

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

The first report from your councillor in the golden jubilee year of the MV Golden Mariana

Welcome to AD 2023! I wonder what this year will bring us—the promise of new ferries? I am not optimistic. The only promise the Scottish Government has made Orkney is “to convene a task force to take forward preliminary discussions ... with the objective to undertake the business case analysis.” As regular readers of my *Letter* will be well aware, OIC has worked for many years with consultants and the public on the *Orkney Inter-Island Transport Study*, carried out in accordance with the Scottish Government’s own routes and services methodology, and the outline business case final reports were completed over a year ago. Therefore, I fail to see the need for a “task force” to spend yet more years re-doing the work that has already been done. We don’t have time to waste. Meanwhile, over on the west coast (part of the Scottish Government’s “Fairer Scotland”), the Scottish Government has just contracted the Cemre Marin Endustri shipyard in Turkey to build two new vessels to serve Skye for delivery in 2026! *The Press & Journal* asked me for my comments on the Orkney ferries “task force”, and the article can be found at this Internet URL: <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands-islands/5256235/orkney-councillor-ferry-task-force-placating-scottish-government/>. I was also interviewed for television by *BBC Alba*, where I made the same point about the “task force”. The programme is in Gaelic, but I spoke in English.

At least we have the Coronation to look forward to, the first in this country for 70 years (and of a king for 86 years). It is time for our schools and community organisations to start thinking about how they are going to celebrate this historic event, and what souvenirs they will distribute. As well as the ubiquitous mugs, commemorative medals make a lasting keepsake, such as those shown below, one from Sanday (Queen’s Diamond Jubilee) and one from Westray (70 years of the North Isles Sports).



I am delighted that, after an extended period of closure, Westray’s swimming pool re-opened on the 7th January. That gives the Westray School pupils plenty of time to train up for the next Longhope Swimming Gala and present their traditional challenge to Sanday and Stronsay. The community associations and volunteers manage the day-to-day operations of our island swimming pools (on Westray, Sanday, Stronsay, and Hoy), while OIC provides and maintains pool facilities. Despite the lack of support I received a year ago when the Covid-19 recovery money was being distributed (see *Issue 108*), I continue to push for adequate funding from the Council to refurbish our pools and bring changing facilities up to modern standards.

To the Orkney College Management Council we welcomed the new business and community representatives. Originally, three had been advertised for, but the calibre of the shortleet was so exceptional that it was decided to appoint all five of them!

Other meetings I have attended (both really and virtually) so far this year include: Ferry and Air Consultative Forums; a finance seminar; a discussion on our ferry fares, and a follow-up meeting with Isles’ community council chairs regarding NHS 24.

Happy New Year!

Cllr Dr Stephen Clackson
 Member for the North Isles Ward
 Depute Convener Orkney & Shetland VJB
 West Manse, Sanday
stephen.clackson@orkney.gov.uk

Letter from School Place is also available on-line at clackson.info

