

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place (currently from School Road) Keeping the folk of the North Isles ward informed — with Orkney's only councillor newsletter

You will note in the title, that I say “currently from School Road”. I've only recently discovered that I live in *School Road*. It came up when I ordered an NHS Covid-19 test kit online and typed in my postcode. It makes sense, I suppose, because there is a school across the road from the West Manse, but given that Sanday once had several schools, there could equally be other candidates for this appellation. Mind you, road names in Sanday are variable. For example, the *Hill Road* is also known as the *Airfield Road* (and could, indeed, also legitimately be called the *School Road*). I expect this state of affairs has arisen because (like its houses) rarely do Sanday's roads display a name sign. *Marston Road* is, I believe, the only one.

My claim to publish Orkney's only councillor newsletter can be verified. At the last election, several councillors promised to keep in touch with the public via social media, but (with one notable exception) they invariably soon gave up, battered by abusive comments and the time and effort involved in dealing with them. Sometimes, the old ways really are the best ways. When Howie Firth was OIC councillor for Sanday & North Ronaldsay from 1990 to 1999, he used to publish a “Letter from the Council” in *The Sanday Sound*, and it is sad that only I still use the printed medium to communicate with ward constituents.



During the council recess I managed to get away for a couple of weeks with my family. We were able to visit Iona Abbey, where Ute & I married 26 years ago. We wanted to go there last year to celebrate our silver wedding anniversary, but the pandemic put paid to that. It was good to see the place again and be able to show it to our younger children for the first time.

Owing to a hospital appointment, I missed the visit of OIC's Chief Executive to Sanday on 22nd July to talk to community groups about island issues. Luckily, my children, Dunstan and Frideswide were on hand to give him a youth perspective.

As you might have read in *The Orcadian* (5th August), I am not too enamoured of the Scottish Govt's proposed “Islands Bond”. Some 60 permanently-inhabited Scottish islands have fewer than 200 residents, so how many of these “bonds” can Orkney realistically expect to get? What, exactly, are these “bonds”? Are they money to be spent, or collateral against loans? Can they be traded on the Stock Exchange? What conditions will apply? We all know that what the Isles require are reasonably well-paid jobs. I've long maintained that OIC should “decentralise” its clerical posts. Although this got off to a good start with the establishment of the Warehouse Building in Stromness (in the Council Leader's ward), such outworker offices have never progressed to the Isles, where they are really needed. As Orkney's biggest employer, OIC has the power (and responsibility) to redistribute its jobs in a way to discourage population decline. If the Scottish Govt were to help facilitate this, that would be the most effective way “to deliver a meaningful, sustainable intervention reflecting island communities' aspirations and needs.”

The Sanday Show on 6th August marked both the start and the finish of Orkney's agricultural show season for this year. Well done to the Sanday Agricultural Association for its courage. There was a good turnout of stock, which I am sure is a sign that the Show is safe for many years to come. The Clackson family had its usual goose successes, and we also entered hens and Muscovies. The goose with me in the photograph below hatched this year on the 22nd April, the 20th anniversary of the release of “Shrek”. As she was a green gosling, we named her after Princess Fiona in the film. She is a Pilgrim X Embden.

On 9th August we went “beyond Level Zero” (presumably to “Level Minus One”). Changes to the rules permitted an increase in passenger carrying capacity on Orkney Ferries, nevertheless we retained the requirement to pre-book in order to protect our crews from infection. (Infection is not a theoretical risk: CalMac's Ardrossan to Brodick route suffered cancellations after a crew member on the *MV Caledonian Isles* was tested positive for Covid-19 and the vessel had to be withdrawn from service!) On 13th August, our onboard catering services resumed, which will save passengers having to bring their own flasks of coffee.

The Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board has received a damning audit report from Deloitte, which vindicates my reasons for resigning from it back on 20th August 2020 (see my *Letter*, issue 91). The report particularly condemns the standard of leadership. Since 2017, the Valuation Board's Convener has been OIC's Cllr Andrew Drever. *The Shetland Times* contacted me for comment, but not *The Orcadian*, which published a rather bland piece on the whole sorry affair.

Orkney's new academic year has now commenced, and I'd like to welcome Stronsay School's new headmistress, Dr Petra McLay.

Keep well and carry on,

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