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Call for immediate action to improve island ferries

by Colin Smeeton
editor@arranbanner.co.uk

A call has been made to Scotland's First Minister to take immediate action on the reliability of Arran's ferry service.

In a letter to Nicola Sturgeon, West Scotland MSP Jamie Greene is also demanding contingency plans for ferry disruptions.

Mr Greene, shadow cabinet secretary for education and skills and previously shadow cabinet secretary for transport, infrastructure and connectivity, wrote to Ms Sturgeon following more reports from Arran residents who have been unable to attend hospital appointments.

The issue was first highlighted during First Minister's Questions when Nicola Sturgeon said she would look into the matter.

Jamie Greene said: 'Island residents should have access to the same standard of health-

care as people living on the mainland. Unfortunately that is simply not the case as Arran patients are not able to attend critical hospital appointments because of the unreliability of the ferry.'

'The situation with the ferry has left island residents exasperated and at the mercy

'We cannot wait until 2022 or 2023 to have a working ferry – this shambles has gone on long enough.'

of constant delays, disruptions and cancellations, leaving them either stranded on the wrong side of the shore or without access to key public services such as healthcare.

'It's time Nicola Sturgeon took the needs and concerns of Arran seriously and delivered the replacement ferry that was promised and should have been here three years ago.'

'We cannot wait until 2022 or 2023 to have a working ferry – this shambles has gone on long enough.'

Mr Greene has asked Ms Sturgeon to co-ordinate with relevant stakeholders, including the cabinet secretary for transport and the islands minister, to draw up contingency plans for when ferry delays prevent patients from attending hospital appointments.

Mr Greene's letter, printed here in full, said: 'Dear First Minister, I am contacting you further to our recent exchange at the Wednesday January 27 2021 edition of First Minister's Question Time where I raised the issue of cancer patients not being able to attend hospital appointments to receive treatment because of the unreliability of the ferry service.'

'Whilst I am grateful for you agreeing to look into this specific matter, I thought it relevant to raise a similar case from a resident on the Isle of

Continued on page two.



Perfectly timed photograph...

Amateur photographer Helen Logan of Pirnmill was lucky enough to capture this stunning and perfectly timed photograph of a raft of otters during a return journey from doing her shopping in Brodick.

Hoping to catch a photograph of a rare sea eagle, she stopped along the coast between Machrie and Imacher where she noticed a

family of otters enjoying their time fishing and playing in the late day sun. To her amazement the otters struck the perfect pose – a one in a million shot, which she captured.

It would appear that luck was on her side that day as she also captured images of a rare sea eagle, a heron and seals.

Full story, visit www.arranbanner.co.uk



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West Scotland MSP takes ferry fight to First Minister

Continued from page one.

Arran, who brought it to my attention after watching our exchange. 'Last week [REDACTED] missed an important appointment with a consultant at Crosshouse Hospital because the ferry travelling to the mainland was abruptly cancelled.

'Although she was able to secure an alternative appointment, her circumstance highlights a clear problem with the provision of healthcare to residents on the Isle of Arran, which [REDACTED] has asked me to convey to you.'

'You will also appreciate that our health service is already under great pressure and missed appointments will only further strain the system.'

'The crux of the issue is the vessels serving the route are beyond their life expectancy and frequently need to be taken



out of service for repairs and maintenance. The replacement vessel that island residents were promised, the MV Glen

Sannox, is three years late, substantially over-budget and still has no firm delivery date. 'Arran residents are becoming increasingly exasperated at the seemingly endless disruption engulfing the Ardrossan-Brodick ferry route which not only inconveniences passengers, but often leaves people stranded on the wrong side of the shore or (as recent cases have highlighted) deny residents access to key public services such as healthcare.'

'I am sure we would both agree that island residents should have access to the same standard of healthcare as is afforded to those residing on the mainland.'

'Therefore, I would be most grateful if you could co-ordinate with the relevant stakeholders, including the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and the Island's Minister, to determine what contingency plans will be put in place to prevent further patients missing critical hospital appointments because of ferry delays.'

'Thank you for your time in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.'

The issue of the reliability of vessels is compounded by the fact the replacement vessel which should already

be serving the Arran route has not been delivered following a delay to the initial delivery date. It is now five years behind schedule. This has caused much dissatisfaction and has been the subject of fierce debate and criticism.

At a Holyrood debate on the Construction and Procurement of Ferry Vessels in Scotland report, held last Tuesday, around 17 speakers each had four minutes to deliver a speech on the subject.

Among them was Arran's MSP Kenneth Gibson who said: 'Although it makes for uncomfortable reading, I welcome the conclusions and recommendations of the rural economy and connectivity committee's Construction and Procurement of Ferry Vessels in Scotland report and thank the committee for its sterling work over many moons.'

'I speak as the constituency MSP for Cunningham North, which includes Arran, the community that has been directly impacted by the lengthy delay in delivering into service ferry 801, or the Glen Sannox, as it is now named.'

'Alongside Ferguson Marine's obvious project management failures, others with decision-making responsibilities, Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited in particular,

and Transport Scotland, are accused of failing to discharge those responsibilities competently and effectively.'

'There was a lack of clarity regarding remit and responsibilities and there were no clear processes to escalate matters quickly when those went unfulfilled, which has resulted in mounting costs, delays and little progress.'

'The vessels in question, which were originally due to be completed in 2018, are now five years overdue and Covid restrictions could delay them further.'

Mr Gibson continued with his speech, making full use of his four minutes, concluding with: 'For too long, decision making on new ferry construction and procurement has been delayed, despite the fact concerns have repeatedly been raised by CalMac, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, islanders and other ferry users, as well as MSPs of all political persuasions, including me.'

