

Scottish Government response to Colonsay Community Council

Colonsay Community Council is very concerned about the extraordinary discrepancy concerning freight fares to Colonsay compared with other destinations. It puts all Colonsay enterprise at an insuperable disadvantage and, innocently enough, CCC thought it might have arisen by mistake. Perhaps the Scottish Government had not really intended to single out Colonsay to be especially targeted? Either CCC was wrong or the Government needs to sharpen up on its staff selection procedure as regards spokespersons:

Our ref: 2015/008906

18 March 2015

Thank you for your email of 24 February to Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Transport and Islands, regarding ferry fares for freight on Colonsay. As a Ferries Policy Officer, I have been asked to reply.

You will likely have been passed a copy of my reply of 11 February to John Finnie, however I have attached a copy in case you have not previously been sighted on it.

I understand the concerns you raise about the inconsistency in freight fares between Colonsay and Coll. As you are aware, RET including commercial vehicles was originally piloted on the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree in 2008. Commercial vehicles were not included in the further rollout of RET for passengers, cars, small commercial vehicles and coaches to Islay, Colonsay and Gigha in 2012.

The intention was that commercial vehicle fares on the original pilot routes would be returned to non-RET levels transitionally over 3 years. However, during this time a study showed that the sharp increase in fares was damaging the economies of these islands, [i.e. Western Isles, Coll and Tiree ; *clarification by editor*] therefore the decision was taken not to implement the full transition back to non-RET levels.

This decision was taken in the knowledge that Transport Scotland is currently undertaking a full review of freight fares, in order to implement a new overarching freight fares structure in future Scottish Government ferry contracts. One of the key aims of the review is to produce a consistent freight fares structure that does not advantage one part of the network over another.

It is worth noting that Colonsay has had RET for passengers, cars, small commercial vehicles and coaches, and the concessions introduced alongside for lorries carrying hay, livestock and live shellfish, since 2012; having RET and these additional services over the past years, before the roll-out to all Clyde and Hebrides routes this October. It is also worth noting the original pilot islands have not had the Traders Rebate Scheme reinstated, something which is available to other islands.

I appreciate you highlighting the issues that Colonsay face. However, **if additional concessions were offered to Colonsay, they would have to be introduced across the entire network.** The freight fares review will address the inconsistencies in freight fares, introducing a freight fares structure that is fair and consistent across the network.

Yours sincerely

Carol Nowbaveh

A neat *non sequitor* but it will not wash. Exactly why would additional concessions have to be introduced across the entire network? Clearly they have no problem providing specific disadvantages targeted upon one island, so why should concessions be any different? They left Colonsay for FOUR years without RET, and then introduced it without any Commercial Vehicle element, but continued the CV element on a slowly reducing scale to our competitors. The Scottish Government needs a better excuse or a more gifted spokesperson. Urgently. Before May 7th.



Colonsay in the Long Grass - again

On behalf of the Scottish Government, on 25th March Cabinet Secretary Keith Brown proudly announced that 4G Mobile Phone has been installed in Coll, the favourite island (which also enjoyed RET for four years in the “pilot” programme for most-favoured islands) . This new development sits nicely with Coll’s heavily subsidised freight service and no doubt we can shortly expect to see that their income tax has been abolished too. It will be remembered that Colonsay only receives a mobile service of any sort in fits and starts, and can frequently go for weeks without one. The Government Press Release is so good that it is worth savouring in full:

“Ultrafast mobile network is live on the Isle of Coll. The inner Hebridean island has become the first off Scotland to have access to 2G, 3G and 4G telecommunications services.

Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure Keith Brown described the roll-out as “a massive breakthrough” which could “help transform the local economy”.

The switch-on – in partnership with Vodafone and community organisations – means local people, businesses and the wider community can have faster and more reliable mobile access, ultimately boosting business opportunities for islanders.

Mr Brown said:

“The Isle of Coll project is a great example of what can be achieved when a community has the ambition and the commitment to making such a development work.

