

## Pupils back in the swim as parents' fears stroked aside

by EILIDH WHITEFORD  
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FEARS that Western Isles primary pupils are missing out on the chance to learn to swim have been laid to rest by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar who reassure: "Free swimming lessons for primary school has been ongoing for a number of years and will continue after the October holidays."

A regular swimmer in the Lewis Sports Centre recently became concerned at the lack of school swimming lessons.

He says: "Every week when I go swimming there used to always be schools in the pool as well getting their swimming lessons. The last couple of times I've gone to the pool however, it's been empty - no school swimming lessons."

"I hate to think that the amount of enjoyment and satisfaction I have had throughout my life as a swimmer is now being denied the younger generation."

"The Government say that all primary school children in Scotland will be given free swimming lessons, but it doesn't seem to be the case up here."

Last month the Scottish Government announced an £800,000 investment to support the improved delivery of swimming lessons and ensure that all children should have the opportunity to learn to swim before leaving primary school.

The monies were delivered to national organisation sportsScotland, who then allocated funding to individual local authorities.

Minister for Sport, Shona Robison, comments: "The Scottish Government has always wanted to make sure that Scotland's children are given the opportunity to learn to swim and to enjoy swim-

ming as a lifelong activity.

"By giving local authorities the flexibility to create opportunities to try new approaches and improve on their current provision, this announcement will continue the process of ensuring that this happens."

A spokesman for the council confirms that the Comhairle's share of the funding package was approximately £2,500, and will be used for: "Continued professional development i.e; developing accreditation and qualification for swimming teachers in line with the guidelines issued for accessing this money."

Although pupils have been without swimming lessons for the first term of the present school year - as the organisation of school swimming has been transferred from the Sports Centre to the Education Department - the situation is set to change following the October break with schools being offered eight week blocks of free lessons, at a rate of two lessons per week.

The Comhairle spokesman expands: "Over the course of primary schooling all primary age children in the Western Isles will get a structured series of lessons to the national swim curriculum."

"For the small minority who are unable to meet the standards at the end of their 16-20 lessons, additional extracurricular opportunities will be made available to meet their needs."

Taking the organisation of school swimming in-house through the Education department, the local authority are also set to reduce the cost of transporting pupils to and from their schools and sports centres by combining neighbouring schools to travel together, cutting down bus hire charges.



## Local charity to make cash from trash

by MICHELLE ROBSON  
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DUMPING weekly bin collections might indirectly benefit a local charity.

As the Comhairle consider the possibility of fortnightly waste collections for the whole Western Isles, Hebrides Alpha is due to start a business recycling service.

At last week's budget consultation meeting in Stornoway, the Comhairle suggested that cutting bin collections could save them in the region of £90,000.

It was pointed out at the meeting that a reduction to fortnightly collections could put pressure on businesses in the town as they did not have recycling collections.

However this is soon to change as Hebrides Alpha plan to roll out their new initiative at the start of November.

A feasibility study was undertaken for the charity over the summer whereby over 450 businesses were contacted about a potential new service that would take away dry recyclates such as plastic, cans, paper and cardboard.

Robert Sinclair, Project Manager of Hebrides Alpha Trading CIC explained that they had met with 200 businesses and from that, 120 had stated they would be interested in being involved.

He said: "We have met with CnES staff who

have been very helpful and the outcome of that is that we will be doing a 12 week pilot with 20 businesses starting at the beginning of November until the end of January. We will collect the waste in a Luton van which we will purchase shortly and we will take the recycled waste to Creed Park where it will be baled and sold on the mainland to a Materials Recycling Facility."

He added that the pilot was an opportunity for them to learn as they went along in regard to how best to provide local businesses with bins, bags, storage etc. "The businesses who have a bin contract will continue to pay the Comhairle for their collections, we will collect the dry recyclates and the Comhairle will collect the residual waste," he added.

