



Newsletter September 2017

We invite you to join us for our **Annual General Meeting** on **Saturday 25th November** at **11.00am**.

This year we are delighted to be holding our AGM in the **Columba Centre** in **Fionnphort!**

Please come along for a look inside the Columba Centre, to enjoy a coffee and cake and to find out what SWMID has been up to over the past year.



We are so excited that, after many months of negotiation, we have signed a lease with Historic Environment Scotland for SWMID to rent half of the **Columba Centre** building in Fionnphort. On October 1st, we are moving into a newly configured office at the front of the building where you can wave to us as you pass by!

In response to the priorities that came out of our consultations in 2016 we have lots of ideas about how the rest of our part of the building can best be used to benefit the community. There are going to be opportunities for local organisations and businesses in South West Mull and Iona to rent different kinds of space. If you are interested, please get in touch, or pop in to the Columba Centre after 1st October.

Sound of Iona Harbours: With the help of Michael Russell (MSP), who facilitated a discussion of key stakeholders, SWMID's Sound of Iona Harbours sub-group are delighted that the project is moving through the **design stage**. The scope of this stage is to agree a design that gives a clear picture of the desired infrastructure and a programme of necessary work and costs, enabling the project to move on to the construction stage.

Argyll and Bute Council have commissioned the company Byrne Looby to design the new infrastructure. The Sound of Iona Harbours group are actively engaged with the designers and the council to ensure that the finished design addresses as many as possible of the current difficulties faced by the ferry, fishermen, leisure crafts, locals and visitors, due to conditions in the Sound. The principal aims for the project are a safe overnight berth for the ferry at Fionnphort and a breakwater to provide shelter at the slip on the Iona side. Byrne Looby visited Iona at the end of August and had valuable conversations with the ferry crew about what infrastructure they feel is needed. As part of the process, wave-modelling, sediment testing and geophysical surveys are underway.

Investment from Argyll and Bute Council into fit-for-purpose infrastructure on each side of the Sound could enable a number of other high impact community projects including a marina, pontoons, workspace for fishermen and fish processing. Such projects would offer fantastic opportunities to local businesses and a huge boost to the local economy. There will be community consultations as the new pier developments are progressed.



Local economic development is a key driver for SWMID and we are in the early stages of investigating the potential for **seaweed farming** in the area – can it work and what are the potential benefits for our community? Much work needs to be carried out to find answers, but with a global industry valued at £4bn these are questions worth asking. Greg Moschonas, Argyll and Bute Council, is very interested in our approach and keen to help us to move forward.

We are currently securing funds to carry out the feasibility work needed to see if a community owned seaweed farm is indeed an opportunity for our community.

Tiroran Community Forest update

Local primary schools have visited the forest several times with Emily Wilkins, the NTS ranger. Activities have included poetry inspired by the forest, woodland art and insect identification. A “survivor camp” was held in the summer holidays as part of Gala 2017 with den-building, fire lighting and arrow making!

*“Bumpy ground, cracky stick,
bark flaky and rough,
moss fluffy and soft, squishy mud, dry bracken,
dead leaves like ripped silk – the feel of the forest”*

From Pictures & Poetry, class 1 Bunessan Primary School



Visitors to Mull Eagle Watch have been able to view the pair of white tailed eagles and the successful fledging of their chick, Arwen.

We have received some very generous donations towards developing a seating/welcome area at the entrance to the forest, thanks to funds raised by Marie Fox and Christine Leach’s plant sales. The groundworks have now been completed for this and we hope to see some stonework in place soon!

We have started to work with a keen group of potential crofters to explore developing Woodland Crofts in the forest.

The commercial aspects of the forest have been problematic with haulage of timber being halted over the winter due to deterioration of the B8035. Argyll and Bute Council have agreed to allow us to move the cut timber at the roadside between July and October to enable us to sell this timber before it loses value. The road is being monitored closely and regularly during this period. Further negotiations with A&BC are ongoing to facilitate timber haulage in 2018. Until an agreement is reached felling of commercial timber has been halted and other work, including planting, has been put on hold.

We are legally obliged to fell diseased larch as part of the Forestry Commission’s plant health strategy for containing the spread of Phytophthora ramorum. This work will begin soon.

Funding from the Scottish Land Fund has enabled us to appoint business consultants, Athena Solutions, to investigate the potential benefits and difficulties of SWMID purchasing **South Bunessan Wood** on behalf of the local community. The current owners, Tilhill Forestry Ltd, have offered SWMID first refusal on the sale. The study is expected to be completed by the end of October. An initial report on the findings of the study will be presented at the AGM on 25th November.

Goodbye to John Clare

We are very sad to be saying goodbye to John Clare who is leaving us at the end of the year, having been our Forest Officer since the purchase of Tiroran Community Forest was completed in November 2015. Previously John was a director of SWMID. He has worked with great commitment in both roles, helping us to secure ownership of the forest and supporting SWMID to grow into the role of forest owners!



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