

EILEAN EISDEAL NEWSLETTER No.38 - AUGUST 2007

To all Easdale islanders, members and friends

We are well into the summer now and this newsletter is later than we would have wanted – however this means that we can announce the fantastic news that we have been successful in our funding application for the museum thanks to the hard work put in by Mike, Sandra and Jan – more below.

We have to announce with regret that Donald (aka Mellon) has tendered his resignation as chairman. This was due to pressure at work, and was a difficult decision for him and not one he made lightly. His unstinting contribution to Eilean Eisdeal will be sorely missed. His position as chairman has been filled by Adrian in an acting capacity meanwhile. As many people know, Mike Mackenzie has also tendered his resignation due to his immense workload. Mike has been a driving force behind many of the achievements of Eilean Eisdeal and we are extremely grateful for the massive contribution he has made to the community through Eilean Eisdeal; however we are delighted that he has agreed to continue as a member of the subcommittee recently set up to respond to the STAG Appraisal. We welcome Iain McDougall and Lynn Noble as co-opted directors; their experience and enthusiasm are much appreciated.

MUSEUM

Big Lottery Growing Community Assets and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have enthusiastically endorsed our plans to develop the museum as a community asset. It will take some time to complete the purchase from Chris Nicholson, the current owner, but we hope to open next year under the Eilean Eisdeal banner. To celebrate this success and outline our plans for the museum we held a party for the community on the 18th August in the hall. Lynn and Voirrey prepared a superb display of museum photographs and memorabilia in the hall, including new collages of island news. Iain described the history of the museum and Jan outlined the background to the grant and future plans. We have run the museum successfully on behalf of Chris Nicholson since April 2006 thanks to Lynn, Voirrey and the volunteers and we hope to develop its potential as a community asset in the future. We are planning a larger launch party next Spring to include those outwith the community who also supported this project. Anyone with an interest in the museum who would like to be involved in the future plans is invited to contact any of the directors.

EGM

As a condition of the grant for the museum from Big Lottery, we have been asked to make a small change in the wording of our Membership and Articles. This will require an EGM, which we plan to hold on 15th September. Further details will be sent to all members in the near future.

HALL EVENTS UPDATE

This year's Arts Programme kicked off in April with an ancient Greek time-travelling Aesop puppet in Absolutely Fabulist's innovative production, part of Scotland's National Puppet Animation Festival. This one kept the kids of all ages riveted. Hot on Aesop's heels with more time-travelling came the zany 'Singin Sous' Chefs Alive Again!' with their mad-cap brand of comedy acappella soul. Samba Sene and Diwan brought afro-beat jazz dance grooves from Senegal – twice – the second time fighting off stiff competition from two high profile local events with a well-attended concert, and mostly off-island audience. Another band that played twice was the Bristol five-piece, Sheelanagig. After setting the hall bouncing with their high energy blend of Celtic and East European music, the guys enjoyed themselves so much that they stayed for another night and gave an acoustic performance in the hall bar on the Sunday evening. And they are keen to come back. In the most recent musical event of the year we were treated to the king of Scottish blues music himself, the legendary Mr Tam White accompanied brilliantly on piano by former Young Scottish Jazz Musician of the Year, Paul Harrison. As Tam said himself, 'this was class'.

It has not been all music in the Arts Programme so far; Rapture brought this year's first theatre performance with a production of Broken Glass by Arthur Miller. After their acclaimed and popular productions of "Blue/Orange", "Damages" and "The Collection", Rapture returned with another exciting show which continued their rare ability to merge thought provoking theatre with a good night out. 'The Gareloch Horties', the 12 strong, women's peace group introduced to us by founder member Kay Carmichael, displayed some of their famous protest banners and relayed to us some historical anecdotes through song and stories.

But we are not finished yet. Get your diaries out and ink in the following dates: 25 August - BBC Young Folk Award winner Lauren MacColl brings her trio to take us on a musical journey from rousing Highland strathspeys and reels, to emotive Gaelic airs; 31 August – singer song writer Michael Marra plus 4-piece band (which might include Seil fiddler Aidan O'Rourke); 15 September - Mull Theatre with Brightwater, a theatre production based on the life and writings of Gavin Maxwell. Keep your eyes peeled and browsers pointing at www.easdale.org/hall/events.php for the most up to date info.

STAG APPRAISAL

A subcommittee headed by Sandra Melville who with Iain McDougall and Mike Mackenzie are gauging the community's response to the STAG appraisal on the fixed link to the mainland proposed by the Council, as you will know if you attended the meeting on the 21st July. We hope you have completed and returned the questionnaires – every reply is important in assessing the feelings of the community on this matter which is fundamental to the future of the island.

