

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

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On 21st March, many Covid restrictions were eased in Scotland, and then the legal requirement to wear masks in indoor public spaces and on public transport was lifted on the 18th April. (Unfortunately, so too was access to free lateral flow tests.) Health advice is to continue wearing masks voluntarily, and this is recommended on board Orkney Ferries' vessels.

I hope none of you got made a fool of on 1st April. Here in Orkney, you need to be wary of the 2nd and 3rd April, too. The 2nd April was traditionally "Tailing Day", when children would secretly pin tails to each other and, more daringly, to adults (especially teachers). In the past, butchers would save up pigs' tails for this purpose, but in more recent times paper and string were mainly used. This year, "Tailing Day" coincided with "National Ferret Day", although ferrets don't have very impressive tails. The more dangerous day is the 3rd April, "Borrowing Day", when anything borrowed on that day becomes the property of the borrower! The 16th April is St Magnus' Day, when we fly the Orkney Flag here at the West Manse.



The deadline to get your census form returned (on paper or on-line) is the 1st May. In Question 43, "How do you usually travel to your main job or course of study (including school)?", many modes of transport were on offer, but notably not plane or ferry! I don't think this census had been adequately "Island-proofed"!

It has been a strange time, recently. I have continued being your councillor while simultaneously being a councillor candidate. One of the consequences of this was that throughout the pre-election ("purdah") period, my attendance at community council meetings has had to be as an ordinary member of the public. Council meetings have not entirely stopped; for example, I have attended a members' briefing and a Special Policy & Resources Committee meeting on the Council's corporate management restructuring. A Special General Meeting on the 26th April will be the last full council meeting before the election.

Many of you know already that on the eve of close of nominations I was undergoing an urgent operation at Raigmore Hospital to re-attach the retina in one of my eyes. The operation took over an hour, and I was awake throughout. However, I would reassure anybody else who is about to undergo such surgery that the experience is not as bad as it may sound. (Just don't watch a YouTube video of the procedure before you have it done!). It was a few days before I got back home, because the eye had been filled with hexafluoroethane gas, so flying was forbidden. (For those taking exams in chemistry this summer, hexafluoroethane is ethane with all the hydrogen atoms replaced by fluorine.) As medically advised, I'm taking it easy during the recuperation period. Of course, from the point of view of my election campaign, this all happened with impeccably bad timing, so I am sorry that very few of you have seen me out canvassing. Folk will, I'm sure, understand that I want the eye to recover as best it can. Apart from anything else, if re-elected, I need to be able to keep both eyes on what's going on at OIC!

Although the date of the Local Government Election is the 5th May, postal ballot packs have already been sent out to most people in the North Isles. Pay careful attention to what you have to do and how to vote, and make sure you put Envelope A the correct way round into Envelope B so it is the Returning Officer's address that appears in the window and not your own!

I am hoping the North Isles' electorate will re-elect me to continue serving them at Orkney Islands Council, so that this won't be the final issue of *Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place*.

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Letter from School Place is available on-line at

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