

SUNART COMMUNITY NEWS



of keeping Sunart a great place to live, work & visit.

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Welcome to our Summer 2025 issue

This edition is a special one, as 2025 marks 20 years since the formation of our community company—originally incorporated as Strontian Community Company in November 2005, and renamed Sunart Community Company in 2008.

Over the past two decades, we've worked together to deliver projects like Oakwood, the Jetty, community paths, the Craft Hub, and more recently, Longrigg and the Heritage Centre. It's been an incredible journey, and this year we'll be celebrating all that's been achieved, while looking ahead to what the next 20 years might bring.

Inside, you'll find updates on current projects, including Longrigg Woodland, Strontian Jetty, and recent path improvements, plus news from the Board, including new Directors and roles. We've also got plenty of social events lined up—starting with the upcoming Sunart Solstice Splash in June. Thanks for being part of the journey—past, present and future.



Celebrating 20 Years of Community Action.

Did you know?

This year marks 20 years since Sunart Community Company (SCC) was founded in 2005—born from the community's desire to have more say over local development, land and facilities. What started with a bold vision has grown into a trusted and proactive organisation shaping the future of Sunart through local ownership, hard work, and collaboration.

🌿 Did you know one of our very first projects was in partnership with the Strontian Angling Association? With their support—and funding raised through the sale of fishing permits—SCC helped back efforts to restore wild salmon stocks in the Strontian river. School pupils even got involved in riverbank work and developing a fish hatchery, and for many years, the Association's contributions helped keep SCC afloat financially. That partnership remains one of our proudest early successes.

🦆 You might remember the much-loved Duck Race down the Strontian River—just one of the many creative ways SCC and our volunteers have raised funds and awareness over the years.

🌳 SCC now owns a community orchard tucked behind Dail Mhor, developed as part of our Rural Skills Project. We also own the Back Village Green, which has seen barrels planted, benches installed, and social events held. As we look to the future, we'd love your input—what could we do next with the Village Green to benefit local residents? Wildflower areas, a children's nature zone, seating shelters or an outdoor event space? Your ideas are welcome!

🗺️ Before the pandemic, our Paths Group was instrumental in building and maintaining the Ardnastaing and Longrigg paths, and even refurbishing the Back Road and Hotel Road. In 2024, thanks to support from High Life Highland's Ranger Service, we've seen this group resurrected with fresh energy, with new volunteers joining regular monthly sessions to care for and improve our local trails.





🌲 In the past decade, SCC has developed ambitious land-based projects like Longrigg Woodland, the Sunart Rainforest Project, and the creation of Oakwood Tourism and Crafts—a hub for local makers and visitor information. Through these, we've continued to deliver on our mission to support sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and community benefit.

💡 Since 2005, SCC has secured over £1 million in funding for local projects, thanks to the dedication of volunteers, support from national and local funders, and the generosity of our community. Initiatives like the £150 Cost of Living Fund (delivered twice), our Craft Hub and Men's Shed refurbishment, the EV Car Club, and community-led heritage, health, and housing work – all show what's possible when we work together.

☀️ As we celebrate our 20th year, we want to thank everyone who has contributed—past and present. From founding directors and long-serving volunteers to our newest committee members, it's your energy that has shaped what SCC is today.

🗣️ We'd love to hear your stories, ideas and memories—and invite you to help shape what the next 20 years of community action looks like. (enquiries@sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk)

What Could the Next 20 Years Hold?

As we mark 20 years of community action, we're also looking ahead. The next two decades could see Sunart leading the way in heritage, conservation and local resilience.

One exciting development is the planned Heritage Centre. With funding secured to purchase the former Strontian Church and churchyard, we aim to create a space for local history, storytelling and learning—bringing the past to life for all.

Our land-based work is growing too. The Sunart Rainforest Project, supported by NatureScot, The Woodland Trust and FLS, is setting the stage for long-term rainforest restoration, woodland expansion and biodiversity, in partnership with local land-owners. And at Longrigg Woodland, now owned by the community, opportunities are emerging for conservation, outdoor learning, eco-tourism and sustainable timber.

Looking ahead, we hope to see a flourishing rainforest, a thriving heritage hub, and a new generation of community leaders. If the last 20 years are anything to go by, the future looks bright.





Meet the Team – New Roles and Fresh Faces

As Sunart Community Company celebrates its 20th year, we're also stepping into a new chapter with a refreshed Board and named officer roles. We'd like to begin by expressing our sincere thanks to **Paul Sharples**, who has served as Chair with dedication and calm leadership over the past few years. We're pleased to share that **John Jones** has now taken on the role.

John has been visiting Strontian since 2000 and made it his permanent home in 2013. With a 42-year career in central government—20 of those in professional and management training—John brings a wealth of experience. He has served on the Community Council for over a decade and continues to be a strong advocate for thoughtful, community-led progress.

We're also delighted to welcome **Laura Cameron MacGregor** into the role of Vice Chair. Laura was brought up on the Morvern peninsula and returned to Sunart after studying and teaching in Aberdeen. Now a teacher, crofter and host of two self-catering properties, Laura brings energy and care to everything she does—especially our social events, including the Hogmanay Party and Christmas Auction.

