

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

A report from your "shortlisted" councillor.



The Union Flag flies at half-mast over the Council Offices on the day of the funeral of HRH The Duchess of Kent.

A drawback of living in Orkney is a lack of integrated transport. The timetables for different modes of transport seldom match up conveniently—and sometimes very inconveniently. At the autumn Internal Transport Forum meeting, my suggestion to try out using artificial intelligence (AI) to design our timetables was not met with any enthusiasm from the Council's transport officers or from the chairman of the Forum. Considering the publication in June of the UK Department of Transport's *Transport Artificial Intelligence Action Plan*, I was somewhat surprised and disappointed, as AI would be ideally suited to weighing up parameters such as community wishes, speed of vessels, and crew working-time restrictions, and coming up with the optimum solution. I hope we will reconsider giving AI a go.

I attended an update on our Ferry Replacement Programme. Residents of the four larger outer North Isles are having the chance at public meetings to view the plans for some of the proposed new ferries and make comments. Having come this far, I pray our hopes won't end up being dashed upon the rocks of excuses for not taking the project further.

At the meeting of the Education, Leisure & Housing Committee, we were presented with the Care Inspectorate's report on their inspection in May of the Papdale Halls of Residence. There has been an improvement since their last report, when they found that a few of the young people staying there had said they'd experienced bullying by other young people (see [Issue 145 of my Letter](#)). This time they reported that "Almost all young people felt safe ...". If any of my ward constituents, pupils, parents, and others, have concerns about bullying of any kind at any of our council-run institutions, please get in touch with me. We were also presented with the Care Inspectorate's report on their inspection of Westray JHS Nursery in April, and I was pleased to be able to congratulate the headmistress on their three "very good" grades. I got another chance to congratulate everyone concerned, when I attended Westray School's Parent Council meeting, which also gave me the opportunity to be shown first-hand some of the maintenance and repair issues around the school and to report back on them.

Although confidentiality prevents my giving details, at the meeting of the UHI Orkney Stakeholder Group (formerly Orkney College Management Council), I gained further convincing evidence of the potential our college has, if allowed, to help fulfil my vision for tertiary education in Orkney that I outlined in a letter to *The Orcadian* back on 15th March 2018. (You can link to the letter here: <https://clackson.info/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Orcadian-15-March-2018-p39-scaled.jpeg>.) I hope one day the resistance shall be overcome and this vision will be realised, as, apart from all the other obvious benefits, it could contribute greatly to Orkney's economy and sustainability. A starting point would be for OIC (which owns the college) to invest in providing suitable student accommodation.

Other meetings I have attended since my last [Letter](#) include a meeting of the Monitoring & Audit Committee, a seminar on food security in Orkney given by Prof Tim Lang (who authored a report on food security for the National Preparedness Commission)—this gave us food for thought, and a seminar on our Regional Marine Plan and Fish Farming Spatial Guidance.

Finally, as you may have seen in the media, I have been shortlisted for the LGiU's *Community Champion* award (LGiU stands for Local Government Information Unit). Orkney is represented twice, as my colleague Cllr John Ross Scott has been shortlisted for the *Lifetime Legend* award. I don't need to know who nominated me; they'll know who they are, and I am very grateful to them for the recognition. The award ceremony will take place at the City Chambers in Glasgow on 5th November.

Stephen

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

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