“A state-of-the-art telecoms mast – funded by the Scottish Government as part of our Demonstrating Digital programme, which supports our digital world class 2020 vision – allows communities and businesses on Coll to access mobile services for the first time.

“It’s very encouraging to see a local community and a service provider – in this case Vodafone – work with the government to develop an innovative solution for an area that is otherwise unlikely to receive mobile coverage.

“This community ownership model provides a template that has the potential to be adopted in other remote areas across the country, improving connectivity to Scotland’s islands and rural towns and villages.”

Vodafone UK Chief Technology Officer Jorge Fernandes added:

“Our partnership with the Scottish Government and the local community is the ideal business model to be able to deliver ultra-fast 4G mobile communications to remote locations, such as the Isle of Coll.

“Thanks to the enormous effort of our engineers, we can now give islanders high-speed mobile data access to services that will enable greater economic development and improved social inclusion. This initiative is real evidence of what we can achieve together, when the required fixed connection is in place to link our 4G network in remote places to the national fixed line infrastructure.”

Lavinia MacLean-Bristol, Chair of Development Coll, said:

“The ability to communicate has a real impact on families and businesses within small, remote communities such as ours and this project will help to make a big difference.”

Derek Graham, Programme Director with the Demonstrating Digital team at Scottish Futures Trusty, stated:

"This is a great example of what can be achieved in a collaborative environment, allowing locals and visitors to the Island of Coll access to mobile and data services for the very first time. We very much look forward to seeing the many benefits that the introduction of mobile technology will have on the lives of those visiting, living and working on Coll."

The project has resulted from a successful collaboration between the Scottish Government, Scottish Futures Trust, Vodafone, Mono Consultants, Wireless Infrastructure Group and the local community.

The Coll project is the first of several pilots that the Scottish Government and Scottish Futures Trust will use to evaluate the potential for this approach to be replicated to address mobile not-spots in other remote communities in the future.

This pioneering project demonstrates community ownership of telecoms infrastructure. Development Coll, a local community trust established to generate income through local enterprise is taking ownership of the mobile mast and has assumed responsibility for its maintenance.”



VisitScotland – more Dead than Alive?

Our readers will be fully aware of the saga of The Dress, (if not, see it in Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_dress_%28viral_phenomenon%29) whereby the recent wedding of Keir and Grace attracted worldwide attention. Everyone will know that Keir and Grace were guests on the Ellen Show, and that together with other wedding guests they were flown to Los Angeles, that they were gifted a luxury second honeymoon to be taken in Grenada plus a pot of spending money; that Caitlin was flown to Dubai to talk about Social Networking; and that the island appeared on Stern TV in Germany plus virtually every news channel worldwide.



Put this in perspective. It was a story that involved Colonsay, Argyll, the Inner Hebrides, the Highlands and Islands, Scotland, GB and UK – and those are just the most basic keywords. It engaged more than 85,000,000 people (yes, eighty five MILLION people), rather more than (for example) the Commonwealth Games and about 100 times as many as The Gathering. So, what use did VisitScotland make of this open goal?



Too difficult to promote?

They missed it! Not by a little, not by a lot – they never even left the dressing room! How can this possibly be? It is an absolute scandal – surely we should expect something better from a national tourist board? In fact, anything at all would be a start. Many commercial agencies saw the opportunity and, to its great credit, so did the Salvation Army, who used it very effectively in a campaign which might be best described as striking. Maybe we should ask the Sally Army to promote Scotland? They certainly could not do worse than the official body. Compare and contrast

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/> with <http://www.visitscotland.com/> The VisitScotland page seems to be promoting the seaplane service to Mull that ran in 2008 – does it still operate?

Springtime in Colonsay

Luckily enough, Colonsay is not relying on public agencies and can be proud of the almost incredible programme of events provided through the energy and enterprise of local people.

At Easter there will be a magnificent ceilidh on the Saturday night, hosted and arranged by **Liam McNeill** as part of his work as a music student of Benbecula College, University of the Highlands; on Easter Sunday itself, everyone is invited to the 11.30 Family Service at the **Baptist Church**; this is a joyous occasion and children are of course especially welcome. The following Saturday (11th April) sees another great ceilidh at the Village Hall, hosted by friends of **Kilchattan Primary School** and intended to help raise funds for Educational Travel.

