

Highpoints

Sàr Phuingean

Cash for communities

in Caithness, Sutherland,
Inverness, Skye and Raasay

Rock Challenge

Alness Academy win Scottish Final
of UK Rock Challenge



3 Highland Pipe Bands' success

Pupils plant for the future

Pupils from Kinmylies Primary School are learning about trees



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Welcome

Welcome to the summer edition of our magazine Highpoints (Sàr Phuingean).

It has been a busy few months for the Highland Council, with the Scottish Parliament Elections, EU Referendum and the setting up of the Redesign Board. Work is progressing well on major projects such as the West Link Road and the new Council offices in Fort William and Kingussie. We have also got many events going on throughout the Highland area. There has never been a better time to come to the Highlands for leisure or business.

We have had the opportunity to showcase our stunning scenery and our new Global Geopark status, our history, culture and the many other attractions that make the Highlands such a tremendous place to visit.

We have enjoyed an influx of visitors to the Scottish Open, the Mountain Bike World Championships, the Blas Festival and the various summer Highland Games across the area.

We are working hard to improve connectivity for the region and I am delighted that we now have improved air access through the new Heathrow and Amsterdam links.

The city of Inverness will soon reap the benefit of an additional tourist attraction in the opening of the North Tower later this year and exciting plans for the castle are now within sight.

The start of the West Link road also heralds a brighter, cleaner future for the city in the reduced congestion and better transport connections that this will bring. As a key partner in the Seven Scottish Cities Alliance, we will be seeking a stronger voice for Inverness and the region.

Localism and community participation continue to feature in this issue as we report back on the peoples' votes from the successful participatory budgeting events that took place in recent months.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Highpoints as much as I have.



Isobel McCallum Highland Council Convener

Local sporting twins receive Freedom of Granttown on Spey

Twins Suzanne Grant and Shelley Cowie (nee Grant) have been presented with the Freedom of Granttown on Spey in recognition of their contribution to the sport of football, and to their local community.

The twins have represented their sport at the highest level with both having played for the Scottish Women's National Football team. Shelley has now stepped back from the professional game to concentrate on family, however Suzanne continues to play, currently with Motherwell Ladies, and has now achieved 104 caps for her country.

The presentation was made by The Highland Council Convener, Councillor Isobel McCallum at a ceremony in Granttown Courthouse on Saturday 9th July. She congratulated Suzanne and Shelly who were awarded the honour in recognition of their achievement and dedication to the sport of Women's Football.

The awarding of this prestigious honour of the Freedom, which is rarely presented, has been granted by The Highland Council in recognition of services to sport and was strongly supported by the community and by the Badenoch and Strathspey Ward Councillors.

Councillor Jaci Douglas described the twin's early lives in Granttown on Spey saying:

“Suzanne and Shelly have played an inspirational role in the community for many youngsters looking to develop their own sporting aspirations.”



Photo L-R: Area Committee Chair for Badenoch & Strathspey Cllr Bill Lobban, Shelley Cowie, Convener Isobel McCallum, Suzanne Grant and Councillor Jaci Douglas

Freedom of Lochaber for over 40 years' service

The prestigious honour and title of 'Freeman' is rarely presented by The Highland Council to Highland residents, however, the Freedom of Lochaber was recently bestowed upon Mr Colin Neilson for over 40 years' of outstanding service to the community.

Presenting the Freedom at a small ceremony of family and friends, Lochaber Area Leader Councillor Thomas MacLennan paid tribute to Mr Neilson saying:

“Colin is a well-known and respected Fort William resident who has carried out a significant number of roles in local government, health and sport sectors, on local, national and international stages. His unstinting enthusiasm and dedication have contributed greatly to local government, healthcare



and sport in the Lochaber area and beyond. Not many people can claim to have served their community for over forty years, and it is in recognition of this service that The Highland Council is pleased and honoured to confer the Freedom of Lochaber to Colin Neilson.”

There have been just 12 previous recipients of the Freedom of Lochaber since 1947.

Success for Highland youth pipe bands

Three Highland school Pipe Bands achieved success in the European Pipe Band Championships in June in Forres.

Lochalsh Junior Pipe Band was placed 2nd in Novice B;

Ross and Cromarty Pipes and Drums School (RACPADS) pipe band were 5th in Novice A; and

City of Inverness Youth Pipe Band 9th in Novice B.



Cover photo: Lochalsh Junior Pipe Band

These three bands are run as an extension to the work of The Highland Council's Instrumental Tuition Service. Piping in Highland schools is well supported in addition to the many other instruments available to pupils. Many other Highland pupils were also competing in community bands at the Championships.

The Council's Music Development Officer, Norman Bolton, says:

“ Competing at this level is a great experience for the band members and their successes are certainly well deserved. ”

Highland tuba player blows judges away

Antony Hook, tuba player and pupil at Lochaber High School, was awarded Highland Young Musician of the Year 2016 at a competition held in Inverness on 19th June.

Eight competitors representing a wide range of instruments, worked over the course of the

weekend and presented music to the judging panel at a prelim round of the competition. The judges then invited five of the musicians to perform their complete 15 minute programme at the evening's public final.

The five finalists were: Antony Hook (Lochaber High School); Zoe Hodi; Neavan Lobban (Music School of Douglas Academy); Rosie Clark (Lochaber High School) and Rhona Mackintosh.

In addition to Antony being awarded the winners accolade and the Richardson Trophy for Musical Excellence, Rhona Mackintosh (violin), also from Lochaber High School, took the 'most promising talent' award. Zoe Hodi (violin) from Aberdeen

City Music School, Dyce received the runner-up prize.



Highland Young Musician of the Year, Antony Hook from Lochaber High School, pictured with his trophy



Alness Academy comes top of Rock Challenge

Five Highland schools won awards in the Scottish Final of UK Rock Challenge at Dundee's Caird Hall on 17th June, with Alness Academy winning first place and becoming the Scottish Champions for 2016.

WINNERS



Pupils from Alness Academy received the Scottish Champions 2016 award at Caird Hall Dundee in the UK Rock Challenge with Bill Alexander, Highland Council Director of Care & Learning

© Nick Scott



Dingwall Academy performing at UK Rock Challenge Scottish Finals

© Nick Scott

strongest performing from across Scotland – Thurso High, Dingwall Academy and Millburn Academy.

