

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

An epistle of sanity in an increasingly insane world.

We have set our council tax increase for the financial year 2026/27. The rise will be 6%. Council tax generates 9% of OIC's income (11% if you take out the ferry funding). We agreed to draw on our reserves up to £20,000,000, which will cover 13% of council expenditure. Our rationale is to try to maintain services and quality of life rather than make cuts. And although our council tax level approximates to the Scottish average, we continue to strive to be an above-average local authority.

You have probably noticed that the part-time, light-controlled 20mph speed limit signage around Isles schools has been removed. This was necessary for safety reasons owing to significant defects having been identified with the supporting poles. In order to maintain road safety, a road traffic regulation order was issued in *The Orcadian* of 5th March to temporarily implement permanent 20mph speed limits in these areas. As I made clear from the very start of my campaign for Isles children to be afforded the same road safety standards around their schools as children elsewhere, I prefer permanent limits (as in the left-hand photo) over part-time ones (as in the right-hand photo), so I hope these will be retained in the long-term.



Permanent 20mph speed limit outside an English village school in 2015



Part-time 20mph speed limit outside an Orkney island school in 2024

At this juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to quash the fake news that has been circulating in the Isles that agricultural vehicles are not permitted to drive through permanent 20mph zones. This is completely untrue. The only restriction applying to agricultural vehicles in 20mph zones is that their speed must not exceed 20mph, the same restriction that applies to any other vehicle. I request the originator of this rumour please to desist from spreading misinformation which only serves to undermine safety for everyone on our island roads.

Meetings I have attended in Kirkwall this month include: a budget-setting consolidation seminar, the Policy & Resources Committee meeting where we actually set the budget, and the General Meeting at which we ratified our decision; pre-meeting and meeting of the Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board; a joint transport meeting with members of North Ronaldsay and Papay community councils about Phase 2 of our Ferry Replacement Programme; and a public sector reform briefing session.

In the Isles, I participated in person at the meeting of Sanday Community Council.

I was invited to Shapinsay's "Community Get-Involved Day" at which residents and guests worked on the island's Local Place Plan and contributed through workshops their ideas on social life, community, regeneration, local economy, housing, future sustainability, community facilities, and recreation. These workshops gave me the opportunity to learn more about the needs and aspirations of the islanders and to proffer some of the knowledge and experience I have of other island communities in the North Isles ward. There were stands set up in the school hall for drop-in sessions, and Shapinsay Community Council kindly allowed me a corner of their table for one of my own (see the photograph on the right), where I was able to converse with ward constituents on matters concerning them, pass on my contact details, hand out "MyOrkney" cards, and distribute copies of my *Letter from School Place*.

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

Photo credits: Stephen Clackson, Charles Hay