'Many ferries are now significantly beyond their originally planned operational lifespan and more vessels must be ordered. Where Transport Scotland already knows the views of island communities, that should happen now.'

'We must absorb and learn from the committee's report and take on board its findings to ensure the same thing does not happen again.'

'The commitments that the Scottish Government have made so far are hugely encouraging, but they must be fulfilled, and ordering new vessels while ensuring a start date on site for the associated but seemingly never-ending Ardrossan harbour redevelopment, which will be essential to dock and service the Glen Sannox, would be a very good start.'

MV Caledonian Isles makes a welcome return

MV Caledonian Isles, which was meant to return to service last month, has returned.

The ferry was expected back on Monday this week following a gearbox repair and a sea trial the day before but, following a fault with a cylinder in the main port engine and subsequent sea trial, it was Tuesday afternoon before the vessel returned to service.

Immediately after its sea trial on Tuesday, MV Caledonian Isles returned to service its Brodick to Ardrossan route by 3.20pm. The vessel, which was launched in 1993 and which has only ever operated between Ardrossan and Arran, is well-loved by many on Arran, especially by those who have grown up with her in service. Some refer to the

vessel as 'Calamity Isles' owing to its age and susceptibility to break downs, but for most it is affectionately known as the 'Caley Isles'.

Its return to service is especially welcomed following an extended period of weather-related disruption which its temporary replacement vessel, MV Hebridean Isles, is less capable of dealing with.



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Bread was snapped up by eager buyers as soon as the shelves were replenished, while fresh fruit and vegetable shelves lay empty. Meat supplies also started to run dry, with just a small selection remaining.

Wild winter weather leaves Arran cut off

by Colin Smeeton
editor@arranbanner.co.uk

A spell of prolonged wild weather last week caused food and petrol supplies to dwindle on Arran as the ferry was unable to sail for a number of consecutive days owing to sea swell conditions.

Monday February 1 saw some weather related ferry cancellations and a technical issue with the MV Hebridean Isles' starboard engine which was repaired within hours. The bad weather continued the following day and on Wednesday, with all sailings for the two days cancelled.

The inclement weather continued well into Thursday, with the first sailing that week eventually making its way cautiously into the Brodick berth just after 4.15pm in rough swell conditions.

Onboard MV Hebridean Isles were two large Co-op lorries, three Royal Mail vans and a fuel supply vehicle, all of which were given priority over other private and commercial vehicles which were bringing supplies to the island.

Some smaller shops on Arran sold out of many items, while the largest shop, Brodick Co-op, fared reasonably well, keeping shelves stocked with bulk order supplies from their storage. However, items that are usually delivered daily, such as fresh meat, bread and



Above: flooding caused damage to at least three homes at Douglas Place, Brodick, and, left, MV Hebridean Isles berths in Brodick on Thursday afternoon for the first time in many days.

milk, remained in short supply, with fresh fruit and vegetable shelves completely empty.

Food stocks at the shop were replenished with the Thursday delivery, as well as further deliveries on Friday morning before all sailings for the remainder of the day were cancelled at 2pm, once again owing to the weather.

The severe weather also caused flooding issues throughout the island, most notably on Thursday when torrential rain combined with a high tide caused parts of Brodick Main Road to be completely submerged under water. A lengthy stretch outside Arran Active and along

the golf course in Brodick were particularly hard-hit, with overtopping taking place at Cladach and at Machrie. Flooding also caused water damage to at least four houses in Brodick and Lamlash.

Locations on the mainland also experienced travel disruption owing to the weather. On Thursday the ScotRail service from Ardrosson Harbour to Glasgow Central was blocked by flooding at Saltcoats. Bank of Scotland customers in Saltcoats were also impacted by the high winds and heavy rain and had to be diverted to other branches after the building was damaged by the weather. It remains closed until repairs can be made to

Police appeal for dashcam footage following deaths

Police Scotland are appealing for dashcam or mobile phone footage from anyone who was at University Hospital Crosshouse and Portland Street in Kilmarnock last Thursday evening, writes Colin Smeeton.

The appeal for information follows the double stabbing of two victims, now formally identified by police as Emma Robertson Coupland, 39, and her daughter, Nicole Anderson, 24.

A third death, that of Steven Robertson, 40, who died in a crash on the C50 between the B7036 and A76, is also part of the incident which has made national headlines and is linked to the appeal.

Chief Superintendent Faroque Hussain, policing commander for Ayrshire Division, said: 'As you can imagine, the families of those involved are absolutely devastated and still coming to terms with what has happened. They have requested that they be

allowed to grieve privately at this time.'

'The investigation into the circumstances surrounding their deaths, which are linked, are ongoing. We are not looking for anyone else as part of the inquiry.'

'The local community has been very supportive of our enquiries so far but we are still appealing for information, especially dashcam or mobile phone footage from the car park at University Hospital Crosshouse between 7.30pm and 8pm on the Thursday night.'

'We're also eager for anyone who may have been in the Portland Street area between 7.45pm and 8.15pm, and anyone travelling on the A76 between the Bellfield Interchange and Ochiltree between 7.50pm and 8.45pm, to get in touch.'

After the formal identification of the victims, NHS chief executive John Burns said: 'Following the inci-

dent at University Hospital Crosshouse on Thursday February 4, we can confirm the sad death of our colleague Emma Robertson.'

'Emma was a valued member of our domestic services team and she will be sadly missed by her colleagues.'

'Our thoughts and condolences are with Emma's family, friends and colleagues.'

'We have increased the staff care support available to our staff and are encouraging any members of our staff who have been affected to take advantage of the support available whether that is by calling our helplines and speaking to a member of the staff care team or attending the staff wellbeing hub.'

If you have any information or footage that can assist police in their investigation please contact the police on 101 or submit this directly to officers via the Major Incident Police Portal at //mipp.police.uk/operation/SCOT21S01-PO1.