The UK Rock Challenge is the British arm of the Global Rock Challenge. The Rock Challenge is an anti-drug and crime-prevention celebration that takes the form of a dance and drama performance by the participating schools.

Caird Hall was sold out for the performance, which involved eleven schools from across Scotland. Each school had 4 minutes to get their set on to the stage, and then 8 minutes to show off their dance prowess to the judges and large audience.

Having been the highest Highland-placed team at the Scottish Final in previous years, coming fourth in 2015, this

win marked Alness Academy's sustained success in the competition.

Head Teacher, Laura Gordon said: “ I’m very proud of our young people and staff. We must recognise the immense work put in by our staff, youth team and others over the years. Their effort, commitment, hard work and belief have won out at the end.”

The Highland Council’s Director of Care and Learning, Bill Alexander said:

“ Twenty Highland schools performed in the heats at Eden Court, showing the depth of talent across the authority, and the incredible support of parents, volunteers and staff. More than 1,000 young people were involved over three nights, and all of them had been rehearsing for

Another Ross-shire school, Dingwall Academy, also scored highly, coming fourth. All of the Highland schools won awards on the night, recognising excellence in various aspects of the competition, such as community participation and inclusion.

Two of the five Highland teams were the winners from the heats held at Eden Court in Inverness in April - Alness Academy and Invergordon Academy.

Three other teams qualified with ‘wild cards’ from the heats, as the judges identified them as being amongst the



© Nick Scott



© Nick Scott

months before. It was enormously encouraging that five of our schools qualified for the Scottish Final in Dundee. It is just fantastic that Alness and Dingwall did so well, and all of our schools performed tremendously on the night.”

BLAS festival

Taste the best of Highland culture at BLAS 2016



Blasad Dha-rìribh de dhualchas na Gàidhealtachd aig feis BHLAS 2016

The opportunity for communities to celebrate Highland culture has been a hallmark of the Blas Festival since it began, and this year's festival, taking place from 2nd to 10th September, will be no exception.

Organisers, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, who receive funding from bodies, including The Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council

and Western Isles Councils, Bord na Gaidhlig and Creative Scotland, have outlined an exciting programme with cèilidhs, concerts, school visits, music in hospitals, performances in care homes, drama performances, family events, and walks and talks.

Young people from the Highlands will feature widely, alongside some of the best international artistes including Sharon Shannon, the Red Hot

Chilli Pipers, Nuallan from Cape Breton, as well as Aly Bain & Phil Cunningham. There will be appearances from newer artists, as well as Gaelic writers and poets.

The Council supports traditional music and Gaelic song through a number initiatives and organisations based in the Highlands.

Full festival program me and tickets: www.blas-festival.com

Student teachers graduate through distance learning

Eleven Highland students graduated in June through the University of Aberdeen in partnership with The Highland Council, following an eighteen month distance learning PGDE (Primary) Programme.

The strong partnership between the Local Authority and the University of Aberdeen has created The Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education (DLITE), with opportunities for local people to train to become teachers via distance learning

techniques, while remaining in their home towns and current employment.

These students enter their Probation year in Highland schools this August and another eight students began the third phase of DLITE in January this year, qualifying in June 2017.

Bill Alexander, Highland Council's Director of Care and Learning said:

“ The Highland Council is working with its partner authorities in the north to address the shortage of teachers affecting us all. Our partnership with the University of Aberdeen and the creation of DLITE is a very successful way in which we can enhance the profession, by opening doors to people with talent who have a passion for teaching and working with young people. ”



L-R: Bill Alexander with Graduates Jessica MacLennan, Siobhan Millar, Yvonne Stoddart, Elizabeth Fuller, Sara Riach, Roddie Jamieson, Ann Stewart, Melanie McKay, Nicola Cope, Catriona Smith and Louise Chisholm.

Leugh is Seinn le Linda

'S e iomairt chom-pàirteach nàiseanta air a chur air dòigh leis An Lòchran agus Comhairle nan Leabhraichean a th' ann an Leugh is Seinn le Linda. Tha an iomairt a' toirt cothrom do chloinn fo aois 5 bliadhna tlachd is spòrs fhaighinn à seiseanan leughaidh is seinn sa Ghàidhlig.

Chaidh seiseanan a chumail ann am Fàs Mòr – an t-Ionad Cùraim-chloinne Gàidhlig, Bun-Sgoil Shlèite, an Sgoil-àraich ann am Bun-Sgoil Phort Rìgh, sa Ghearasdan agus ann an Inbhir Nis. Tha na seiseanan air an stiùireadh leis a' Bh-uas Linda NicLeòid a tha na Tosgaire Òg airson Leughadh Gàidhlig agus na seinneadair is na preasantair TBh ainmeil.

Thuirt a' Bh-uas Shona Masson, Oifigear Leasachaidh Ealain is Cultair aig An Lòchran:

“Tha e air a bhith sgoinneil a bhith a' toirt Leugh is Seinn gu sgoiltean, sgoiltean-àraich is buidhnean coimhearsnachd air feadh na Gàidhealtachd air a' chiad thuras aig Leugh is Seinn. Tha e air còrdadh gu mòr ris a' chloinn a bhith a' leughadh is a' seinn sa Ghàidhlig agus tha sinn fada an comain an luchd-maoineachaidh againn aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus Tasgadh, a bharrachd air na sgoiltean, na buidhnean coimhearsnachd agus Sgioba na Gàidhlig aig Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd airson ar cuideachadh gus an Turas a chur air dòigh.”

Leugh's Seinn le Linda is a national partnership initiative organised by An Lòchran and the Gaelic Books Council, giving children under 5 years of age the opportunity to enjoy fun-filled reading and singing sessions in Gaelic.

Sessions recently took place in Fàs Mòr, the Gaelic Child Care Centre, Sleat Primary School, the Sgoil Araidh in Portree Primary School, Fort William and Inverness, led by the Gaelic Books Council's Young Reading Ambassador and well-known singer and TV presenter Ms Linda MacLeod.

Ms Shona Masson, An Lòchran Arts and Culture Development Officer said:

“It has been fantastic to take Leugh's Seinn to schools, nurseries and community groups across the Highlands on our first Leugh's Seinn tour. The children have had lots of fun reading and singing in Gaelic and we are very grateful to funders Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Tasgadh, as well as all the schools, community groups and The Highland Council's Gaelic Team for helping us to arrange the Tour.”



