

# Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

*A report from your councillor in a busy month.*



It's been a busy month. At the end of January, I spent two exhausting days in Glasgow attending the *Offshore Wind Conference 2026*, learning about this burgeoning industry and doing my bit as an ambassador for Orkney among the thousand or so delegates, many from abroad. The photograph above shows the impressive Orkney stand, and the one below shows me meeting the Norwegian Deputy Ambassador, Mariam Naqvi. (I was often accosted by Scandinavians, who were intrigued by the Orkney flag on my lapel.) As well as all the trade stands directly related to offshore wind energy, some of the “ancillary” ones were also of interest to me given my broad scope of concerns as a councillor. For example, I had a discussion with a representative from SAMS (Scottish Association for Marine Science) about the UHI transformation and how Oban was developing as a university town (my long-standing vision for Kirkwall, you may remember—see *The Orcadian* 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018 p39); I had a conversation about personal, civic and corporate heraldry with intellectual property experts; and I talked about flags and flag-flying protocol with a shipping company. The stand of a Shetland marine engineering enterprise had on display a very neat 3D-printed model of an on-board accommodation unit for sea-going vessels, so I enquired about the possibility that such units might also find an application as habitation modules to augment sub-standard dwellings in the Isles. And a conversation I had with a firm that specialises in hiring out remotely-monitored, solar-powered, portable welfare units might possibly lead to a way of solving our Ring of Brodgar public convenience problem. The key message that came out of the conference sessions was that electricity transmission charges are much too high. These are not only making developments such as the West of Orkney Windfarm financially unviable, but are, of course, also the reason our electricity bills are higher in Orkney than elsewhere, despite the fact we see electricity being generated all around us. Orkney Islands Council needs to be lobbying harder to get transmission charges lowered, and work towards making fuel poverty here history.

A fortnight later, and I was in Glasgow again for a meeting of the Scottish Councils' Committee on Radioactive Substances (SCCORS) on which I represent OIC. I sparked off an interesting discussion when I asked whom a member of the public should inform if they discover something radioactive on the beach or in a deceased relative's attic. In Orkney, you are advised to contact OIC's Environmental Health team, who will be able to “triage” the case to alert it to the appropriate agency. Telephone 01856-873535 and ask for Environmental Health, or e-mail [environmental.health@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:environmental.health@orkney.gov.uk).

Another organisation I represent OIC on, the University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) Foundation, had a meeting and conference in Inverness, but bad weather and transport unreliability meant, regrettably, that I had to attend virtually. Nevertheless, my contribution to the UHI transformation debate was well supported by those in attendance. The conference part was about the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, which was very timely given my recent attendance at the *Offshore Wind Conference 2026* and all I had learnt there.

Back in Kirkwall, other meetings I attended included a confidential members' briefing; and meetings of the newly-rebranded Education, **Communities** & Housing Committee (no more *Leisure* ☺), and the Monitoring & Audit Committee. At the Policy & Resources Committee meeting, in respect of our council Climate Change Study, I once again asked that further work be done on investigating our carbon emissions footprint resulting from our use of digital services such as e-mail, online meetings and the Internet, as, for as long as these details are absent, we are getting an incomplete picture of the true situation.

Out in the Isles, I went along in person to meetings of the Shapinsay Community Council and Westray School Parent Council.

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**Letter from School Place** is also  
available on-line at [clackson.info](http://clackson.info)



Photo credits: Stephen Clackson & conference delegate

