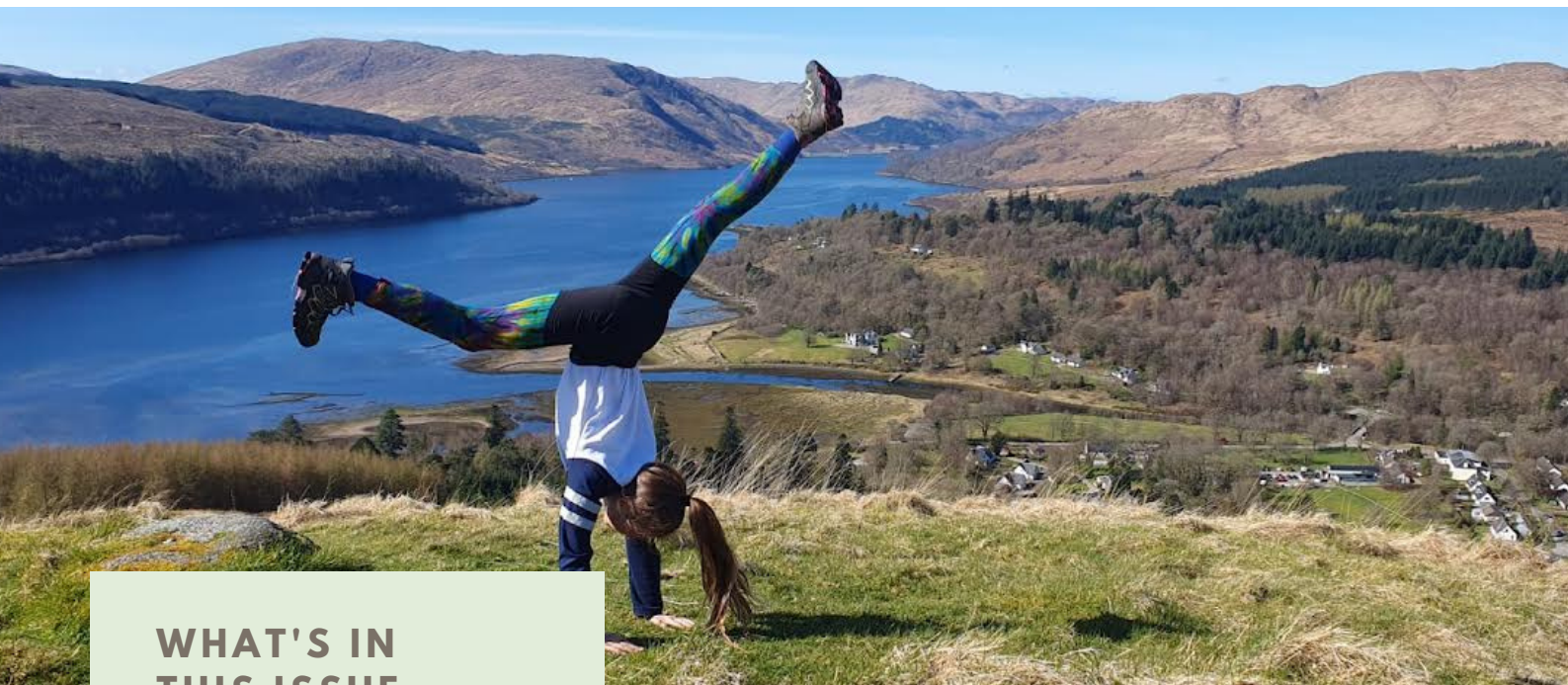


# SUNART COMMUNITY NEWS



Keeping Sunart a great place to live, work & visit.