Children at Sleat Primary School

Lundavra Primary School



With panoramic views over Loch Linnhe, the new Lundavra Primary School replaced Upper Achintore and Fort William Primary Schools, opening its doors to pupils after the October break on in October 2015.

The current pupil roll is 237 Primary and 50 Nursery pupils. Head Teacher, Nick Thomson says:

“ The new school provides a fantastic learning environment in a beautiful setting for our pupils and staff to work in. ”

Lundavra Primary School was officially opened at a ceremony in June by former pupil, Dr Finlay Wild. He said:

“ As a former pupil of Fort William Primary School I was delighted to be invited to meet the pupils of the new Lundavra Primary. As a runner and GP it was great to speak to the kids about running and keeping active, and to join them in their Daily Mile run. ”



Councillor Drew Millar, Chair of Highland Council's Education, Children and Adult Services Committee said:

“ Lundavra School is another example of the Highland Council's commitment to providing 21st century schools to enable our children to enjoy a first class learning environment. This latest facility brings the Council's investment in Education and other projects in Lochaber to over £40 million in the past 5 years and over the next two years there will be other significant capital investments by The Highland Council in the area. ”

Lochaber Area Committee Leader, Councillor Thomas MacLennan added:

“ It's another wonderful new school for Lochaber and will be a real community asset for this part of Fort William. I'm sure the setting and beautiful views will inspire local children for generations to come. ”

Some of the community groups also using the school include: The Stepping Stones project for toddlers and parents run by Health Visitors; a baby massage class; High Life Highland sports groups and the parent-led weekly Youth Club.



Pupils get bus-savvy

Pupils at Milton of Leys Primary School in Inverness have been taking part in sessions to learn about using public transport in a safe and responsible way.

The work forms part of the Hitravel programme, delivering classroom workshops and on-bus sessions with primary schools in the Inverness and Nairn area. The campaign highlights that there are good alternatives to the car for many local journeys.

For more information about Hitravel, visit: www.hitrans.org.uk/hitravel

Royal opening for refurbished footbridge

© Mark James LRPS



HRH Princess Anne receiving a bouquet from Etta Brown who received a Member of the British Empire medal in the new year honour's list, with the Lord Lieutenant Janet Bowen looking on.

© Mark James LRPS

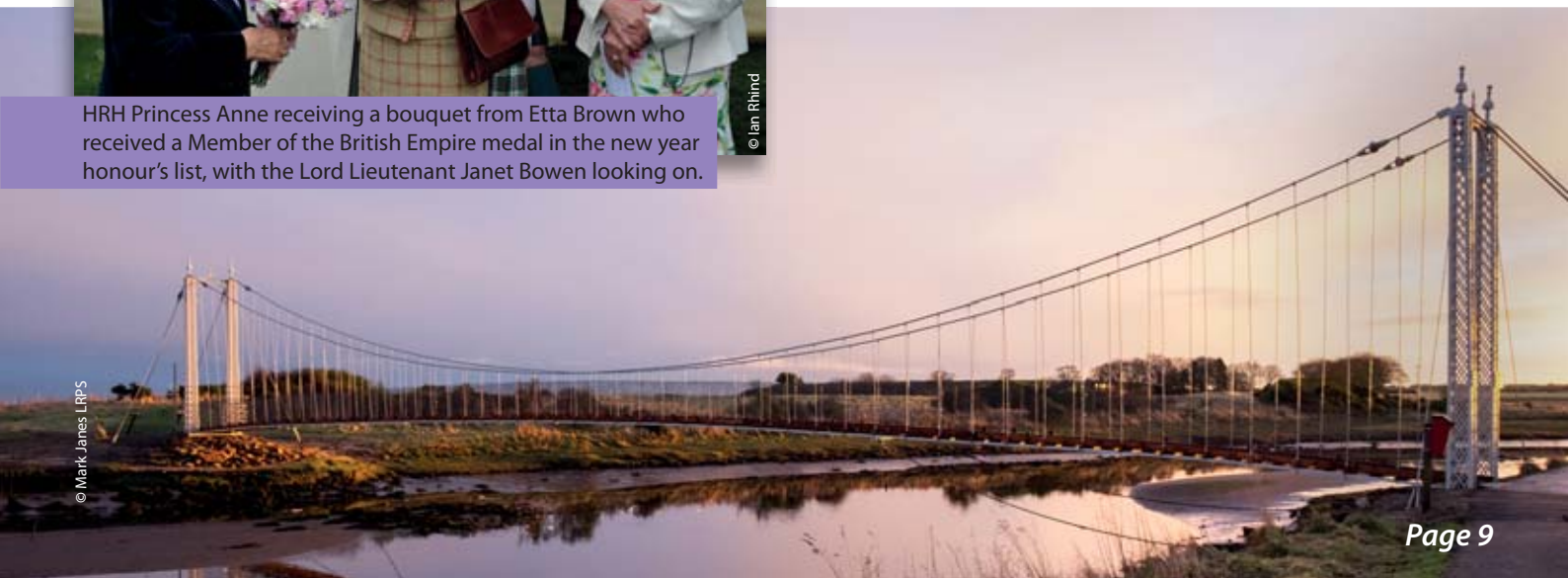


HRH The Princess Royal visited Tain on Thursday 21st July and her first engagement of the day was to officially re-open Alexander Bridge at Tain Links which has been restored to its former glory.

The B listed suspension footbridge was built in 1902 and provides a crossing of the River Tain at the junction of three popular footpaths, providing walkers access to the foreshore and areas east of the town.

Thanks to a funding package from Tain Common Good, with contributions from Historic Scotland, the Council's Capital Discretionary Fund and Ward Discretionary Budget, as well as support from Tain Community Council, this landmark has been fully refurbished, giving it a new lease of life so walkers will be able to enjoy the routes in the area for many years to come.

© Ian Rhind



“ Many hands make light work and it was great to see people pulling together. ”

Tain residents muck in to spring clean local community



Residents take part in Mansfield Big Clean Up

Local residents in Tain came out in force to take part in the Mansfield Estate Big Clean Up Day in May, which brought together volunteers, employees from the Tain Co-op and council staff, to work side by side, to spruce up the area.

Leading up to the spring clean, the residents group worked closely with the local councillors and council staff to draw up an action plan on jobs to be tackled and then put out a request for people to come along and lend a hand.