Working closely with the Comhairle, this could be an opportunity for services to be transferred to the voluntary sector not only helping the council to save money and avoid landfill, but benefiting a good cause at the same time.

Hebrides Alpha aims to help those in the community with alcohol and drug problems by providing therapeutic employment and they are also working towards the set up of supported accommodation.

Their services include window cleaning, power washing, inflatables hire and a range of recycling.

To find out more about the charity and their services, visit their website [www.hebridesalpha.co.uk](http://www.hebridesalpha.co.uk).

## Fate of 11 island schools to be decided on Nov 2

THE fate of eight primary schools and three secondary departments will be in the hands of councillors next month as they meet to make their decisions, writes Michelle Robson.

Balalalan, Bragar, Carloway, Cross, Sandwickhill, Scalpay, Stonybridge and Shelibost Primary Schools and Daliburgh, Lionel and Shawbost secondary units are all recommended for closure following a consultation period which ended in September.

Despite strong resistance from most of the communities involved, the Education Committee will be asked to consider closure of all of the schools which were part of the consultation process.

The rationalisation of schools is a key part of the Comhairle's plan to cut their budget over the coming years and net savings from eight primary schools is estimated at around £1.2m.

Another £1m could be saved with the closure of the four remaining S1/2 departments.

The Comhairle conducted community conversations and also formal consultation meetings in each area and despite the issues raised, they are all now recommended for closure.

Leader of the Comhairle Angus Campbell said at last week's budget consultation meeting in Stornoway that in the past some politicians had backed away under pressure when making difficult decisions about schools, but that the Comhairle had to take responsibility.

He added that there would be problems to come if the school rationalisation did not go ahead.

Some communities are already raising concerns about the value of the consultation process and are not yet prepared to give up the fight.

The West Harris Trust are furious with the recommendation on Shelibost School and particularly the description of their plans as 'aspirational'.

Neil Campbell, Secretary of the Trust commented: "We are extremely concerned that no attempt was made to contact the West Harris Trust to obtain an update on our proposals to strengthen the community prior to completing the review of education provision at Shelibost School."

He drew attention to the HMIE report which states in paragraph 3.10 that: "The consultation document does not take sufficient account of the effect on the local community, which has purchased

the estate and has announced six house sites going forward for planning permission with a further seven sites at the preliminary stage of investigation. This could lead to an increase in the pupil population in the near future. The Comhairle may wish to consider these proposals before making any final decision in closing this remote rural school."

Continued on page 2

## Licensing Board no show for golf club court appeal

AFTER having twice refused Stornoway Golf Club a Sunday drinks licence, the Western Isles Licensing Board has now chosen not to be represented in court when an appeal action calls at Inverness Sheriff Court writes Taylor Edgar.

Instead, the Licensing Board have lodged their reasons for bunkering the golf club's seven day licence with the Sheriff Principal's Office.

A spokesperson for the Licensing Board told the Gazette: "The Licensing Board considers that the reasons and legal justification for its decision are set out unambiguously in the statement of reasons and the stated case which will be put before the Sheriff Principal. The Board is of the view that the issues to be considered by the Sheriff Principal are clear and as a consequence has decided to

exercise its right not to appear as a party at the appeal."

The Licensing Board - whose decisions to bar the golf club from Sunday licensing hours have been condemned by the Board chairman, Mr Martin Taylor - are arguing that the grant of the application and the subsequent increase in the availability of alcohol would be inconsistent with the licensing objective of protecting and improving public health. It was on these grounds, says the Licensing Board, that they refused the golf club's application.

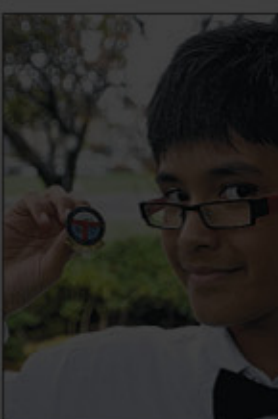
The date for the hearing has still to be fixed.