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Disaster averted at Hunterston

by Colin Smeeton
editor@arranbanner.co.uk



A serious maritime incident at the nearby Hunterston Terminal was averted after lifeboats from Largs, Girvan and Troon RNLI spent more than 40 hours securing a 228-metre drillship which broke free of its moorings last week.

Shortly after 7.20pm on Tuesday February 2, HM Coastguard received a mayday call from VALARIS DS 4, a 96,000-tonne drillship with eight crew on board, which had started to drift without power in strong easterly winds.

Lifeboats from Troon and Largs were launched to assist but with no immediate requirement to evacuate those onboard, Largs RNLI returned to station while Troon RNLI's all-weather lifeboat provided assistance to help secure the vessel and to prevent it from drifting further.

Following a 12-hour shift by the Troon lifeboat, Girvan's volunteer crew took over at 6am on Wednesday to allow their colleagues some time to rest. The favour was returned hours later when Troon volunteers returned at 4pm to provide relief for the Girvan crew.

In addition to the work by the lifeboats from Girvan, Troon and Largs, was the Coastguard



Girvan lifeboat dwarfed by the two huge drilling ships. Photograph: Steven Muir, Cumbrae Traffic and Travel.

Rescue helicopter based at Prestwick, and the Largs, Cumbrae, Ardrossan, Ayr and Greenock Coastguard Rescue Teams. Tugs from Greenock were also tasked to help another vessel, Eneso DS8, which needed assistance to hold its position in the rough seas with winds blowing at 40 to 60 knots and sleet and rain adding to the difficult conditions.

At 2am on Thursday morning the Girvan all-weather lifeboat was relaunched and made its way back to the scene to take over from Troon RNLI. After a further nine hours on the water, Girvan RNLI was stood down as the bad weather subsided and the vessel was deemed to be secure.

Girvan RNLI Lifeboat

operators manager John Gourlay said: 'This incident is a testament to our incredible volunteer crews. In the last few days, crews from Troon completed more than 23 hours of on-scene support with our crew here in Girvan spending 19 hours at Hunterston – all of this during some very cold, wet and windy weather conditions.'

'Our volunteer lifeboat crews are on call 24/7. They never know when the next callout will be or how long they will be at sea for. Thanks also go to the families and the employers of the crew members due to the prolonged nature of the call-out.'

Hunterston Terminal was a coal-handling port operated by the Peel Group and the site

is currently under demolition. It lies south of Fairlie with a jetty that is approximately one mile away from the island of Great Cumbrae. The location of the stricken drillship was approximately two miles from the nuclear intake cooling pipe at the station.

Friends of the Firth of Clyde, a campaigning group which supports the sympathetic development of the Hunterston Peninsula in a way that protects and enhances the local environment, has called for an independent investigation into the incident, particularly as concerns were expressed by Fairlie Community Council to ClydePort about the safety of the berthing arrangements prior to the incident.



Patricia Gibson MP is urging the UK Government to extend the validity of driving theory test certificates to prevent learner drivers from having to retake the test.

Arran MP calls for extension to the driving theory test

Arran's MP Patricia Gibson has urged the UK Government to extend the validity of driving theory test certificates because of the restrictions caused by lockdown.

Under current UK legislation, the validity of driving theory test certificates lasts for two years but many learner drivers have found that, as a result of restrictions, their theory test certificates are expiring before they have the opportunity to sit a practical driving test.

Northern Ireland, which has devolved powers over these matters, has already extended the validity of theory tests. However, the Scottish Parliament has no such powers.

Mrs Gibson said: 'Current lockdown restrictions and cancelled tests mean that tens of thousands of theory certificates have simply expired. This is not the fault of learner

drivers and they shouldn't be back to square one by a UK Government which, frankly, has no good reason for doing so.'

'We've already seen common sense prevail in Northern Ireland, which automatically extended theory certificates for its learner drivers. The UK Department for Transport must follow suit, otherwise learner drivers will have to pay again to take a test they've already passed.'

'It would be wrong for learner drivers to have to spend extra cash unnecessarily and re-join a long queue, already backed up as a result of this year's disruption.'

'Learner drivers, driving instructors and the industry all want to see this change.'

Ordinarily, 1.2 million driving tests are undertaken in the UK each year, including around 70 by Arran residents.

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Snowlaf the road gritter falls victim to black ice

by Colin Smeeton
editor@arranbanner.co.uk

The driver of a North Ayrshire Council gritting lorry affectionately known as Snowlaf had a near-miss on Monday after the vehicle skidded on black ice and toppled over onto the grass verge.

The incident, which took place in the north of the island, at The Craw, Catacol, thankfully left the driver unharmed but shaken.

The gritter is a valued member of a team of snow ploughs and gritting vehicles that have been working round-the-clock over the last month, ensuring Arran's roads and pavements are safe during the spell of freezing weather.

A spokesperson for North Ayrshire Council said: 'We can confirm that one of our gritters went off the road earlier today after encountering some black ice. The driver was understandably shaken by the incident, but thankfully was



Snowlaf lies on its side with Catacol and the mountains behind providing an indication of the snow and icy conditions; and above, it was a scary incident for the driver but thankfully he was unharmed after the vehicle slipped on black ice and toppled over. Photographs: Allan Napier

not harmed. A replacement vehicle will be in use while repairs are being carried out to the damaged vehicle.

'From October to April, our

roads team constantly monitors weather forecast information and our fleet of gritting vehicles and snow ploughs are on 24 hours' standby. When

snow and ice are forecast, we operate a priority system to ensure the most important and busiest routes are treated first.'

Snowlaf was recovered later that day and is expected to return to service once repairs have been carried out.