Skips were provided and were soon filled with unwanted items, while other volunteers tackled the weeds along the footpaths, collected litter and painted the communal bin stores.

Sandra Grant, Chair of the Residents Group and Tain Co-operative Community Champion did a great job rallying volunteers and at the end of a busy day said:

“ A big thanks to everyone who turned up to help and for the council on backing our community's tidy-up scheme. Many hands make light work and it was great to see people pulling together. With the bins emptied, weeds removed, a lick of paint and gardens emptied, the whole area looks a lot better. We worked hard to get the new playpark opened last year, so it's good that the surrounding area now looks better and somewhere people will want to spend time in. ”

All three local councillors came along to show their support and

lend a hand. Councillor Fiona Robertson said:

“ The Community raised their concerns about how the estate was looking and it has been great to see people working together to make a difference. Future plans include developing a local hub on the estate, which will not only bring people together, but build on the enthusiasm and hard work of the volunteers. ”

Councillor Jamie Stone added:

“ It's been so encouraging to see the estate pull together like this and I'm sure all this enthusiasm bodes well for future community projects. ”



Improvements to Slattadale section of North Coast 500 route

The first section of a three-phase programme of works to complete a twin track road from Kinlochewe to Gairloch has been officially opened.

This 900m section of the A832 by Slattadale costing £1.4 million began in October 2015. Working throughout the winter the works were completed 6 weeks early and within budget.

The completion of this phase takes another step forward in twin tracking the important A832/A835 loop which is hugely important for tourism development in Wester Ross. This section is also part of the North Coast 500 Route.

Phase 2 will be the next 600m of twin tracking to the dam at Loch Bad an Sgalaig and works are currently planned for 2018-19. Phase 3 will involve the creation of a completely new section of road, almost 5km in length, from Loch Bad an Sgalaig across the hills and preliminary design work for this is currently underway.

Local Councillors Richard Greene and Audrey Sinclair, Chair of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee, were

joined by representatives from the local community and staff from the council and UBCivils Limited for a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Leading a piped procession along the new road was Piper Louis Peteranna, a fourth year pupil at Culloden Academy, who played The High Road To Gairloch. Gairloch High School Head boy Lucas Jackson and Head Girl Christie Wilson helped councillors to cut the ribbon.

The Highland Council is responsible for the maintenance of an incredible 6,752km of roads. The extensive road networks and periods of severe weather conditions make it very challenging to keep up with pothole repairs across the patch.

Jetpatcher just the job on Highland roads

Following trials with neighbouring Local Authorities, the Council's Community Services Committee approved the purchase of a Jetpatcher with £150,000 from the capital programme in February this year. Over a 10-year period the cost of purchase and in-house delivery will provide a saving against the contracted cost of jetpatching.

Councillors Richard Greene and Jaci Douglas recently viewed a 'Jetpatcher' in operation at Grantown on Spey. (Jetpatcher operator Shaun Melia of NU-Phalt air blasted out a pothole, then lined and sprayed it with emulsion (bitumen) and filled it with 6mm stonechip.)



L-R: Councillors Richard Greene and Jaci Douglas, and Jetpatcher operator Shaun Melia

© The Highland Council

Cash for community projects

Local people have cast their votes for community projects as part of The Highland Council participatory budgeting events, held across the Highlands. The Community Empowerment Act 2015 requires councils and other public bodies to support communities, giving them more influence over what matters to them. It requires the public sector to work in partnership to support the development of local action, helping communities take part in decision-making.

Cash for Caithness

Local people cast their votes in May at an event held in Thurso High School. Eleven, out of the 19 projects bidding for local causes, were awarded a slice of £30,000 community funding by over 120 people who registered to vote on the day.

Applicants were given a 3 minute slot to sell their project with a further 2 minutes allocated to allow any questions from the audience.

Cllr Roger Saxon, who co-chaired this event, said:

“ We believe handing decision making to the community it is a great way to support community empowerment and helps build community cohesion. This event is an opportunity for Caithness groups to meet new people and find out what is happening locally. ”

The successful bids are as follows:

- **Connect Carers** - training for carers/stress relief sessions for carers/day out for carers, £1,200
- **AMD Caithness** - Development of local group, £3,000
- **Wick Players** - roof refurbishment of club rooms, £3,000

- **M.S. Therapy** - upgrading of chamber oxygen systems, £3,000
- **Caithness Sight Impairment Group** - respite break and equipment, £3,000
- **Thurso in Bloom** - flower purchase/xmas tree purchase/equipment, £2,700
- **Latheronwheel and Latheron Improvement Group** - upkeep and repairs at Latheronwheel harbour, £3,000
- **1st Wick Scouts** - upgrade of Scout Hall including toilets refurbishment, £3,000
- **Ormlie Community Association** - Silver Sightseers trips, £2,920
- **Wick Society: Oral History Section** - recording equipment, £2,889
- **Thurso Heritage Society** - Scanning equipment, £2,874

Sutherland projects get £15,000

Around 50 people in Sutherland chose 9 projects out of the 33 groups, who put their projects forward for a slice of £15,000, at an event in Lairg community centre.

The successful bids were:

- **Scourie Community Hall Association** - Refurbishment of Scourie Village Hall
- **Lairg Eco Group** - Outdoor Classroom
- **Rogart Cinema** - Upgrading to larger screen size for Cinema
- **Lairg Pupil Council** - School Sign
- **Kinlochbervie Community Company** - Regeneration of 17 Manse Road in Kinlochbervie
- **Silver Rock Foundation** - Soundwaves Music/Drama Workshops for deaf youngsters
- **Sutherland Youth Forum** - Sutherland Youth Forum bi-monthly meetings
- **Sutherland Sessions** - Sutherland Sessions Presents
- **Lairg Table Tennis Club** - Lairg Tennis Court improvements

A video of the event is available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=teVbCSsQJZ8

Skye and Raasay

Your Island,
Your Cash,
Your Choice

Residents in Skye and Raasay had the chance to cast their vote in May at the "Your Island, Your Cash, Your Choice" Event held in Portree.