Next on the agenda is the annual **Colonsay Book Festival**, 25th and 26th April, sponsored by CalMac Ferries, Marine Harvest, Hebridean Air Services and Lovereading. The programme is absolutely outstanding, far beyond any sort of brief review so see <http://www.colonsaybookfestival.org.uk/>

In an effortless transition, we move on to **Colonsay Festival of Spring** which starts on April 27th. There is a very full programme of events throughout a full three week period and once again one can only suggest that you visit the site at <http://www.colonsayevents.co.uk/springfest-2015-1>

The programme is arranged so that you can visit for a day or for the full three weeks, and either way you will be certain to be amazed. For example, in Week 1: Fused Glass & Stained Glass; Textile printing workshop; Foraging & Wild Food Cooking session; Nature walks; Knitting & Crochet workshop; Ornithological walks; Colonsay House Gardens Tour ; Talks and slide shows; Quiz Night; Local Music; Art Exhibition at the Old Waiting Room; Baking Classes; Drystone Wall building; Collage making. In other weeks there is also stone carving, photography, screen printing, landscape painting – it is simply amazing. All this in a sun-kissed island paradise, fringed with litter-free golden sands, and supported by every amenity from a choice of dining and drinking establishments through fishing, golfing and archaeological opportunities to the ultimate convenience of a dedicated local brewery.

Please note that there is a **Last Minute Availability** section on the homepage of www.colonsay.org.uk which is clearly labelled in the **Where to Stay** box. If there is a cancellation or whatever, it will normally be listed there. Of course, if you are an accommodation provider, it is worth your while to make sure and list any last minute vacancies! Just email the dates to byrne@colonsay.org.uk and include a note of the price if you wish.



Ceol Cholasa 2015



17th to 20th September 2015 will see Colonsay celebrating it's 8th Music Festival. Over the past 7 years, thanks to the hard work of the Islanders and the generosity of the artists Colonsay has consistently managed to attract Scotland's finest musicians to the smallest (and we think best) festival in the land. It's a tribute to Colonsay's charm that busy musicians are willing to take a weekend out of their touring schedules to come and make music with us. And they do: on stage, in the pub, at impromptu parties and who knows what goes on behind closed doors!

The charm of our festival is that we get the chance to mingle with the musicians and they get a chance to step back from their busy schedules and very definitely mix business and pleasure.

Why not join us?

This year's headliners are the world famous Blazin' Fiddles and Breabach. Details about them and the other performers can be found [HERE](#).

For a flavour of Ceol Cholasa have a look at this short film by Rachel Hendry:

[Ceol Cholasa 2012](#)

Tickets are available from <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/date/156845> or by contacting us directly.

Details of accommodation can be found on www.colonsay.org.uk

We're currently investing in an all new website. In the meantime the old site remains. It is fine for a look back and contact details are current, however the line-up is **last** years!

Community Garden News

The Community Council has received requests recently to position memorial benches at various points around the island. It was decided to suggest the best place for such memorials would be the community garden so if any of the corncrake readers would like to donate such a bench (plaques welcome) could they please contact Moira Bell who is secretary for the garden group on 01951200017 or moiraannebell@btinternet.com. It would also be possible to club together if desired to purchase a very substantial plastic bench - sounds horrible but these look very real, are extremely heavy, need no aftercare and so are ideal for our climate.

Dates for future:

Garden work party- all welcome Saturday 11th meet at garden at 10.30am - general tidy plus spread seaweed

Big Lunch: Sunday 7th June

Community Garden Summer Fete: 19th July 3-5pm

Satellite Broadband

Details of the GigaPlus Argyll scheme to provide guaranteed Broadband speeds of a minimum 15Mbps were circulated recently; hopefully this system will be in operation for Colonsay within two years. In the meantime, Homefield has a speed which is frequently less than 1kps and which recently was reduced to zero for over a month; and the Service Point had no front-office Broadband from September until February.