Further information about gritting on Arran, where to find your nearest grit bin and advice on clearing snow and ice from public footways, can be found at www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/winter-gritting.aspx

Views of Arran's elderly sought in Age Scotland's Big Survey

Age Scotland is seeking the views of older people on Arran and throughout Scotland in the first comprehensive survey of what it is like to grow older in Scotland, writes Colin Smeeton.

The Big Survey explores all areas of life for older people including health and wellbeing, housing, media representation and the impact of Covid-19.

The national charity hopes to gain a better insight into what older people think, experience and care about. Survey responses will help prioritise its future campaigns and shape policy.

The Big Survey launches after an exceptionally challenging year for older people. This was the age group most severely affected by Covid. Older people were asked to shield, while the overwhelming majority of deaths happened among the over 75s and care home residents faced months of separation from family and friends. Lockdown has contributed to



soaring levels of loneliness and the absence of regular exercise activities and sports has had an impact on physical fitness.

Age Scotland wants to hear from as many older people across Scotland as possible to find out what their lives are like now, what issues are important to them and their expectations of later life.

Brian Sloan, chief executive of Age Scotland, said: 'We are pleased to be launching The Big Survey at such an opportune time. This has been a tumultuous time for older people

and undoubtedly the past 12 months have had a profound impact across society.

We want to hear how older people's lives have been affected by Covid; what their expectations are now; how they want to live and what their requirements are for enjoying a fulfilling and happy later life.

I would urge as many older people as possible to take part. Each and every response will be considered and they will help to shape our policies and our work in the coming years.

So please take the time to share your views and help us be there to support older people throughout Scotland in ways that make a real difference. We look forward to hearing from you.'

The Big Survey can be found online at www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/our-impact/policy-and-research/surveys/big-survey/ or by visiting the Age Scotland website at www.ageuk.org.uk/Scotland and searching for The Big Survey.

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LETTERS

Write to us: send your letters to editor@arranbanner.co.uk or The Editor, Arran Banner, Brodick, Isle of Arran KA27 8AJ

Tidal wave of opinion on ferry impossible to ignore

Ferries and ferry disruption are once again dominating the pages of the Arran Banner.

Our letters page is full of opinion, sentiment and concerns and questions, all revolving around the provision of our ferries and harbours, and the state of the Arran ferry service.

And it's not just our publication; social media pages are awash with the subject, as are online discussion groups, and in local community forums where it dominates conversation.

The inescapable fact is that Arran residents' lives are so closely intertwined with a reliable ferry service that our health, wealth, prosperity, and our very futures all depend on it to varying degrees.

Even where our next meal comes from during lockdown restrictions depends almost entirely on the ferry service.

So it is hardly surprising that some of these opinions and shared thoughts, once made in measured and philosophical tones, have become brash and exasperated and demanding.

Some seem to have reached a saturation point with it all and are eager to move on to other pressing issues and, of course, we are still in the middle of a pandemic.

Whatever your thoughts or opinions on the matter are, at least there are machinations and discussions, by various lobbying groups and now at the highest level in Scottish politics, which must surely be better than none at all.

And even if you lack optimism in a ministerial solution, at least you can take some comfort in the fact that the tidal wave of sentiment has now become impossible to ignore or brush aside any longer.

Thought for the week

'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.'

Matt 5: 16

Common sense and hard evidence needed

Sir,

The present survey on the temporary use of Troon misses the point. The real and pressing question surely is whether the Ardrossan redevelopment should in fact go ahead, and whether more thought about our mainland port is required.

The minister responsible, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, and now the Arran Ferry Committee, have stated categorically that the redevelopment will improve Ardrossan's reliability, and weather resilience. But yet, neither have provided one shred of evidence to substantiate such a claim.

Ardrossan harbour will always be tight, and with no measures to mitigate swell how can that view be credible? Will for instance, the ferry be able to berth overnight there in poor weather or will the misery of cancelled 7am ferries continue? Are we again looking down the barrel of another Brodick disaster with well recognised and significantly worse weather resilience, despite many millions being spent?

The people of Arran deserve better information, and a good and simple place to start would be for the current route skippers to be asked publicly to state whether the Ardrossan redevelopment will allow them to sail more often and berth safely in adverse weather. We already know the answer for Brodick!

These are difficult times and it is essential that every single penny of public money is spent wisely, with transparent due diligence. It is not the time for political dogma and face saving, but instead a time to let common sense and hard evidence prevail.

Yours,

Robert Cumming, John Ford, David Henderson, Richard Wright, Archie Cumming, Alan Mitchell, Lochranza

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Exemplary health care

Sir,

I was horrified when I read – I believe from the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald – 'Arran residents treated like second-class citizens when it comes to healthcare'. On reading further I discovered that they were talking about the ferry fiasco.

However, this headline certainly gave the wrong impression to some. My cousin from England sent me a message wanting to know why we did not leave, especially as we had the fastest growing Covid situation in Scotland.

The lack of differentiation between Arran and North Ayrshire leads to much confusion. Arran has little in common with the rest of Ayrshire. We pay higher insurance on our cars because of the postcode and our 'high crime rate'. I remember when Arran was part of Argyll and later Bute and we did not have such problems.

The most important part of this note, however, is the comment about our healthcare. We have lived in more than a dozen locations and never once have we seen such high level of medical and health care services.

From the GPs, nurses, carers, administrators, receptionists, hospital, helicopter links, ambulance service and more, all of which I have had to use frequently, we have received nothing but the highest care, compassion and professionalism.

Every single time we have needed them, they have been there to provide the best service in the country. I was even born on the island, so experience goes back a long way.

The rollout of the vaccine was exemplary. Our community has pulled together magnificently throughout this strange time – shops, delivery services, volunteers and friends. We thank them all from the bottom of our hearts.