Over 90 people attended to choose which projects should benefit from the £15,000 available. 15 out of the 45 groups who put their projects forward

received funding to put their ideas into action. The successful applications for Skye and Raasay are as follows:

- **The Skye Youth Pipe Band** - Pipe Band drumming
- **Skye Stroke Friends** - Skye Stroke Friends Outings
- **Isle of Skye Pipe Band** - Isle of Skye Pipe Band
- **Staffin Lunch Club** - Enhancement of Activities for Lunch Club Members
- **Dannsairean an Eilen Sgitheanaich** - Strictly Skye 2016
- **Clann Throindairnis** - After school Gaelic Club focusing on Gaelic singing/drama/music.
- **Skye and Lochalsh Gymnastics Club (SLGC)** - Growing SLGC with coach development

- **Way Forward Group** - Way Forward Group To Meet Fortnightly To Reduce Isolation
- **Tarskavaig Communities Hall Association** - Save Energy & Save an Accident
- **Crossroads Care** - Skye and Lochalsh - Crossroads Connecting Communities
- **Isle of Skye YMCA** - YMCA Skye Outdoors
- **Viewfield Garden Collective (VGC)** - Therapy Through Gardening
- **Broadford Youth Club** - Summer Trip
- **St Columba's Church** - Bread Basket
- **Friends of An Acarsaid Care Home** - Otago exercise sessions

Inverness West Ward awards £11,000

People in Inverness West (Ward 14) cast their votes for local projects on 24th June. Inverness West Councillors agreed to use a participatory budgeting process to distribute £10,000 of the local ward discretionary budget, Charleston Community Foundation then agreed to donate £1,000 to the fund.

Over 40 people took part in deciding the projects that would be funded from the £11,000 that was available. Eleven out of the 19 groups who put their projects forward were successful.

Councillor Graham Ross, a member of the Inverness West Organising group said:

“It was a superb showcase of all the great work that voluntary and community groups do in the area. Having an event like this is more than just a new way of allocating funding. The real benefits are engaging local people, reaching new groups, funding new and different projects, and creating an opportunity for the community to come together.”

The successful bids were as follows:

- **Charleston Community Complex** - Gala Fun Day Committee - Gala Fun Day - Gala Tents
- **Charleston Seniors Club** - Annual Senior Citizens Activity Programme

- **Kinmylies Primary School Active Schools** - Outdoor Opportunities
- **Kinmylies United Football Club** - Provision of a new Storage Container
- **High Life Highland** - Muirtown Primary School Gymnastics Club
- **High Life Highland** - Charleston Summer Camp
- **Highland Boxing Academy** - Boxing as a diversionary activity
- **Muirtown Explorer Scout Unit** - A new Gazebo
- **City of Inverness Championship** - Highland Dancing Championship/ Competition
- **Inverness Polish Association** - Friends in the West
- **Inverness Shinty Club** - Summer and Autumn Inverness Shinty Camp

A video of the event is available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s6-H6f5sMw



Turfcutting: Leader of the Council, Provost of Inverness and Chair of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee and local members were joined by representatives from the Highland Rugby Football Club, Scottish Rugby Union, the Civic Trust, sportscotland, contractors Wills Bros, and local elected members for a turf cutting ceremony. Pupils from Holm and Kinmylies Primary Schools on either side of the River Ness, were also present to celebrate this landmark occasion.

© Phil Downie

Councillor Audrey Sinclair said:

“ The West Link is a major contribution by the Council to the City-Region Deal and the benefits will be felt much wider than Inverness, with easier links and improved journey times for those coming from and going to Lochaber and other areas in the west. The economic return of £4 for every £1 spent on building the road will benefit the whole region. ”

Andy Little Chairman of Highland Rugby Club commented:

“ The Commencement of the West Link and the redevelopment of Canal Park will provide a long overdue link over the river and canal and the enhanced sporting facilities at Canal Park will provide excellent facilities for our sport and for the wider sporting community in Inverness and the wider Highland Region. ”

West Link commences

Work began on building Stage 1 of the West Link in May. This will provide the link between the southern distributor and the A82, including the Canal Parks Enhancement works, all due for completion in late 2017.

The initial works is the A82 Glenurquhart Road at its junction with Bught Drive. The new River Ness Bridge construction involving works in the river will take place on two occasions during the periods July 2016 to October 2016 and July 2017 to October 2017, with completion of Stage 1 of the project in late 2017.

The West Link will reduce traffic congestion in the city centre, improve journey times and support active travel through

new cycling and walking routes. The scheme will also provide construction jobs and will enable housing development, with Developer contributions of some £3.75 million.

In order to allow for the construction of the new Clubhouse and artificial pitch at the Canal Parks, the Highland Rugby Club, will relocate to the Inverness High School in 2017.

Stage 2 of the project will be completed in 2020 following the relocation of the golf course. This stage, which involves an additional canal swing bridge crossing and roundabout, where the Golf Club is currently located, is programmed to commence in 2019 to coincide with the move of the Golf Club to the new course and facilities.



© The Highland Council

Leader of the Council and Head of Infrastructure talk a walk-through of the site and inspect the works starting in the river in July to prepare for the bridge.

Pupils plant for the future



Bailey McArthur aged 8 and Rose Munro aged 5, from Kinmylies Primary School, with Provost of Inverness Helen Carmichael planting a Silver Birch.

Pupils from Kinmylies Primary School will be learning about trees and their importance to the environment, as they take part in a special project by looking after three young trees which are destined to be planted beside the new West Link road.

Pupils, aged 5 to 7 from P1 to P3, were assisted by land based skills students from the Scottish School of Forestry, Inverness College, to plant three trees in the grounds of Kinmylies Primary School. The children helped to plant a silver birch, a wild cherry and a beech tree with the students and their lecturer, who had tended the trees in their nursery.

P1 to P3 Pupils from Kinmylies Primary School with Provost of Inverness Helen Carmichael with the Silver Birch and Wild Cherry trees.



Teacher Lorraine Innes said:

“ The children are learning about trees at the moment as part of their science lessons, so this is a great project for them to be involved in. Pupils from different classes get together once a month to work together as part of community orchard and gardening groups.”

The trees were planted in such a way, with assistance from the Scottish School of Forestry, so that they can be easily moved to their final location by the West Link in 2019. They will be amongst 3000 saplings and over 170 large trees planted to provide instant ‘greening’ and screening. Over time they will mature and

help to integrate the road and associated projects into the local landscape and the saplings will be managed to ensure the continuity of tree cover in Inverness.