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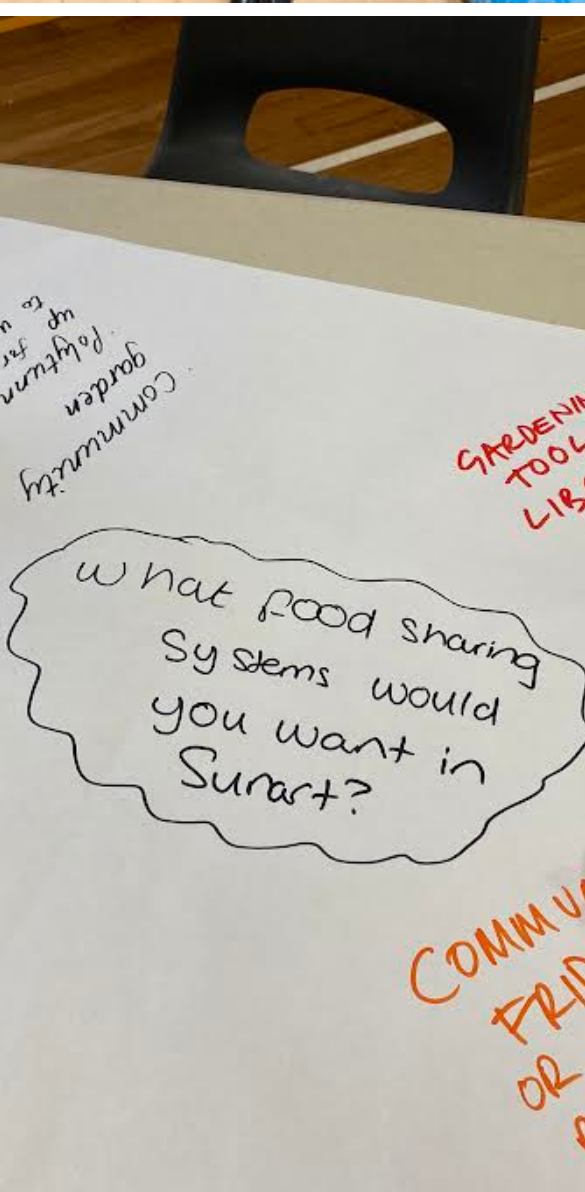
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## WELCOME

Hello and welcome to the first edition of a new, regular newsletter with updates from the Sunart Community Company (SCC). After the long days of sunshine that kick started our summer it is hard to imagine being anywhere better than Sunart, but we've been combing through the results of the community consultation, and having a series of conversations on the outcomes, as we try to bring to life some of the ideas to make this community even better. This first SCC newsletter will give a summary of the results, the actions that have already been taken in response, and the plans for the coming months.

Firstly, we are delighted that 158 people took the survey in paper or online - that equates to around 40% of the community. We also did targeted outreach at the high school as our younger community members were slightly under-represented in the results.

JULY 2023, ISSUE NO. 1



So it was exciting to see enthusiastic support for the proposed uses of the woodland, with walking, biking, woodland restoration, biodiversity enhancement, outdoor learning, woodland crofts, eco-housing to meet local affordable housing needs, and firewood production all securing support from at least 70% of respondents.

There were a lot of interesting views shared on the ideas around new, or repurposed, community spaces with enthusiasm for new facilities we can share. A number of important points were raised around the proposed Church buyout, new village hall, and permanent space on the show field, including concerns on costs, challenges of upkeep, and duplication of the uses provided for by existing community spaces. Nonetheless there was support for moving these ideas forward - including many indications of willingness to participate in the work needed to do so. The SCC and others involved in the community will take all the feedback into consideration as we move to further develop plans in each of these areas.

## Community Gatherings

Four of the ideas for potential community action which generated enthusiasm in the survey became the focus of in-person and online discussions earlier this year. Events were held on potential food sharing initiatives, improvements and expansions of the network of paths around Sunart, community social events, and a car sharing scheme. 57 people attended across the four meetings and cooked up plans to sort the bridge on the Faeries Road, clear the path to Ardnastaing beach; host ceilidhs, music events, and craft groups; start a community fridge or pantry, and a food swap and share; and how to maximise the use of a new community-owned electric car!

We are delighted to announce that a new electric car for Strontian is on its way and will be charged overnight at Oakwood Tourism & Crafts. Watch out in the coming months for how you can join the car club.





So we can be very confident that the views and ideas captured are highly representative of the thinking of the people of Sunart. Thanks to everyone who took the time to share their thoughts – it was a chunky list of questions! This input is essential to everything the SCC does.

## Community Support for Big Projects!

The survey results showed very high levels of community support for a number of the projects underway, or proposed, including the buyout of Longrigg Woodland, and the Strontian Parish Church building. There also appears to be majority support for developing a new social space for the village when the village hall can no longer be kept open. Separately, almost 77% of respondents agreed with the concept of putting a permanent building on the show field.

We are pleased to report that having secured over £20,000 from the Scottish Land Fund the church has now been surveyed, valued and a detailed feasibility study published to help guide next steps towards a possible new Heritage Centre for the area, which can also be used for church services when required.