Meanwhile, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar states that it is normal practice for the council to pay the legal costs of the Licensing Board and that, at this time, there are "no costs".

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**INTERNET POLL RESULTS: SHOULD THE WESTERN ISLES HAVE ITS OWN DEDICATED MS NURSE?**

Yes 74% No 26%

See page 4 for this week's poll question

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# Fuel price rise

by MICHELLE ROBSON  
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ISLAND motorists faced another rise in fuel prices last week as an increase in duty took effect. Petrol and diesel have gone up by 1p a litre.

With islanders already paying some of the highest fuel prices in the country, concern has been expressed about the disproportionate effect of this rise on rural communities.

Angus MacNeil MP, warned the Treasury over the impact soaring fuel prices on economic recovery and called for action to

bring down fuel prices ahead of the January VAT hike.

Western Isles MP, Angus MacNeil, who is also the SNP's Westminster Transport spokesperson, said: "Just when we need action to bring down fuel prices, the Treasury is driving up duty and causing real pain for Scottish motorists and businesses. Instead of stopping Labour's highway robbery, the Con/Dem coalition is pushing up the cost of living for Scottish households.

"There was no relief in the Budget, but the Treasury must act because soaring fuel prices are actually hindering economic recovery from recession. The October duty increase is bad enough, but will be compounded with the Tory and LibDems VAT increase in January.

"It's a national scandal that, in an oil rich country like Scotland, we are paying the highest fuel prices in Europe."

Mr MacNeil also made a direct appeal to fellow Highland MP Danny Alexander, now Chief Secretary to the Treasury, reminding the Liberal Democrat Minister of his pre-election promises of action on fuel prices.

Mr Alexander visited Stornoway earlier this year to discuss cuts in public spending with the people of the islands.

He said the UK Government were committed to introducing a fuel derogation pilot scheme but could not confirm what areas would be included in that.

The UK Government is currently considering a pilot fuel derogation scheme which could benefit remote and rural areas including the Western Isles.

# No date for BBC Alba Freeview decision

by MICHELLE ROBSON  
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THERE is no deadline for the BBC Trust to decide whether the Gaelic TV channel will appear on Freeview or not.

The decision was due to be made earlier this year but the Trust announced in March that it was extending this review.

This move has left the channel in limbo and the BBC confirmed this week that an estimated date cannot be given for a decision.

A spokesperson said: "I'm afraid I don't yet have a date for the Trust's decision regarding Alba's being available on Freeview. The background to this is that the Trust announced in March that it was extending the timetable for a final decision on BBC Alba.

"This is because the Trust will be publishing its final conclusions on the wider Strategy Review before Christmas, and since this will respond to questions on what universality of access to BBC services should mean in the future, it would be inappropriate to take a decision on BBC Alba before this date."

She added: "A decision on Alba will therefore follow sometime after this but I can't confirm the date at the moment."

BBC ALBA is sure to be much in demand later this month when they broadcast live from the Royal National Mod.

BBC Gàidhlig will be producing a premier package of live hour-long programmes covering the daily highlights throughout the festival from Monday 12 to Friday 16 October.

Each live programme will be broadcast at 9.00pm on BBC ALBA and repeated that night at 11.20pm on BBC Two Scotland with a short-

# Inappropriate to take decision on BBC Alba till after wider Strategy Review

er, 45 minute review programme transmitting at 2.15pm the following day on BBC One Scotland.

The programmes will include performances from each day's competitions and coverage of the prize-winners' concerts as well as the premier solo and choral competitions which are the highlight of the latter end of the week.

BBC Gàidhlig will also be producing a premier package for Radio nan Gàidheal with 30 hours of live radio coverage. Some material will also feature in 'De a-nis?' the award winning children's Gaelic language television programme for seven to 11 year olds.