Provost of Inverness Helen Carmichael said:

“ *The West Link is about connecting communities and this is a wonderful project where children can be really involved in their environment and their future. As the children grow, they will be able to see the trees grow and have a real connection with the project and their environment.* ”



P1 to P3 Pupils from Kinmylies Primary School with Teacher Lorraine Innes, Provost of Inverness Helen Carmichael and Students and Lecturer Neil Cleland from the Scottish School of Forestry, Inverness



Work on Torvean Golf Course swings into action

Construction of the new Torvean Golf Course and Torvean Housing site preparation works commences in August 2016. The new course is part of the project plans for enhanced sports facilities in the city and will be playable in 2019.

The construction of the West Link requires a reconfiguration of the Golf Course and additional enhancements to the golf course were agreed in a greater ambition for the City of Inverness. The expanded golf project of over £9million, with

additional funding from Sports Scotland for the clubhouse junior room, includes land purchase and Golf Course design as well as construction of the Clubhouse and maintenance facility. The construction of the associated access road and Clubhouse and maintenance facility will commence in 2017, timed for completion to coincide with the golf course opening for play.

Award winning global golf course architect, Stuart Rennie, has been chosen to design the new Torvean Golf Course.

As highlighted in the approved Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief, this relocation of the golf course will also release residual existing golf course land to the East of General Booth Road and land to the South of the A82 will be freed up for informal public open space and a mixed use development adjacent to the canal at this important gateway to Inverness.

Convener of the Council, Councillor Isobel McCallum said:

“Golf tourism is very important to the Highland economy. This project will deliver substantial long term assets for the City of Inverness which will further economic development in the area.”



L-R: Kevin Mackintosh (Vice President of Torvean), Colin Howell (Head of Infrastructure THC), Hamish Spence (President of Torvean), Cllr Graham Ross, Jim Kelly (Coffey), David Knight (Capita) and Declan O'Malley (EGS). The drawing shows the golf course layout.

Making maths count at the Scottish Open

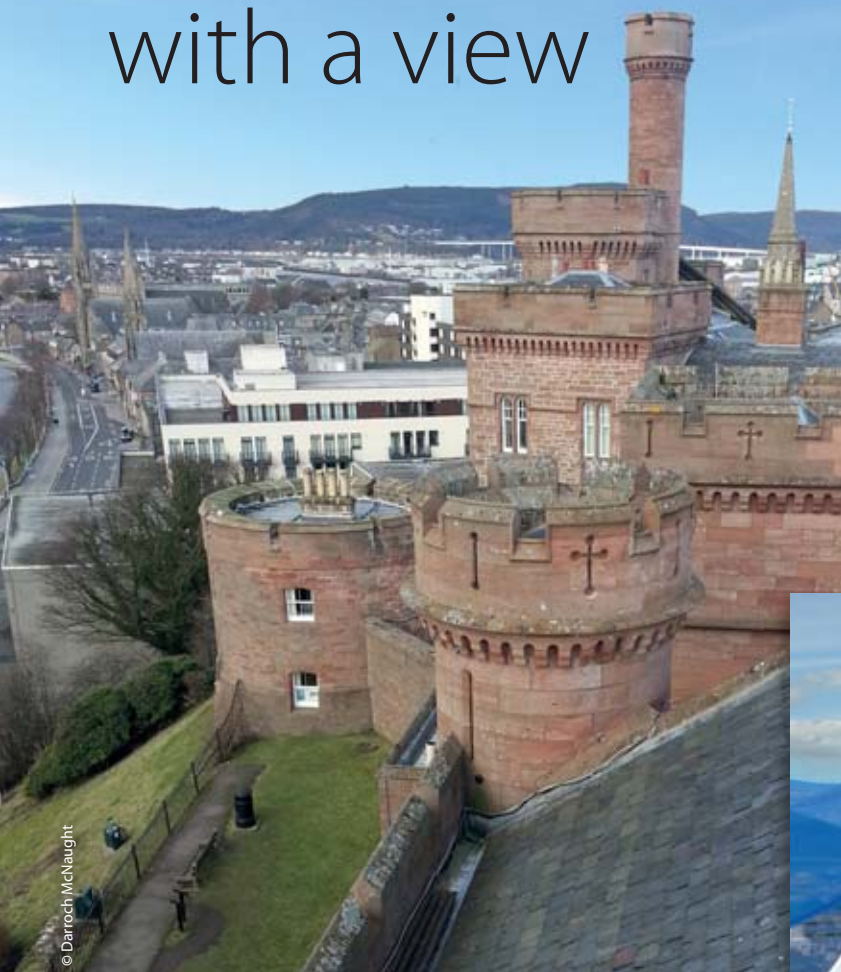
Aberdeen Asset Management together with the Scottish Government and VisitScotland came up with a novel idea to help encourage greater enthusiasm for maths amongst the country's children – by printing mathematical expressions, or sums, on the 18 pin flags on course.

The expressions were provided by pupils from Ardersier and Balloch Primary schools in Inverness.

Pupils Ossian Maclellan (10) of Ardersier Primary and Harry Ratcliffe (12) of Balloch Primary are joined by Aberdeen Asset Management ambassador Russell Knox at Castle Stuart Golf Links ahead of the Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open



Tower with a view



© Darroch McNaught

Work is well underway to convert the North Tower of Inverness Castle from office space into a visitor attraction and viewpoint. Views from the top are spectacular, looking both south over the River Ness and beyond and north over the Ness Bridge towards the Black Isle.

The Council, Inverness Common Good Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have all contributed to the cost of the project, which includes a shop and viewing platform. City Region Deal money was also made available to improve the approaches to the North Tower and the castle and environmental improvements to the grounds.

The project is being carried out with every effort to minimise any disruption to visitors who can look forward to visiting the attraction when it opens later this year.



© Kirsty Foster, The Highland Council

Director of Development and Infrastructure Stuart Black and Programme Manager John Robertson survey the progress at the top of the North Tower.



...to shape economic future

The local authority leaders of Scotland's seven main cities have issued a collective call for a new working relationship with the UK and Scottish governments to allow them to reach their full economic potential.

In a report, 'Empowering City Government', the city leaders say only a fundamental shake-up of existing arrangements will allow them to "compete with other cities close to home and globally".