A large number of responders commented on the need for more affordable housing for younger families, while housing for care workers, teachers and NHS professionals was also a concern. The top community concerns include access to healthcare, the cost and future of the ferry service – likely to have raced up peoples' list of concerns after weeks going the long way around the loch – high transport and fuel costs, and household energy bills. People also expressed concerns about long-term provision of care for older people in the community, access to good broadband and the lack of public transport.

The efforts to secure Longrigg as a community woodland have achieved an important milestone, with Forestry and Land Scotland agreeing to our request to buy the wood. The next step, securing the funding from the Scottish Land Fund, is underway and we're hopeful the wood, and control over its future, will be in community hands before the end of the year.







The survey did show that a significant portion (38%) of the community have faced challenges with their or a loved one's mental health over the last year, with health, the cost of living, loneliness, loss or bereavement, and drug or alcohol issues flagged as the main drivers of people's difficulties. Some of the ideas discussed in more detail in the follow up consultations on social events and food sharing will hopefully help to address these, and we'll be reaching out to Ewen's Room and Urram to discuss the implications of the findings to ensure we're doing all we can as a community to help each other.

Overall there was a huge amount of enthusiasm for lots of the plans already in motion to make our community an even better place to live, work, and visit - and there were dozens of new ideas to add to the mix. There is much work to do to bring these ideas to reality, but huge thanks goes to everyone who helped to make the survey and follow up events happen. Please do get in touch, or come along to any of the events being planned over the coming months, as the most important thing about Sunart - and getting these ideas off the ground - is the people.

## Upcoming Events

Burger Stall @ Sunart Agricultural Show - Sat 12th Aug

Vegetable Fermentation Workshop - Fri 22nd Sept

Clothes Swap - Sunday 22nd Oct

Christmas Market & Auction - Sat 25th Nov

AGM & Burns' Supper - 27th Jan



# A BRIEF HISTORY

01.

Established as Strontian Community Company in 2005, but later changed its name to Sunart Community Company. Formed to acquire recreational land and fishing rights being sold off by the then Scottish Executive, and has continued to manage a number of footpaths and areas of amenity land around the village, including local angling rights in partnership with the Strontian Angling Club.

2005

02.

We worked alongside the Community Council to facilitate a Community Appraisal and Action Plan – this gave all local groups a clear sense of where the priorities lay for the next 20 years in our community.

2013

03.

Conducted a local Housing Needs Analysis using a grant funded intern. This demonstrated the need for more affordable housing locally, paving the way for the Highland small Communities Housing Trust and Lochaber Housing to develop new affordable housing units on School Road.

2014

04.

Helped instigate a 100 kw river hydro scheme – operated by Sunart Community Renewables – a stand alone community benefit company, which donates profits to the charity.

2015

05.

A successful community share offer for the hydro, emboldened the community to enter into an agreement with Highland Council to build Scotland's first community-owned school building – utilising a second community share offer.

2016

Sunart Community School Building Company has built a beautiful new school – which can easily be converted to social housing should Highland Council ever give up the tenancy of the property.

In 2016, we employed our first staff – 2 part time Development Officers.

Over £100,000 of hydro funds has now been distributed by the Sunart Community Benefit Fund, established with the help of Foundation Scotland.

Although the Community Company acts as a banker, an independent panel decides how the money is spent, against community priorities.

So far this fund has helped unlock local projects worth over £1.2million

2018

06.

Following protracted negotiations with Highland Council we acquired the rights to the Strontian Slipway and Jetty and installed 3 moorings for visiting boats. In 2020 the shed was refurbished and in 2021 a new lease with Crown Estate Scotland was secured.

07.

Longrigg Woodland Community Consultation & Feasibility Study was carried out 2018-2020 giving the green light to seek community buyout.

2019/20

We were awarded £41,000 from the Scottish Land Fund to purchase the former Visitor Information Centre closed down by Visit Scotland. In March 2019 Oakwood Tourism Crafts opened, creating a permanent job locally. We now run this as a local cooperative of artists, makers and tourist activity providers. The shop supports 30 local businesses.

08.

Working closely with the Sunart Community Council, we secured over £15,000 to help the community respond to the Covid-19 lockdowns, establishing a helpline and volunteer task force. We established the Sunart Community Christmas Auction and Craft Fair, now an annual community event.

2020/21

09.

In the winter of 2022 the Sunart Community Renewables "windfall payment" was distributed by the Sunart Community Benefit Fund to every local household, a windfall payment to every household in the community of £150.

2023

We also recently completed a second community consultation to understand the changing priorities of our community, and our Longrigg Woodland Committee is in the process of securing funding to complete a community asset transfer to bring the woodlands under community ownership.