Margaret Mary Murray, Head of Service for BBC ALBA, said: "The Mod has gained international recognition drawing competitors and visitors from throughout the UK as well as further afield from Ireland, US, Canada and even Australia. In recognising the popularity of such a prestigious festival, not only at home but also abroad, I am delighted that we are able to offer audiences the opportunity to enjoy the best of the Mod through our television and radio coverage".

John Morrison, Chief Executive of An Comunn Gàidhealach, said: "In this, the Year of Homecoming, An Comunn Gàidhealach is

pleased to bring the Royal National Mod back to its birthplace, Oban. We are delighted that the BBC will again provide coverage of the event on both BBC ALBA and also on BBC One and Two Scotland. In addition, we are indebted to Radio nan Gàidheal for covering the event in a comprehensive and professional manner.

"The comprehensive package of BBC broadcasts allows us to showcase our premier Gaelic cultural event to an appreciative audience at home and overseas.

"The growth in interest in the event has been greatly assisted by the support of our broadcast partner and we thank them for their tremendous commitment to the Royal National Mod."

The multi-talented duo of Tony Kearney, actor and TV producer, and the highly acclaimed singer and musician, Mary Ann Kennedy will present the daily television programmes.

Tony said: "I'm delighted to be presenting the Mod with Mary Anne again this year. Mary Anne and I both have Mod backgrounds so it's great to be part of it all again and be involved in the fantastic coverage that the BBC always provides."

# Support for MS Nurse campaign

by TAYLOR EDGAR  
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THE Western Isles Carers, Users & Supporters Network (WICUSN) has today (Thursday) backed a campaign for a specialist Multiple Sclerosis (MS) nurse service in the Western Isles.

They have lent their support to the move in advance of a meeting between MS sufferers and carers in the islands and Highlands and Islands MSP Rhoda Grant tomorrow afternoon.

The meeting at the High Church Hall on Matheson Road, Stornoway has been arranged by local MS sufferer, Christine Stewart who has grown infuriated by the lack of support locally for people with the condition. The Western Isles is the only region in Scotland without a dedicated MS nurse service.

Throwing their weight behind the campaign in the islands – an area with the third highest rate of the disease in Scotland – WICUSN highlights the stark contrast between the services offered to diabetics and those with multiple sclerosis.

Said a spokesperson: "One of our members who suffers from both MS and diabetes tells us that the good standard of support and care she receives for her diabetes through a diabetic nurse is in stark contrast to the total lack of support for her to help her cope with the MS.

She describes it as a feeling of total abandonment. Now, no one should, in this day and age, be experiencing total abandonment but that is how it is for people with neurological conditions in the Western Isles, the only Health Board in Scotland not to employ an MS nurse, despite the very high incidence of MS in the Western Isles."

While acknowledging the work being done on health promotion and prevention of disease, WICUSN are appealing to the Western Isles Health Board to consider the benefits providing an appropriate MS dedicated service would bring to those suffering from MS.

"Such help would, we feel sure, be cost effective as it would ensure that people with MS would be supported and enabled to lead



WICUSN is supporting Christine's campaign.

independent lives for so much longer," pointed out the WICUSN spokesperson.

"During consultation on the Clinical Strategy, we frequently heard about encouraging health professionals to diversify to provide services that would be sustainable and reduce dependence on consultants. Surely this is just such a service. WICUSN urges the Health Board to embrace this service."

Speaking to the Gazette ahead of the meeting, Ms Stewart said she had received expressions of interest in the campaign from MS sufferers in Lewis, Harris and the Uists. She urged MS sufferers and their carers to attend the meeting if at all possible as this was a rare opportunity to gain support from a leading politician willing to take on the Health Board on their behalf.

Anyone interested in attending or wishing to lend support can call Christine on 01851 702564 or email christine.stewart52@gmail.com.