The city leaders have published a four-point plan which, if given the go-ahead, would see the councils secure historic new powers over tax, spending and the development of massive infrastructure projects. In its blueprint for unprecedented change, the local authority leaders call for a new cross-city partnership with national bodies such as Transport

Scotland, Scottish Water and Zero Waste Scotland. Leader of The Highland Council, Margaret Davidson, added:

“By working together with the other cities in Scotland, Inverness will have a stronger voice in securing new powers to drive the economy forward both in the city and the wider Highland region.”

The report, 'Empowering City Government', is available on the Scottish Cities Alliance website:

www.scottishcities.org

Record crowds for Fort William Mountain Bike World Cup



Greg Minnaar in action

“ As well as being a top sporting event, it’s been a great weekend away for anyone wanting to get close to the action and soak up some of the thrill and buzz of the sport in a spectacular location and I’d like to thank the community for making everyone feel so welcome. A bonus this year was the weather which was hot and sunny and really capped a successful weekend.

“ Fort William has developed an international reputation as the spiritual home of the sport, offering some of the best and most gruelling courses in the world. We have been delighted to work with the organisers to make sure the Highlands benefits from the increased number of visitors during the event, as well as showcasing our spectacular scenery to people across the world through the global media coverage the event attracts. The economic benefits are well recognised and have firmly placed the Highlands and Scotland on the world map for mountain biking and the organisers should be congratulated for once again delivering a top world-class event. We look forward to welcoming back competitors, their supporters and spectators.”

A record number of fans attended the 15th year of downhill mountain bike racing in the Scottish Highlands in what is being described as the best ever Fort William Mountain Bike World Cup.

Organiser Rare Management say almost 22,000 fans attended the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup and BUFF® 4X Pro Tour, over the course of the weekend (3rd - 5th June), making it the most well attended UCI World Cup in Scotland yet.

Taking place on the uncompromising slopes of Aonach Mor and the Nevis Range, riders and fans enjoyed glorious sunshine as part of a thrilling weekend of mountain bike action which saw Great Britain’s Rachel

Atherton and South Africa’s Greg Minnaar storm to victory in the women’s and men’s finals.

More than a quarter of a million fans have descended on Fort William since the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup came to the Highlands 14 years ago, delivering a £33m boost to the Highland economy since 2002.

The multi-award winning event, which is supported by EventScotland and Highland Council, was the third stage on the UCI World Cup Downhill calendar and this year marked the last competitive appearance of former Downhill World Champion and mountain bike legend, Steve Peat.

Leader of The Highland Council’s Lochaber Committee, Councillor Thomas MacLennan, said:



Crowds enjoying the event

www.fortwilliamworldcup.co.uk

10,000 strong crowds at Inverness Highland Games



Sinclair Patience, 2016 Inverness Highland Games Champion

July's significantly expanded Inverness Highland Games and Gala Weekend attracted over 10,000 spectators to Bught Park and provided a significant boost to the Highland Capital's economy and profile.

This year's event included the biggest ever new attraction of a 700m long TruckNess (featuring 70 trucks), along with Boxing, a Wheelbarrow Grand Prix, the Highlands' Strongest Man and Strongest Woman competitions, a Veterans Parade, a Primary School age Shinty Sixes Tournament, an Eve of Gala Party and, last but not least, a Highland Games within a Highland Games for the Royal Regiment of Scotland. The line-up involved something for everyone to enjoy.

The event is sponsored by the Inverness Common Good Fund. This enabled support for numerous local charities, by giving them a free opportunity

to fundraise, and kept admission prices as affordable as possible. Everything staged on Saturday evening and Sunday was free of charge.



Partners pledge support for loneliness campaign



The Highland Community Planning Partnership Board members have given their full support to a campaign running across the Highlands to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Community factors that influence loneliness and social isolation can include access to transport, neighbourhood safety and personality.

The Board, made up of representatives from The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Third Sector and a number of other organisations have all agreed to sign up to the campaign launched by NHS Highland to reduce loneliness and isolation. The organisations will encourage 1 in 3 of all their staff to make a pledge to take action.

Chair of the Board Cllr Margaret Davidson said:

“ Loneliness and social isolation is a significant issue that impacts on individuals, communities and services across the Highlands. There is increasing evidence about the effects on health and wellbeing and the impact on demand for services which is why all Board members are very supportive of this worthy cause. Any breakthrough achievement must make a significant difference to our communities and there is huge potential to make a real difference by harnessing the efforts of our staff both in their professional roles and in supporting them to take action within their communities. ”

The NHS 'Reach Out' Campaign encourages members of the public, companies and other organisations to complete a 'pledge' in which they will undertake to carry out a task of their choosing to address loneliness. These tasks can include anything from chatting to an elderly neighbour twice a week to organising a social event for lonely people.



“ There is increasing evidence about the effects on health and wellbeing and the impact on demand for services ”

The pledge form is published at: www.reachout.scot.nhs.uk

New north coast marine plan

To support north coast local communities, a new marine plan for the North Highlands' coast has just been completed.

This collaborative project with Marine Scotland and Orkney Islands Council and The Highland Council will support the Council's aim for biodiverse marine and coastal waters that support thriving and resilient local communities.

Details can be found on the Marine Scotland website.

www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/3696

Fort William's former school gets new lease of life

Work started in June on the £5.7 million major project that will bring The Highland Council's administrative and professional staff from different locations across Fort William into a single building, providing a year-on-year revenue saving of around £400,000.



The new council office will redevelop the former Fort William Secondary school site. The project breathes new life into the empty listed building, owned by the local authority. Space within the new building will be created for other public sector partners in a move to help with revenue costs.

This latest project takes the total spend invested in Fort William over the last five years to over £40 million. In addition to these investments, the Council has also invested a further £2 million in the purchase of the Blar Mor site to make provision for a new hospital and potentially a new science academy for the West Highland college and has directed and enabled finance of £7.35m for housing association projects in the town over the past 5 years.



Kingussie Council Offices

The £2.3m refurbishment and conversion of the grade B listed former courthouse in Kingussie, and new extension to the rear to provide new Council offices is shortly to be completed, with staff moving in from late summer.



Creating new homes in Fort William

Work has begun to transform the site of a former medical centre in Fort William into affordable rental accommodation.

A partnership between Lochaber Housing Association and The Highland Council will see the site of the former Belhaven ward, which closed its doors in 2013, redeveloped over the next 12 months to create a mixture of bungalows and flats for rent.

