

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

A regular, reliable report from your councillor in uncertain times in an uncertain world.

The storm at the winter solstice brought down some of the guttering at the West Manse and dislodged a ridge tile from a hip (but on the positive side it gave us an extra day to prepare for the arrival of two of our children for the festive period). At least our house is still intact, unlike so many homes in Los Angeles. As a former airfield firefighter, I am awed by how the wildfires manage to spread so rapidly and extensively through suburban residential neighbourhoods, and how the buildings are so utterly destroyed by them. One building in the area whose fire integrity is of particular interest to me is the Getty Museum, to whom my old college regrettably sold JMW Turner's *Van Tromp, going about to please his Masters, Ships a Sea, getting a Good Wetting* for £11 million in 1993. When I was a student, you could find yourself in the college picture gallery situated next to this 1844 narrative history oil painting whilst sitting an exam or sipping cocktails at a summer ball. I hope it survives.



Nonetheless, despite the likely link between these conflagrations and global warming, the once and future United States president, the half-Hebridean Donald Trump, on his first day back in office, ordered the USA out of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Given some of his earlier statements on Panama, Canada and Greenland, will he also be eyeing up Orkney and the largest natural harbour in the northern hemisphere as part of his expansionist strategic ambitions? Or even Sanday's Plain of Fidge for another golf course? The world has some uncertain years ahead. It is high time to heed the warning attributed to the USA's third president, Thomas Jefferson: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."

It has been a gentle start to 2025 at the Council—the calm before the February storm, when we'll undertake the challenging task of setting our budget in the current inclement financial climate. I've had a mixture of real and virtual meetings, including a catch-up with the convener and clerk of the Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board.

It has come to my attention that some North Isles folk are unaware they may be entitled to a Smartcard for local concessionary ferry travel. (Residents of North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray can also receive concessionary entitlement for inter-island air travel.) In order to meet the required eligibility criteria, you must: 1) be in possession of a National Entitlement Card (Saltire Card); 2) be aged 65 or over, or meet the disability criteria; 3) be a permanent resident of Eday, Egilsay, Flotta, Graemsay, Hoy, North Ronaldsay, Papa Westray, Rousay, Sanday, Shapinsay, Stronsay, Westray, or Wyre. For further information write to: Transportation Service, Marine Services & Transportation, Enterprise & Sustainable Regeneration, Orkney Islands Council, School Place, Kirkwall KW15 1NY; telephone: (01856) 873535; or e-mail: ferryvouchers@orkney.gov.uk. You can also find details on the Council's website, www.orkney.gov.uk

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



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