Yours,
**Mairi S Christie,
Kildonan**

PRESS POLICY

The Editor welcomes letters for publication on this page. The Editor reserves the right to shorten, amend or to refuse to print them. Names and addresses MUST be supplied to indicate good faith, although these details can be withheld from publication. Telephone numbers, if available, should also be included. Anonymous letters will not be considered. Please write to: Letters, The Arran Banner, Brodick, Isle of Arran, KA27 8AJ. Fax: (01770) 302021. Email editor@arranbanner.co.uk Emailed letters can only be considered if they have a name, full address and phone number.

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Its Plan for Jobs builds on the nine million jobs protected, with initiatives that include...

KICKSTART SCHEME

Six-month paid job with local employer, paid for by the UK Government, providing fully funded opportunity for 16 to 24 year-

olds to gain experience of working among many varied companies.

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Offer opportunities for jobseekers claiming Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance to build their confidence in a new line of work, enhance

their CVs and gain invaluable work experience and training. Such schemes have so far supported more than 40,000 people across the UK.

NEW ENTERPRISE ALLOWANCE

This scheme provides money and support to help those receiving certain benefits to start their own enterprises. For the self-employed, it helps to develop businesses.



FIRM 'TOOK FLIGHT'

A long-time airline cabin crew member's soft toy enterprise really took off after the pandemic clipped her wings. Julie Britton set up Britton's Bears and Bunting with the help of the UK Government's New Enterprise Allowance.

The Wigan entrepreneur was cabin crew for 21 years and when she was made redundant last March, signed up for a Jobseeker's Allowance. A machinist after she left school, Julie bought a pattern from eBay and, as her creation was such a success, continued making memory bears from recycled fabrics including old airline uniforms.

She was offered New Enterprise Allowance, referred to a



TOYS VENTURE: Julie Britton.

business mentor, and received £65 weekly for 13 weeks then £33 for 13 weeks.

Fashion icons Julien Macdonald and Paul Costelloe, both designers of British Airways uniforms, have praised Julie's work.

"We don't know what the future will bring but my little business is now established and will carry me forward," she added.

'IMMENSE' SUPPORT

"Immense" Kickstart support is the toast of a unique scheme, worth £200 million to the Scottish economy, at the former home of Johnnie Walker whisky in Kilmarnock.

An £65 million brownfield urban regeneration of 23 acres will create 1,300 jobs, and the UK Government's support is central to Scotland's first town centre net zero carbon energy scheme. Marie Macklin CBE, founder and executive chair of enterprise managers HALO Urban Regeneration, welcomed £1.5 million training support for 16 to 24 year-olds on Universal Credit.

"The money the training is going to give us allows us to



HALO: Marie Macklin CBE.

take on 200 young people – 200 because it was Johnny Walker's 200th anniversary. "The Kickstart Scheme is life-changing in the sense that these areas – not just in Kilmarnock – but some of the most deprived communities in the country are being helped. "We're really trying to put something back. The uptake has been immense."

'PROVIDING JOBS'

"Excellent" UK Government Kickstart support has proved just the tonic for an award-winning Welsh distillery. Ellen Wakelam runs "small but ambitious" west coast distillery Welsh Wind, whose spirits include eight prize gins.

"The Kickstart Scheme is an excellent initiative. We're offering local jobs for young people," confirmed the 37-year-old, whose five full-time staff are now developing grain-to-glass whisky with local farmers' barley. "We've been approved for four placements," continued Ellen, who lives near Cardigan. "We teamed up with a training company as our gateway provider to be approved and advertise the places. We think



WELSH WIND: Ellen Wakelam.

we can offer young people really good insights into every aspect of the business such as the technical side of distilling as well as bottling, labelling, customer service, marketing and business insight." Added Ellen: "We're really excited to be able to offer new roles that will give people experience and lots of transferable skills."

Despite disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak, there are still jobs out there to apply for. The jobhelp site from Jobcentre Plus has the latest vacancies, hints and tips on applying for jobs and ideas about roles you may never have thought of. Visit gov.uk/jobhelp



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All together >

Grants available to freelance folk musicians working with youngsters

Freelance traditional musicians and creative practitioners involved in traditional music projects for children and young people on Arran are being encouraged to apply for a share of £40,000 to support their work, writes Colin Smeeton.

The Youth Small Grants Scheme is being distributed by Dingwall-based traditional arts organisation Fèis Rois as part of a Scottish Government Covid-19 funding package to support the arts. It is being administered by Creative Scotland.

Applicants for the fund can apply for between £500 and £5,000 to deliver their traditional music projects for young people.

The fund is open to freelance folk musicians, artists and creative practitioners living and working in Scotland looking

to work directly with children and young people. As the fund directly supports freelancers, it is not open to applications from organisations, local authorities, groups or clubs.

Fiona Dalgetty, Fèis Rois chief executive, said: 'At Fèis Rois we enable people of all ages to access, participate in, enjoy and benefit from the traditional arts across Scotland and even further afield.'

'This new fund will allow many of Scotland's top traditional musicians and creatives to continue their work with young people at a time when it has been severely impacted by the pandemic.'

'Many of them have had to drastically adapt their ways of teaching and working and having the additional support to continue their important work with young people is crucial to ensure our young



The Youth Small Grants Scheme is aimed at freelance folk musicians, artists and creative practitioners who are looking to work directly with children and young people.

people don't miss out on the huge benefits that being involved in traditional music projects can bring.'

'This fund is particularly aimed at activities with young

and economic deprivation, young carers, young people with disabilities, those experiencing mental ill health and several other groups.'

Fèis Rois has an extensive track record in working with a wide range of young people, from music-making projects in HMP Inverness to opportunities for young people in foster and residential care.

'We are committed to supporting freelance musicians as they develop their projects to reach these groups and to make a positive impact through their work.'