Five wheel-chair fully accessible bungalows will be rented to tenants by The Highland Council while the Lochaber Housing Association will rent out the 8 new flats.

The project is being part funded by a Scottish Government Housing Grant with the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust acting as agent for both the Council and Lochaber Housing Association.

Global Geopark status for North West Highlands



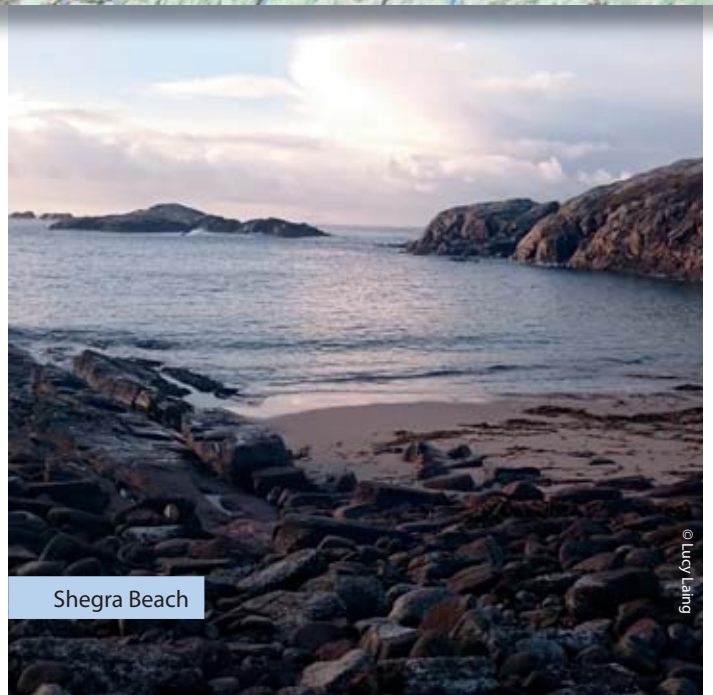
© Jenny Grant

Ben Mor Coigach and Beinn an Eoin in Assynt

The North West Highlands was recently awarded status as a UNESCO Global Geopark. UNESCO recognition is excellent news for the Highlands and North West Sutherland and underlines the worldwide importance of our geological and cultural heritage in the Highlands.

The UNESCO brand is expected to further enhance the work of the North West Highlands Geopark, helping to create new international funding and partnership opportunities, attract national and international visitors, and raise awareness of the North West Highland's unique geological heritage. The North Coast 500 Route runs through the Geopark, showcasing some of the most outstanding scenery in the world.

What sets UNESCO Global Geoparks apart is that they encourage locally-led partnerships that work to support sustainable economic development of the area. They do this primarily through geological and eco-tourism. Activities such as developing geotrails and other projects bring geodiversity to life for people and, holding festivals and events, including education projects in schools and communities, inspire engagement in the earth sciences.



Shegra Beach

© Lucy Laing

National Award for 12 Highland beaches



© Iain Sargeant

Twelve Highland beaches have been recognised as amongst the best managed beaches in the country.

The Highland beaches have, for the first time ever, received the prestigious Scotland's Beach Award - a newly launched accreditation for beach management in Scotland run by the Environmental charity, Keep Scotland Beautiful

From litter free sand, to information provision and toilet provision to maintaining beautiful promenades and secluded bays, all the recognised beaches focus on improving and enhancing local

environmental quality. The award is designed to complement the work currently undertaken by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on bathing water quality and the RNLI on beach safety.

The Highland beaches recognised in this year's awards are:

- Achmelvich Bay
- Brora Beach
- Dornoch Beach
- Durness, Sango Bay
- Embo Beach
- Golspie
- Loch Morlich
- Melvich
- Nairn Central
- Portmahomack
- Shandwick Bay
- Strathy Bay

All the award winning beaches are featured on an online map that Keep Scotland Beautiful have produced along with directions and details of the facilities available.

www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/local-environmental-quality/beach-awards/beach-guide/map-of-winners

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The **@corranferry** twitter feed is also now live on the transport page on our website:

www.highland.gov.uk

Corran Ferry



© The Highland Council

Thurso listed building restored to use

An iconic 200 year old Category B listed building, in Princes Street Thurso, has been restored and brought back into use as much needed living accommodation.

The property sits a prime position within the conservation area of the town. Originally constructed in the early 1800s, over a period of time, lack of maintenance led to the demolition of the chimney head and the rear stair tower. The building became an eyesore and, in order to save it, The Highland Council acquired the building by Compulsory Purchase.

Renovation works started in May last year and now the property has been transformed into three, one bedroom flats. During the works, where possible, the original features of the building were repaired



and preserved. These include repairs to sash and case windows, the original timber doors, skirtings and facings, the ornate plaster cornices and the original roofing slates had been removed are now replaced. Stone repairs have included rebuilding the original window openings at the shopfront and rebuilding the gable chimneyhead. The external walls have been lime rendered in keeping with how the building would have been rendered from early in its history.

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The Highland Council celebrated the historic event of holding two national football cup trophies in the Highlands for a short period in the spring of 2016, with a photograph to mark the occasion.

Provost of Inverness Helen Carmichael and Councillor Margaret Paterson from Dingwall and Seaforth Ward greeted Club Representatives and examined the silverware. Provost Carmichael said: “ This is an historic day for the Highlands and I’m honoured and privileged to have held both of the cups herein Inverness. Congratulations to both Clubs. ”

Councillor Margaret Paterson added: “ This is absolutely amazing for both Ross County and Inverness and the whole of the Highlands, because history has been made having the two cups here in the Highlands! It is a tremendous achievement by both teams. ”

Highland Council celebrates double football success for Highland teams

Iain Auld, Commercial Manager for Inverness Caley Thistle Football Club said:

“ It is a fantastic achievement for the Highlands to hold both national cup trophies for the first time. We enjoyed our day in the sunshine at Hampden last year and we are delighted to see our Highland neighbours also experience success at Hampden in March. ”

Alastair Kennedy, Director of Ross County Football Club said:

“ It was a great day in the Club’s history to win the League Cup for the very first time. It was a great occasion for all our fans and we are very appreciative of the support we have received from Highland Council. ”



Pictured with the trophies L-R: Provost of Inverness Helen Carmichael, Iain Auld (ICTFC), Cllr Margaret Paterson, Lorraine Christie (RCFC) and Alastair Kennedy (RCFC)

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