

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

Reporting on the work of your councillor in Orkney and beyond

"Hostel residents could face fees—Forthcoming consultation to seek views on proposed new charges."

This was the page 2 headline in *The Orcadian* of the 4th October, in which my contribution at the Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee meeting to the debate on consulting on corporate charges was reported. Four proposed charges stand out as having a potentially detrimental impact on the North Isles' economies and residents if they are implemented, namely:

- Increases to landing fees at Council airfields;
- Increased charges for special (bulky) household waste collection and disposal;
- Introduction of charges for overnight parking of campervans;
- Proposed new charge for Papdale Halls of Residence.

With regard to the last of these, as a councillor I have a declarable financial conflict of interest because I have a child at the Halls, hence I shall not be able to be involved in any discussion on charges for pupils to stay there. It is, therefore, **imperative that North Isles' residents become fully engaged in the consultation themselves**. We were pretty much left out of the "OIC Community Conversations" back in June, and didn't have the same opportunity as other communities in Orkney to "shape our public services". When I brought this up at P&R, the Leader stated that "the message was to protect services in these islands, so we weren't asking them to change their services". However, among the "top 5 issues" for the Kirkwall community is a "review of Junior High School provision on the isles" (and at their "Conversation" on 11th June they also discussed charging for Papdale Halls), so, whatever the Council Leader says, other communities are clearly intent on changing the North Isles' services!

After the Orkney College graduation ceremony, I was presented to the UHI Chancellor, the Princess Royal. We talked about her last having seen me dressed this way (see photograph below) at the University of London Presentation Ceremony at the Royal Albert Hall on the 14th March 1990. HRH observed that my beard had changed colour since then! I am still unsure of the protocol regarding academic headdress in the presence of royalty. As noted in my article "Dr ... Who?" in the June 2011 *Living Orkney* (issue 67, p 50): "In Spain, doctors of philosophy may be seated and cover their heads in the presence of the monarch", nevertheless, to prevent any possibility of committing a *paso en falso*, in the presence of our monarch's daughter I uncovered mine. I was delighted to see on the last page of this year's glossy graduation brochure (as a result of my suggestion—see *Letter from School Place* November 2017) colour illustrations identifying which UHI academic dress belongs to which degree.



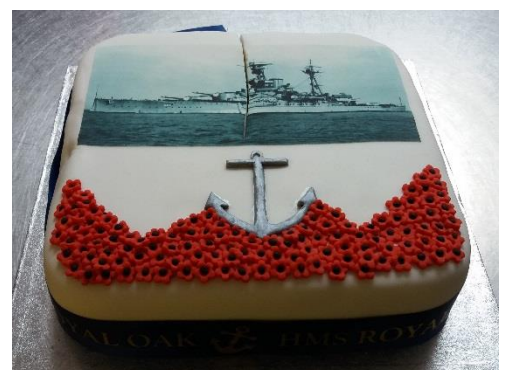
Together with the retiring Orkney College Principal (and fellow physicist) Dr Bill Ross.

Continuing on the University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) theme, as OIC's representative I attended this year's UHI Foundation Conference at North Highland College's Dornoch campus. In his review, the University's Vice-Chancellor informed us that Orkney College has more PhD students than the two largest UHI academic partners put together, which shows what an intellectual centre we have growing at the heart of Orkney. However, he cautioned that OIC must not let its burgeoning college be undermined by the predatory behaviour of the other universities currently courting the Council. In his introduction, the Rector warned against the modern tendency to believe that *perception matters more than reality and the truth is just another opinion*. (In this respect we could all be guided by my old college's motto: "Esse quam videri", which means "*be rather than seem to be*".)

Other meetings I have attended this month include: a briefing on aquaculture water quality impact modelling, a special Development & Infrastructure Committee meeting (by invitation) for the items on the *Kirkwall Urban Design Framework* and the *Aquaculture Water Quality Impact Modelling Assessment for Scapa Flow*; and a Monitoring & Audit Committee meeting. The Community Council Conference was postponed due to a bad weather forecast and will now take place on the 7th November.

At the remembrance service on the 14th October, I laid the wreath on behalf of OIC at the HMS Royal Oak memorial at Scapa. Here is a photo of the commemorative cake eaten at the RBL afterwards:

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