The funding panel, which consists of Fiona Dalgetty, Siobhan Anderson, music officer at Creative Scotland, award-winning Gaelic singer and multi-instrumentalist Julie Fowlis and Ruairidh Gollan, a freelance musician and Fèis Rois board member,

will meet in March to review the applications.

Successful applicants will be able to start projects from the end of April this year and will have until March 2022 to complete their projects.

They will also receive two training and networking sessions to support them with their projects.

The deadline for applications is Sunday March 14 and more information can be found on the Fèis Rois website at www.feisrois.org.

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While this stretch seems hardest of all, we can't relax yet. The virus is still spreading, and we need to keep people safe. The more we stick to the current rules and restrictions now, the less chance the virus has to spread and the sooner we will make it through this.

#WeAreScotland gov.scot/coronavirus



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Calls for dogs to be kept on leads in the countryside

As lambing season approaches, there has been a spate of farm animal attacks by out of control dogs

Insurance and investment specialists NFU Mutual is urging dog owners to keep their pets on a lead at all times in the countryside, particularly with lambing season about to begin.

NFU Mutual insures three quarters of the UK's farmers and are all too familiar with the damage livestock worrying can cause.

Dog attacks on farm animals can result in horrific and often fatal injuries and even if a dog doesn't catch an animal, the distress of a chase can cause sheep to miscarry their lambs and sometimes die from exhaustion.

Thankfully dog attacks on farm animals in Scotland decreased by 13 per cent last year but incidents continue to cause

suffering to livestock and anxiety for farmers. The fall in reported incidents of livestock worrying to Police Scotland last year has been welcomed but a spate of attacks in 2021 has sparked warnings to those visiting the countryside to keep their pets under control.

Mark McBrearty, regional manager for Scotland at NFU Mutual, said: 'We are encouraged by the decrease in Scotland last year and it is a testament to the proactive work which has been led by police and farming groups.

However, horrific incidents continue to cause unbearable suffering to farm animals as well as huge anxiety for farmers and their families as they deal with the aftermath.

'With more people walking in the countryside as Covid restrictions continue and an increase in dog ownership, we have seen many more brutal attacks resulting in large numbers of sheep being killed and a trail of horrific injuries.

'It's a critical time in the farming calendar and there is widespread concern as we enter the peak lambing season that there will be a surge in new visitors who are unaware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code or how their dog will behave around farm animals. We want people to enjoy the countryside as it's so important for people's wellbeing. It's vital that dog owners act responsibly and keep dogs on a lead and under control

whenever there is a possibility livestock are nearby.'

Police Inspector Alan Dron, national rural crime co-ordinator, said: 'Through consistently raising awareness of this emotive offence, Police Scotland takes any report of livestock attacks or worrying seriously. This has resulted in more dog attacks being reported and investigated plus, where applicable, owners brought before the courts.

'Unfortunately too many instances of dogs attacking or worrying livestock still occur and whilst we want everyone to enjoy our countryside, it is important dog owners or those in charge exercise greater caution when accessing rural areas, particularly if livestock are present.'

NFU Scotland's head of policy team Gemma Cooper said: 'It is imperative dog owners ensure their pets are controlled in the countryside.

'We continue to see the devastating impacts of dog attacks on livestock and this crime is completely unacceptable.'

'Unfortunately, we know of a number of cases where farmers have been left with no choice but to shoot dogs that have worried livestock.'

'Any dog, including the most placid family pet, can inflict horrific damage to animals such as sheep. Particularly during lambing season, dogs must not be taken into fields of young lambs.'



A sign warning dog walkers to use a lead around livestock.

Photograph: www.nfuonline.com.

NFU Mutual has issued this advice:

- Always keep dogs on a lead when walking in rural areas where livestock are kept but let go of the lead if you are chased by cattle
- Be aware that even small dogs can chase, injure and kill farm animals
- Take special care to keep close control of dogs unused to farm animals
- Report attacks by dogs and sightings of dogs roaming the countryside to the police or farmers
- Don't let dogs loose and unsupervised in gardens adjoining livestock fields. Many attacks are caused by dogs which escape and attack sheep grazing nearby

Advice on preventing dogs attacking livestock is available from NFU Mutual's website: www.nfumutual.co.uk/news-and-stories/preventing-dog-attacks-on-farm-animals/



With lambing season imminent, dog walkers are being urged to exercise caution around sheep.

of Livestock Bill, as it makes its way through the Scottish Parliament.

NFU Scotland has worked closely with Emma Harper MSP, the member in charge for the Bill, which would significantly increase penalties and powers for investigation.'

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Wintering bird flocks abound amid signs of coming spring

In comparison to last January, January 2021 was colder and wetter.

The mean temperature was 3.5 degrees lower. The rainfall was more than 50 per cent higher. The weather was not conducive to being out-of-doors, nevertheless, almost 100 species were reported.

Some of the highlights were seen through the windows of people's homes, (in line with continuing Covid-19 restrictions), including; little egret in Lamlash on 20th, white-tailed eagle in Machrie on 22nd, little egret in Brodick on 23rd and nuthatch in Pirnmill on 30th.

In addition, there was a long-tailed duck off Porta Buidhe on 5th and a Slavonian grebe off Cosyden on 20th.

Wintering wildfowl included: four goldeneye on Mossend Pond on 1st, 300 greylag geese in Feorline on 12th, 28 Canada geese in Clachaig on 13th, one whooper swan on Port-na-Lochan on 19th, 90 pink-footed geese in Sliddery on 30th, 90 wigeon in Shiskine also on 30th, three goosander in Whiting Bay on 31st and

Highlights include 15 bullfinch in Clauchan Glen

120 teal at Kilpatrick Point also on 31st.