YOUNG people from Sir E Scott School on Harris travelled to New Lanark last week to represent the St. Kilda World Heritage site at the UK UNESCO Youth Summit. The first to be held in Scotland, the summit aimed to explore what world heritage means to young people and how they can help to preserve and protect the internationally important cultural and natural heritage on their doorstep.

The delegation from Harris joined schools representing Scotland's four other World Heritage Sites; the Antonine Wall, Heart of Neolithic Orkney, New Lanark, Old and New Towns of Edinburgh. They were also joined by a delegation from the historic town of St George World Heritage Site in Bermuda.

The aim of the summit, which was sponsored by Historic Scotland, was to explore what World Heritage means to young people and how they can help to preserve and protect internationally important sites on their doorstep.

As part of UNESCO's World Heritage in Young Hands Programme, the Summit provided an opportunity for the participants to put forward their views and visions for World Heritage Sites.

Feedback from the day will now be sent to all Scottish world heritage sites, Historic Scotland and Minister for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop MSP.

Ms Hyslop said: "Scotland's unique and diverse built and natural heritage is celebrated on a global scale, and is a large part of our identity. It is important therefore that young people are encouraged to develop an appreciation and understanding of their built envi-

# Harris group represent St Kilda



The group from Harris took part in the first Scottish UNESCO World Heritage Summit

ronment from an early age, and have a voice. "This event provides a fantastic forum to bring together representatives from our five world heritage sites to share their ideas, views and experiences with their contemporaries from the other side of the world. I very much look forward to receiving their feedback."

Throughout the day the young participants worked on a series of workshops to explore global challenges to World Heritage, questioned World Heritage experts and took part in a "Dragon's Den" exercise.

Each youth delegation also gave a presentation introducing their World Heritage Site to the other delegates.

Joanne Orr, Chair of the Scotland Committee of

UK National Commission for UNESCO, said: "The Youth Summit is an excellent opportunity for young people to explore the unique natural and cultural heritage that Scotland is home to.

Engaging young people in the protection and preservation of Scotland's five World Heritage sites is vital to ensure these sites remain part of our shared global heritage for future generations."

Christina Campbell from Sir E Scott School on the Isle of Harris, said: "Preparing for the Youth Summit has made us think about our own culture and environment and why and how the unique qualities of St Kilda should be preserved for present and future young people to enjoy."

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In addition in paragraph 4.2 it states: "The Comhairle should consider carefully the proposal of the West Harris Trust and other community views in taking forward this proposal. In particular, it should assess whether the proposed regeneration of the community could mean a rise in the pupil population, making Shelibost Primary School a viable remote rural school."

Mr Campbell continued: "Despite these recommendations the Comhairle made no attempt to contact the Trust dismissing our

plans as "aspirational". We can advise you that these updated plans envisage a minimum of 24 new families living on the West Side within five years and it is not unreasonable to project that this will mean an additional 20 to 30 children making Shelibost a viable remote rural school for many years to come. In addition the Trust has made an offer to erect a small wind turbine adjacent to the school and to use the net income to help defray the running costs of the school."

Cross Primary, Daliburgh Secondary and Stoneybridge are recommended to close in June next year with all the rest in June 2012.

Stoneybridge is already closed and the closure of Daliburgh has been accepted by most parents in the area.

One of the issues raised by some communities during the consultation was the question of what would happen to the empty school building in their community.

The Comhairle responded that The Disposal of Surplus Buildings Policy provided an opportunity for communities to make proposals on how buildings could be used.

Based on issues raised in the consultation process, the Education and Children's Services Department has developed a European Social Fund application which is currently at stage 2.

This proposes community-based economic regeneration projects, together with the appointment of community development workers who would be based in communities affected by school closures. Any vacant building would be maintained at the level of it being wind and water tight with minimum heating, representing a reduced cost until time of disposal, at which point a capital asset may be received for the Comhairle.

The Education and Children's Services committee is due to meet on November 2 to consider the future of the schools. Their recommendation will then need to be considered by the full Comhairle on November 4.

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