly available for 12 weeks and the Council should publish its Common Good Register as soon as practicable after the initial 12-week consultation period.

When representation is received from anyone it should be investigated by the Common Good Fund Officer and Members will be kept up to date on any representations made and the outcome of any investigations.

There is currently interest from community groups about Community Asset Transfers of property that has been identified as possible Common Good within Kingussie, but that too would require a public consultation exercise.





# Tenancy Agreement Video scoops top Film award

East Ayrshire Federation of Tenants and Residents and East Ayrshire Council scooped the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland Working in Partnership Award for their Tenancy Agreement Video at the annual housing awards ceremony, which took place online earlier this month.

The Council's Customer Liaison Service and the Federation had agreed early in 2020 that they would produce a video that would provide tenants with clear and accurate information about their tenancy agreement. The video, which was introduced by local tenant Lynn, was designed to be easy to access for new and existing council tenants, helping to break down barriers tenants may experience and enable them to have a better understanding of their tenancy agreement.

**Councillor Elena Whitham, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities said:**



“By working collaboratively, the Council's Customer Liaison Service and East Ayrshire Federation of Tenants and Residents have developed and created a useful resource for tenants that has also been well used by Council employees and elected members. The video, which was launched on Scottish Housing Day last September, helps tenants to feel happy and safe in their homes.

“People are the heart of everything we do and we work hard to ensure that our tenants fully participate and engage with the Council. We achieve this by working closely with the Federation. They are a talented and very committed group who are helping to transform the lives of local people. I was delighted they, virtually, lifted this



award with our employees, they are a very strong partnership and deserve this recognition.”

**Bruce Cuthbertson, Chairperson of East Ayrshire Federation said:**

“We are delighted to be part of the journey going forward to provide better services for the tenants and residents of East Ayrshire. The video was such a worthwhile project and I am so pleased for everyone involved that our partnership has been recognised at a national level. The video ensures that all tenants can easily understand their tenancy agreement and can access clear, concise information from a mobile device.

“We are confident that the future is bright when the projects we are working on are implemented, reflecting the views of both the Council and their tenants.”

**Lynn Graham, Secretary of the East Ayrshire Federation of Tenants and Residents said:**

“The Federation has worked with and been supported by East Ayrshire Council for many years, so when we were asked to get involved we didn't hesitate, and it was a lot of fun. We are very grateful to the Customer Liaison team, Housing Services, Vibrant Communities and TIS for their support to make this project work, we all worked well together through difficult and challenging times last year. We are delighted with this award and look forward to many more years of working together for the benefits of all tenants.”

East Ayrshire Federation of Tenants & Residents' overall aim is to promote the rights of tenants and residents throughout East Ayrshire in the maintenance and improvement of housing conditions, local amenities, and the overall environment, along with promoting a thriving community spirit throughout the neighbourhoods they work with. They are supported by the Tenants Information Service and funded and registered by East Ayrshire Council.

# Council boost for Newton Mearns park

Fairweather Park in Newton Mearns is set for a major upgrade thanks to a £130,000 investment from Council development contributions.

The enhancement works will see a variety of new play equipment installed including a climbing matrix, see-saws, trampolines and a roundabout suitable for wheelchair users.

The park had been highlighted as an area for improvement and further consultation provided local schools, groups and residents with an opportunity have their say on how they wanted the park to look and what facilities to include.

These works are being funded by development contributions, received specifically for the enhancement

or provision of active open space in the area. The Council's development contributions policy allows contributions to be sought from relevant planning proposals to mitigate the anticipated impact of new development upon local services, infrastructure and facilities.



**East Renfrewshire Council Environment Convener, Councillor Alan Lafferty:**

“The upgrade planned for the park will create a fantastic play area for local residents and visitors to Newton Mearns.

Throughout the past year, outdoor space has been hugely important to us all, providing us with somewhere to get fresh air and exercise, so I am delighted that we are creating yet another high-quality facility for young people to enjoy.”

The upgrade is due to get underway at the end of April and is expected to be completed within four weeks.

**“Throughout the past year, outdoor space has been hugely important to us all”**







Photo © Thomas Nugent (cc-by-sa/2.0)

# Empty dam safety warning

A SAFETY warning has been issued for people about the dangers of stepping into an empty Greenock dam.

Water levels at the Cowdenknowes Reservoir, better known as Murdieston Dam, are much lower than normal after it was recently drained to allow for essential safety checks and repairs.

It has left a muddy area at the bottom of the dam more exposed, which poses a serious safety risk for people and their pets becoming stuck as the area is well used by dog walkers.

Inverclyde Council, which is responsible for the reservoir, has issued a plea for visitors not to step onto the mud alongside its emergency service partners at Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

**Councillor Jim Clocherty, Inverclyde Council's communities convener, said:**



"Reservoirs are just as dangerous places when empty as they are when full and I would urge the public to take care and not walk or allow their dogs to walk in the reservoir as there area will be soft and muddy.

"Until as such times as the levels return to normal safety signs have been put up advising of these dangers.

"There's also the added risk of ice at the moment due to the cold snap we're experiencing so please be careful when out and about."

The council has a statutory duty to open and close the dam valve to make sure it is operational in case there is ever an emergency.

That was recently carried out and a fault was discovered during the process meaning repairs were required.

The water level had to drop sufficiently to allow work to take place.

Repairs concluded on 25 January and the dam is now filling naturally, which takes time.

**Chief Inspector Paul Cameron, Inverclyde area commander, said:**

"Officers have been made aware of persons entering Murdieston Dam and recently specialist crews were called to lead a person and their dog to safety.