Other wintering species included: one knot on Silver Sands on 2nd, three jack snipe on Sliddery Shore also on 2nd, four redwing at Porta Buidhe on 5th, two rook on Clachaig Farm on 18th, four purple sandpiper on Silver Sands on 20th, one merlin at Porta Buidhe on 22nd, 30 fieldfare at Ballymeanochglen on 27th and 11 yellowhammer in Sliddery on 30th.

There were no January reports of brambling.

Wintering flocks included: 120 jackdaw on Clachaig Farm on 1st, 51 golden plover in Sliddery on 3rd, five little grebe on Loch Ranza on 16th, 26 turnstone on Silver Sands also on 16th, 10 black-throated diver in Whiting Bay on 19th, 55 lapwing on Clachaig Farm on 21st, nine mistle thrush on Kilpatrick Farm also on 21st,

Bird notes
by Jim Cassels
FEBRUARY

15 bullfinch in Clauchan Glen on 23rd, five great northern diver off Blackwaterfoot on 24th, 32 curlew on Cleats Shore also on 24th, 190 starling on Clachaig Farm on 29th, 70 ringed plover at Dougarie on 30th and 250 common gull at Kilpatrick Point on 31st.

Interesting garden birds in January included: 12 long-tailed tit in Shannochie on 10th, a treecreeper in Lochranza on 11th, a blackcap in Mayish on 12th and a goldcrest in Cordon on 13th.

In January there was one report of returning gannet, one in Whiting Bay on 16th, while there were a number of reports of returning shelduck on coastal territories including Auchenhowe,

Carlo, Clauchlands, Cleats Shore, Kildonan Merkland, Porta Buidhe, Sandbraes and Whiting Bay. Other signs of approaching spring included: a pair of collared dove nesting in Brodick on 15th, 38 eider courting in Whiting Bay on 19th, a grey heron carrying nest material in Whitehouse Wood on 23rd and a great spotted woodpecker drumming in Kildonan also on 23rd. But the winter is not over yet.

In a future Bird Note there will be a report on the Arran RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch Weekend of January 29 to 31.

Enjoy your birding and keep safe.

Please send any bird notes with 'what, when, where' to me at Kilpatrick Kennels, Kilpatrick, Blackwaterfoot, KA27 8EY, or e mail me at jim@arranbirding.co.uk I look forward to hearing from you. For more information on birding on Arran purchase the Arran Bird Report, The First 40 Years, which includes the annual report for 2019 and visit this website www.arranbirding.co.uk



A little egret generates ripples in the water by moving its right leg, hoping to disturb little fish and invertebrates, which it will catch with its long beak. Photograph: Charlotte Clough.



Purple sandpiper, a winter visitor on Arran. Photograph: Howard Sargeant.



Bullfinch, one of the species flocking together on Arran in January. Photograph: Dennis Morrison.



Goldeneye, one of a number of species of wintering wildfowl on the island. Photograph: Brian Couper.

Arran Cat Rescue fills void left by national charity branch

An independent cat welfare charity called Arran Cat Rescue has been established following the closure of the Arran branch of the national charity Cats Protection.

The new cat rescue organisation, started in August last year, will now prepare to tackle all of the rescue work previously done by the island branch. This includes re-homing stray and lost cats and kittens, neutering, micro-chipping,

helping to reunite lost cats and their owners, TNR work (trap neuter and return of feral cats, including vaccination and vet treatments) and offering advice on cat welfare and general cat ownership.

A spokesperson from Arran Cat Rescue said: 'To leave the island without any cat rescue support was beyond our comprehension as it was for many Scottish islands and mainland branches who have suffered

the same fate. As those other areas have started their own rescues, we too felt compelled to do so. Thus, Arran Cat Rescue started with the three people from the closed island branch of Cats Protection. Since then our number of volunteers has grown to 12 which is a fantastic start to a small island cat rescue group.'

'We have been lifted by the response of people who have been coming forward to help

whether it's to transport goods, foster cats or to take cats to the vets, as well as the amazing response in providing homes.'

'We have also been incredibly fortunate that people have been generous in helping with donations of food, equipment and funds to do this work.'

'As a small cat rescue, we have no staff salaries or building expenses so every penny received is for the cats and all cats are supported, both feral and

domestic.' The work required to rescue cats on Arran is both labour intensive, when relying on volunteers, and costly. So, the organisation is appealing for donors who might wish to support cat welfare on Arran.

The spokesperson added: 'We continue to need your help. If you currently donate to a cat rescue organisation then please consider us, an independent cat rescue that is based locally and that supports

the welfare of cats on Arran. We are here on the island to help the cats, both feral and domestic, and will continue to do so. Be assured every penny goes towards cats on Arran.'

Further information on the work Arran Cat Rescue undertakes, along with contact details and information on how people can help, can be found on their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/IsleofArranCats

THE ARRAN BANNER 20 YEARS AGO

Saturday February 10, 2001



Shindig in Shiskine: Dr Ken Currie gives the Immortal Memory at the Shiskine Hall Burns supper. 01_B07TYA01



Donald Bannatyne addresses the haggis with chef Claire Johnston, while Sandy Kerr plays the pipes at the Shiskine Hall Burns supper. 01_B07TYA02



Willie Currie and George Boal help a stranded motorist on the Ross Road after Arran was hit by blizzard conditions that severed power lines and caused outages across the island. 01_B07TYA03



The annual pool team knockout tournament took place in the Kinloch Hotel with home team Kinloch A winning. Celebrating are, left to right, Freddy Galbraith, Denis Smith, captain, Robbie Crawford, Stewart Black, Louise MacAlister and Alan Stewart. 01_B07TYA04



Brodick Ladies Golf Club trophy winners enjoy their annual prizegiving and dinner at the Brodick Bar. 01_B07TYA05

Helen and Phil Wigley outside their new store at Overdale House in Sliddery. The couple have taken over the ironmongery and hardware business previously provided by the Lakin in Torbeg.
01_B07TYA06



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funeral, a Celebration of
Margaret's life will be held at
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Mountain festival delays bookings due to restrictions

by Colin Smeeton
editor@arranbanner.co.uk

Organisers of the popular Arran Mountain Festival, who usually open their booking lines in December each year, have decided to once again postpone taking bookings until they have a clearer idea of what kind of festival they will be able to run this year.