So, as an experiment, a one-year contract with Satellite Internet was arranged for Homefield; the cost per month is £22.95 and provides for 10GB of data, based upon 8.4GB download and 1.6GB upload. If the limit is exceeded you are not surcharged or cut off, but the speed falls to 256kbps (and of course one can simply up the limit, there are various options available). Because of our remote location, the equipment was purchased on a "self-installation" basis and George Leppard kindly agreed to do the actual work. The total upfront investment was about £720.00 to include all the equipment and the first full year's subscription. It transpires that the dish provided (which is quite large) can also be used to receive Sky and FreeSat broadcasts.

George opened the box and assembled the dish, then attached it to the wall; he then drilled through the one metre stone wall, and fitted the wires. The instruction manual looked a bit daunting, mostly like an IKEA leaflet, mostly no words except for worrying ones like "Azimuth" and one rather odd picture showing the dish pointing wnw. All the same, just by following the somewhat enigmatic guidance, the installation proceeded without a hitch and the system went "live".

After it went live, an email was discovered which included links to a very extensive and informative website, with a couple of useful video guides to the installation process. Although this was a pioneering installation it went extremely well, and there can be no doubt that George would handle future installations with even greater aplomb. It is quite a large dish and will certainly be challenged by our winds; it could be mounted on a pole in the garden, provided the view of the satellite is not obscured and provided that nobody will interpose themselves between the feed horn and the reflector whilst it is powered up, where there is an RF electromagnetic field. On a speed test it gave 20.96mbs download and 1.59mbs upload, compared with BT in the same building and on the same testbench reading 1.17mbs download and 2.6 upload. In the first week of operation there were periods of high wind which seemed to cause no problem as yet. Further reports on speed and anything else that arises will follow here in due course; meanwhile interested persons should visit www.satelliteinternet.co.uk



The Colonsay and Oransay Heritage Trust

Writing the History of Colonsay

John de Vere Loder's book *Colonsay and Oransay in the Isles of Argyll* was published in 1935, eighty years ago. It remains an indispensable source of historical and archaeological information. The Trust is holding a workshop on Saturday 27 June to discuss the significance of Loder's work, and to consider how later work has modified and extended his understanding of the island's history.

We invite friends of the island, and those who are interested in the history of the region, to take part in the workshop and to contribute their own viewpoints and research. The format will be informal and detailed arrangements will develop out of the response to this invitation.

Please contact Richard Hill on r37hill@btinternet.com if you wish to participate or contribute a paper to the workshop.

Arandora Star

This year we mark the 75th anniversary of the sinking of MV Arandora Star and the loss of over 800 persons. There will be a commemorative service at the memorial plaque, details to be announced. In the meantime, military historian Alan Davis (author of *Colonsay's Fallen*) will be in Colonsay at Easter and intending to mount a small exhibition at COHT to remind us of this tragedy. Incidentally, Alan has provided an extraordinary resource online, including details of all who lost their lives including the ship's company, the military escort, the Prisoners of War and the civilian internees. See <http://www.colonsay.org.uk/About/Arandora-Star>



For more information about the Colonsay and Oransay Heritage Trust visit www.colonsay.org.uk and www.spanglefish.com/ColonsayandOransayHeritageTrust

Murdoch McNeill

In connection with the Loder event, it would be good to give credit also to Murdoch McNeill. If you know anything about him, where he lived, how his career went, anything he published besides his Colonsay book, or if you have a photograph or indeed any tiny detail about him, please advise byrne@colonsay.org.uk

Isle of Colonsay Golf Club

Subscriptions are now due for the coming season, a bargain at £25 please make cheques payable to Colonsay Golf Club and send to Trevor Patrick Treasurer. At the same time why not buy a Colonsay Golf Club Polo Shirt or Fleece great value and could improve your round !!!

May Whit competition planned for the holiday Saturday.