THE PLANNING ENQUIRY

The forthcoming public inquiry to be held in Oban on 17th August 2007 will deal with objections to the new Lorn Plan, parts of which will affect Easdale Island directly. The council is proposing to re-classify three areas of land on the island which have hitherto been classed as potential development areas (PDAs), thereby preventing future development of any kind. The areas concerned are:

Land to the north-east of the harbour including the rush and gush.
PDA 5/173, situated above and to the north-west of houses numbered 45-54.
Land to the south-east of the ferry house.

Eilean Eisdeal has submitted objections to the first two of these proposals, on the grounds that to prevent any further development could stifle the socio-economic regeneration which the island has seen in recent years, and which was a prime reason for establishing the Trust 10 years ago.

The land around the rush and gush is owned by Eilean Eisdeal, and was acquired along with the harbour with the express intention of earmarking parts of it for future development such as boatsheds, waste recycling, craft workshops and the like, which could form the basis for future island-based occupation particularly for young people. Indeed it was a condition set by the funding agency which enabled the harbour purchase that such facilities should be incorporated into the forward planning of the island's development. This has been publicly debated on several occasions over the past 10 years, and each time the Trust has been given a clear mandate from its members to support a policy of future development in this area. It is clear that the Trust as the landowner was obliged to object to the removal of this PDA.

PDA 5/173 is on land owned by the Clive Feigenbaum via his Easdale Island Company. In 1978 the then owner of this land was granted outline planning consent for up to 30 houses in that area. There is at present no such planning application in place, despite rumours to the contrary. A formal objection against removal of the PDA was lodged by Eilean Eisdeal. However this objection was later withdrawn as it was felt that the Trust had no formal involvement in property outwith its ownership.

It should be made clear that in objecting to removal of these PDAs the Trust was not proposing any specific development projects; merely objecting to the fact that the council was removing them without any real debate or proper consultation with local people, and in so doing, jeopardising the future socio-economic well-being of the Island. Any future development proposals will still be governed by statutory planning procedure, during which any relevant objections will be taken into account.

These arguments are intertwined with that of the fixed link. If all further development on the island is stifled by the removal of the PDAs, the council's case for a causeway becomes stronger. Indeed the council in its precognition for the forthcoming inquiry repeatedly states that facilities such as waste recycling or craft workshops or boat repairs or low cost housing will not be needed on the island since any such facilities could be accessed on the mainland..... ".... it is not considered prudent to encourage industrial development of any scale on the island as there are more suitable sites on the mainland....." The implication being that a fixed link would make it possible. Another council precognition statement suggests that, whilst opposing any other occupational activities, it would be in favour of re-establishing slate quarrying on the island!

Any of us who signed a petition supporting the removal of the PDAs may inadvertently be supporting a causeway. And judging from the response to the recent fixed link meeting in the hall, none of us wants a causeway.

HARBOUR

The pontoon ladder will be fitted soon and has provided the opportunity to plan an improved mooring system. A small 'harbour users group' has been set up to mastermind this plan and push on with harbour improvements. Any proposed changes will be discussed with the community at an open meeting – further details soon.

DENNIS IS NO MENACE!

The trust was delighted to accept a new 'islander' in the shape of a wee character called Dennis; Dennis the Tractor! Dennis is an original Ferguson T20 diesel tractor which has been donated to Eilean Eisdeal but the North Warwicks BSAC Diving Club. The club members have been taking their annual diving holiday on Easdale Island now for 25 years and see this as a way of thanking the island for the hospitality that they have received since their first visit. The donation of the tractor to Eilean Eisdeal is very much welcomed and gratefully received. We were delighted at the kind and generous gift that the divers have given. Many hours of work have gone into restoring the classis 'Little Grey Fergie' in its home town of Coventry and the club members have made one stipulation of the gift; that the tractor is named Dennis in memory of Dennis Johnson, one of the divers and a founder member of North Warwicks BSAC 315 who regularly came up to dive with the club around Easdale. Dennis's ashes were scattered on the island in 2001. Club Diving Officer Pete Hangar said ' As a club we feel that the Little Grey Fergie is just a small thank you for the friendships formed and the help we received with broken boat engines etc over the years.'

OSCR

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator eventually wrote to us concluding their 'investigation' of Eilean Eisdeal and we are pleased, but not surprised that none of the allegations made were found to have any substance. Provision of the paperwork requested by OSCR demanded a huge amount of precious volunteer time and we are particularly indebted to Annabel for her untiring dedication to sorting out this problem.

REGATTA

Because of difficulties in finding a date for this event and pressure of other Eilean Eisdeal activities, it has been decided not to hold the Regatta this year – apologies to all those who have already constructed their rafts.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Many thanks to all those who responded to the recent membership reminder. Your membership fees go a long way in assisting us in our work on behalf of the community and helping to implement improvements for us all now and in the future.

Your continuing support of Eilean Eisdeal is very much appreciated.

Acting Chairman: Adrian Laycock
Secretary: Jess Hill
Treasurer: Jan Fraser
Directors: Iain McDougall
Lynn Noble