The event is scheduled to take place from Friday May 14 to Monday May 17, with a number of guided walks on Arran's most popular mountains and high-level pathways on offer for visitors and residents.

But due to the ongoing uncertainty regarding Covid restrictions, the committee has decided it will be best to wait until a clearer picture emerges so that they can tailor their festival to accommodate any restrictions at the time.

An Arran Mountain Festival spokesperson said: 'We know this is not the news you were hoping for and appreciate that you are keen to plan your Arran Mountain Festival adventure as soon as possible. However, opening our booking lines closer to the event will



Participants enjoy stunning views during the Witch's Step guided walk in 2019. Photograph: Corinna Goeckeritz.

help secure the viability of our community-run, not-for-profit festival for future years.'

'The festival team is planning event options tailored to different potential restriction levels which may still be in place come May. We certainly are determined to offer as much of the usual Arran Mountain Festival as we can. Stay up to

date with what's happening via our social media channels and thank you for your understanding and ongoing support.'

Last year's festival, like many events throughout the UK, had to be cancelled for the first time in what would have been its 14th consecutive year.

The festival attracts huge

numbers of people each year and features up to 30 events squeezed into the four-day schedule. All walks are undertaken by qualified guides and are rated from moderate to extreme. There are some night hikes too and many of the walks include a post walk coffee, tea, cake and natter to discuss the day's events.

ARRAN BANNER GOLF

Corrie Golf Club

Monday February 1, Monday Cup: 1 A Napier 71-10=61 and scratch; 2 G Andrew 73-10=63. Magic twos, R Burke at the 5th. Monday February 8, Monday Cup: 1 G Andrews 69-10=59; 2 R McLean 74-12=62, BIH. Scratch, A Smith. Nine Magic twos recorded.

Fixtures: Saturday February 13, 18-hole Sweep. Monday February 15, Monday Cup, ballot at noon, two balls only as per Covid rules.

Lamlash Golf Club

Sunday February 7: 1 Derek Harrison 81-21=60; 2 Serge El Adm 73-11=62. Best scratch, Ian Bremner 73, BIH. Magic twos, Graeme Andrew at 16th, Allan Campbell at 13th.

Fixtures: Thursday February 18, Yellow Medal, draw at 11am. Sunday February 14,

Glenburn Cup, 9.30am and noon starts.

Machrie Bay Golf Club

Saturday February 5, Lochranza Hotel Cup: 1 John Pennycott 34pts; 2 Brian Sherwood 32pts; 3 Reuben Betley 29pts. Tuesday February 9, Winter Cup: 1 Alex Morrison-Cowan 68, BIH; 2 Brian Sherwood 68; 3 Willie McNally 69.

Fixtures: Tuesday February 16, Lochranza Hotel Cup. Tee off at noon.

Brodick Golf Club

Sunday February 7, Stableford Sweep, 18 played: Alastair Dobson 11, 39pts; Babbies MacNeil 16, 37pts; ACB, Alistair Hume 14, 37pts.

Fixture: Sunday February 14, Brandon Qualifier.



Alex Campbell of Kilmory who landed his first hole in one at Shiskine Golf Club on Monday.



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Arran Belles clock up 2,692 miles for Doddie

by Colin Smeeton
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The Arran Belles, a ladies' cycling and socialising group on Arran, have contributed 2,692 miles to the Doddie Active Inter District (AID) Challenge which has helped to raise more than £1m for the My Name's Doddie Foundation.

The challenge involved people and organisations making a donation to the motor neurone disease research and grant charity then joining a district group with any exercise logged during the month of January going towards the district's total.

The Arran Belles, plus a couple of friends, took part in the challenge in one of the wettest months of the year.

Calling themselves the Doddie Gumpers, they braved the Arran storms, cycling, climbing, dog walking, and golfing to rack up an

impressive 2,692 miles for their district team.

There were five teams in total and although the Belles were part of the team with the lowest numbers, they were the second most generous.

A spokesperson from the Arran Belles said: 'Thanks to others who supported the cause and congratulations to all of the Arran Belles and their friends. Brilliant mileage, brilliant contribution.'

The Doddie AID Challenge, the brainchild of Rob Wainwright, was well supported with more than 27,000 people participating and helping to raise more than £1m for motor neurone disease research.

It also received celebrity endorsement from Sir Chris Hoy, Gerard Butler, Lorraine Kelly and Ewan McGregor and there were messages of encouragement from Nicola Sturgeon and Boris Johnson.

The My Name's Doddie Foundation is named after George Wilson 'Doddie' Weir, OBE, the former Scottish rugby union player who made 61 international appearances for the Scotland national team.

Doddie was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2017 and since then has helped to raise in excess of £7 million to aid research into the causes of motor neurone disease and investigate potential cures.

Through the My Name's Doddie Foundation, the charity also makes grants to individuals suffering from motor neurone disease, to enable them to live as fulfilled a life as possible.

All competitors who took part in the challenge received a tartan Doddie buff which the Arran Belles took on a tour with them and photo-



An Arran Belle takes her Doddie buff on a cycle to High Kildonan.



The Doddie buff at the Brodick Ferry Terminal.



The Arran Belles at the top of the String Road.



The Belles enjoyed some sunshine.



The buff at the top of the Boguille.

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