Happy golfing

Davie (Secretary)

The Church Windows Appeal

There is plenty happening on that front, but your support is needed. The appeal for funds is struggling and not much over halfway mark as yet – over £4000 is still needed and the work is scheduled to start at the end of May. Please go to the JustGiving website and search for Colonsay – you can then contribute in any currency and from any location. If you do not know what the problem is about, please visit <http://www.colonsaychurches.org/text/Windows%20Appeal.htm> or just explore the site.

Meanwhile, there is a new joint website, www.colonsaychurches.org where you can easily check the time and place of the next Service; you can also use it to check a growing list of historical and family history resources – it is hoped that anybody who has ever been connected to Colonsay via a baptism, marriage or funeral will engage with the island through that site.

More excitingly, artist Sara MacCulloch worked in Colonsay in her student days and has generously contributed one of her early works, depicting the church and the troublesome windows! A special page has been created at <http://www.colonsaychurches.org/text/Sara%20McCulloch.htm> Please take a look – the work will be sold to the highest bidder, closing date May 4th 2015.



Arts and Crafts Exhibition 2016

An exhibition of handicrafts will be mounted in the Parish Church to run from mid-March until the end of SpringFest 2016; all items will have been donated by their creators and will be offered for sale in aid of the Fabric Fund. Everything will have a fixed price, anything sold will be available for delivery after the exhibition has ended and any item not sold will be returned to the artist or craftsperson in question.

It is hoped that gifted people will follow Sara MacCulloch's lead and contribute in this very personal way. For further details, please contact byrne@colonsay.org.uk so that you can be put directly in touch with the organiser, Rev. Liz Gibson. It is hoped that the exhibition will be an added attraction for the Colonsay Festival of Spring and perhaps lead to a greater appreciation of the under-utilized possibilities of the church building for cultural purposes.

The Colonsay App

Unfortunately, progress has been delayed. Most of the topographical information is complete but information concerning businesses, beauty spots and the calendar of events is still to be collated and uploaded. The Colonsay Tourism Marketing Group is amazingly busy working on the Festival of Spring, Connect with Colonsay and a raft of other initiatives but the App is a priority and will shortly see the light of day.

On the Grapevine:

Kilchattan Primary School has arrangements in hand for the next expedition and will be holding a ceilidh to raise funds; please make a note of Monday May 4th for a delightful day of MacPhee Bagging; Magnus bought a 60ft launch in Fremantle and has been moving it closer to its new home in Hong Kong, crossed the equator on 25th and reached Sandakan on 28th March; work on the Baptist Manse has taken much longer than expected; ditto work on Hazel Cottage, largely due to the problems with Saturday ferries; the photocopier, printer and scanner in the Service Point has not been operational since last autumn and is STILL down; so is the “public access” broadband, the router has been down for many weeks; the Pantry now offers a fine selection of olives; the hotel is fully open and has an exciting new menu; the Easter service will be in the Baptist Church at 11.30, all welcome (especially children); Beach Litter hunting has started again, take a bag and collect something whenever you can; organised hunts will start again from 25th April; the boxroom at No. 3 Glassard is being converted to a bathroom; there are lambs everywhere and delightful new-borne calves; the ambulance has a new team of four volunteer drivers; Duncan Sandy has contributed very useful material to the gestating study of Bonaveh; The Corncrake is still in search of a new editor...



Prior to departure, Fremantle

Letters etc.

No letters received.

In Conclusion

The Corncrake is published to keep all our friends in touch with life on the island and invites contributions. Brief genealogical and related queries are also welcome from Colbhasachs overseas, as are obituaries and family traditions relating to Colonsay emigrants. The current edition was produced Kevin Byrne, as a temporary editor, and any comments will be welcomed if addressed to byrne@colonsay.org.uk. As usual, it is not intended to be completely anodyne, but any errors or omissions are regretted, and anything seriously annoying will if possible be suitably modified. Please note that we are **still looking for a new editor** – any candidate should contact any member of the CCDC Board (which happens to own the publication and to be the ultimate governor).

Also – please keep an eye on both *Colonsay Kindred* and *Colonsay History*, two little newsletters run by Kevin Byrne; access them via www.colonsayhistory.info