"Deep mud can be a serious hazard and I ask that people and their animals stick to the designated paths.

"Whilst some people think it might be tempting to enter the dam area you can never be sure of the risks."

**People are being urged to:**

- Stay on designated paths and keep animals away from the mud at all times
- In the event of an emergency try not to panic
- If anyone does become stuck, they should spread their weight as much as possible so they are standing evenly
- Always carry a mobile phone and dial 999 in an emergency
- Other people should not attempt to rescue anyone as this can result in more people being put at risk



# Town Centre Funding to improve Caithness CCTV

Members of the Caithness Committee have agreed to use Town Centre Funding to invest in the CCTV infrastructure for both Wick and Thurso.

£16,100 will be used to digitalise the existing aging analogue public space CCTV system in Wick town centre and connection of the new system into the council's CCTV monitoring office with £25,625 to do the same for Thurso town centre.

In September last year the Scottish Government announced extra funding through the Town Centre Fund as part of its national economic recovery stimulus package, particularly aimed at supporting construction activity across Scotland. The Highland Council has received an additional £1,066,000, providing an extra £56,104 for investing into Thurso and Wick.

At the meeting today members also agreed a variance to the 2019/20

Town Centre Funded public realm project being delivered by Thurso Community Development Trust. The remaining £2,379 of the 2020/21 TCF area allocation will be awarded to the Trust for this project. The wayfinding element is now on hold and in its place the Trust will now deliver their market stall initiative at a cost of £8,763. Members also agreed to invest £8,616 on the refurbishment of the Precinct clock.

**Chair of the Committee, Councillor Nicola Sinclair said:**



"I'm delighted to see the proposals for enhanced CCTV go ahead. The second tranche of town centre fund money is relatively

small, so it was important we found projects of an appropriate scale that could be delivered quickly. CCTV has an important role in public safety, but it also protects our other investments in the town centre environment by discouraging vandalism. In the various public consultations undertaken recently and in community council meetings, improved CCTV is a common request from the community, so I'm pleased we're now in a position to take this forward. The regeneration of both Wick and Thurso town centres is a huge project and has faced new challenges with covid but we are making progress."

All Town Centre Fund money needs to be committed by March this year and projects completed by September 2021.



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## Highland Military Liaison Group (Education) podcast receives national interest

A ground-breaking Highland partnership is receiving national interest after being featured as part of a radio podcast aired on BFBS radio.

Due to the success of the podcast, The Highland Military Liaison Group (MLG) will be involved in regular monthly slots on the BFBS radio. It will involve updates from the group, partners and importantly offer the opportunity for children and young people to share their voices and experiences.

The Military Liaison Group (Education) provides a unique partnership of services and agencies that come together regularly to plan and provide support to children of Armed Forces Families in Highland schools. The MLG have a wealth of experience and can offer a committed partnership that is proactive in offering advice, guidance and key support to military families, educators and practitioners in Highland.

**The Military Liaison Group Operational Lead - Lou Kinnear commented:** "Being offered the opportunity to talk about the work of the MLG and be recognised nationally for the service we provide in Highland is fantastic.

High mobility and re-deployment is part of military life, but with that comes a multitude of change for families and in the school transition for the child or young person. Whilst the majority of our MLG families are resilient and cope well with the changes, reaching out, offering support and listening to the voice of children to identify their needs and how best to support them is key to their wellbeing. Creating awareness that MLG is a one stop contact point to support Armed Forces families in an educational context is very important."

The MLG encourage identification of being from an Armed Forces family at school enrolment to help make sure the right support is given at the right time to meet the needs of the pupil. This allows a point of contact to be established and makes support, transition and settling in the area that little bit less daunting.

**The pandemic and lockdown are identifying greater challenges**

**for children moving to Highland. They've yet to meet their class and teachers in person. Several resources have been developed by both The Highland Council and The MLG Partners to aid transition.**

The Highland Council website provides information and resources to support members of the Armed Forces, Educators and Practitioners in Highland.

To listen to the podcast and hear from Lou Kinnear on the great work and partnerships being developed across Highland click the link: <https://fb.watch/2U7J-jnjAD/>

For further information on the work of the group – Contact Lou Kinnear – Positive Relationships Coordinator, Military Liaison Group Lead. [louise.kinnear2@highland.gov.uk](mailto:louise.kinnear2@highland.gov.uk)





# Council apologises for data breach affecting 600 customers

Scottish Borders Council has apologised for a data breach which has affected around 600 customers.

The Council is currently alerting around 1,300 residents that they are eligible for a payment. Unfortunately three emails were sent to multiple individuals and in those emails all recipient email addresses were visible.

**A Scottish Borders Council spokesperson said:**

“We would like to apologise unreservedly to all our customers affected by this data breach and for any distress or embarrassment this has caused.

“Those customers who have received an email which includes others’ email addresses are asked to delete it. All payments will be made as planned to these individuals.

“Individual email addresses were disclosed, this is personal information.

The content of the email also outlined that eligibility for the payment was due to the receipt of free school meals, which we absolutely appreciate is a sensitive matter for individuals.

“We are taking the incident very seriously and have discussed it with the Information Commissioner’s Office. We are taking steps to put in place a technical solution to minimise the chances of a similar incident occurring again.”

Anyone affected by this data breach with any specific additional concerns should contact the Council’s Data Protection team on [dataprotection@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotection@scotborders.gov.uk) or call 0300 100 1800.

All those eligible for the payment will be contacted to confirm eligibility before the end of this week.



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