Another important transition is in the role of Treasurer. We offer heartfelt thanks to **James Hilder** for his years of careful financial stewardship and support across countless SCC projects. He remains on the board as a valued director. We warmly welcome **Alison Gainsford** as our new Treasurer. With a long career in business development at HIE and a deep knowledge of the local economy, Alison is already making an impact.

Nick Brooks, who joined the board in 2024, takes on the role of Secretary. With a background in marketing and business, Nick is enjoying a busy retirement filled with kayaking, walking and history study. Finally, we welcome **Neil Mellis** as a new director. A well-known face in the village for over 30 years, Neil brings energy, humour, and hands-on support—whether helping at events, firefighting, or auctioneering.

We're grateful to all returning directors: **James Hilder, Paul Sharples, Hollie Taylor, and Sarah Traynor**. We would like to thank **Rowena Henderson**, who recently stepped down, for all of her time and effort as an SCC Director. We wish her, her husband Sam, and their son Angus (our first board baby) well!



Strontian Jetty Group: Community Collaboration and Progress

The Strontian Jetty Group has been instrumental in revitalising our waterfront, ensuring it remains a safe and welcoming space for all. Through dedicated volunteer efforts and community support, significant strides have been made in maintaining and enhancing this vital local asset.

Annual Clean-Up and Maintenance

In mid-March, volunteers convened for the annual clean-up around the Green Shed, diligently removing seaweed, stones, and debris. This effort significantly improved the appearance and safety of the jetty and slipway. A heartfelt thank you to all who participated, including our enthusiastic swimmers and boaters. Looking ahead, plans are in place to address the potholes on the jetty, further enhancing its usability.

Phase 1 Completion

June marked the successful completion of Phase 1 of the jetty refurbishment. This milestone involved power washing the slipway and concreting the holes at the top of the jetty. Special thanks to Julian Morris Design & Build for supplying materials and to Golden Eagle Contractors Ltd for providing essential equipment.

Solstice Splash Event

To celebrate the summer solstice and the jetty's rejuvenation, the community is invited to the Solstice Splash on Saturday, 21st June, from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM. This fundraising event will feature a barbecue supporting ongoing jetty maintenance. Attendees are encouraged to bring their wetsuits, swimsuits, paddleboards, kayaks, canoes, or boats for an afternoon of water-based fun.

Stay Connected

A Jetty Users WhatsApp Group is being established to facilitate communication among users, coordinate maintenance activities, and share updates. If you're interested in joining, please contact Alex Pykett to be added.





Longrigg Woodland: A Community Forest in Action

After years of visioning, planning and community consultation, 2024 marked a major milestone—the successful community asset transfer of Longrigg Woodland to the Sunart Community Company.

This is our most significant land-based project to date, made possible thanks to support from the Scottish Land Fund, the Sunart Community Benefit Fund, and the incredible backing of our local community.

With the transfer complete, we've now entered an exciting new chapter—turning community ownership into meaningful action. Scottish Woodlands were appointed as our professional Harvesting Manager to oversee sustainable forestry operations.

In early 2025, we also welcomed Craig Holden as the new Longrigg Project Coordinator. Craig acts as the vital bridge between the harvesting contractors, the SCC Woodland Working Group, and the wider community.

He's already proving invaluable in keeping everything running smoothly and making sure local voices continue to shape what happens on the ground.

Practical work has begun too. Volunteers and committee members have been out repairing fencing, and our new Longrigg Working Parties are now taking place on the third Sunday of each month.

These sessions are open to everyone—offering the chance to roll up your sleeves, enjoy the woodland, learn new skills, and be part of something bigger.

We're also looking to grow our Woodland Committee. Whether you bring forestry experience, admin skills, or simply a passion for the outdoors, we'd love to hear from you. Get in touch at becky@sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk.

And don't forget—Sunday 22nd June is our Longrigg Celebration and Public Engagement Day.

Come along to explore the woodland, find out what's happening, and help shape the future of this remarkable community asset.

Scottish Land Fund
Ionmhas Fearainn na h-Alba

Delivered by
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND

HIE
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Ionaid na Gàidhealach n'nan Eilean

Funded by



Scottish Government
Riaghailtas na h-Alba
gov.scot





Sunart Rainforest Project - A Greener Future for our Community.

We're excited to share news of a major step forward in protecting and restoring one of our area's greatest natural treasures – the Atlantic rainforest of Sunart.

Starting in April 2025, running through to March 2026, the Sunart Community Company is delivering the Sunart Rainforest Project—a year-long initiative focused on reviving our native temperate rainforest.

Funded by the Nature Restoration Fund (NatureScot), with match funding from The Woodland Trust, FLS, and Scottish Government RPID, the project will lay the foundations for long-term woodland recovery and resilience.

Spanning the area between Loch Sunart and Loch Shiel, the project brings together seventeen landowners committed to a shared vision of ecological restoration.

Activities will include developing a collaborative deer management plan, surveying biodiversity and invasive species, and exploring opportunities for woodland expansion.

We're delighted to announce that a local project coordinator, Euan Palmer, has now been appointed to lead engagement with landowners and the wider community, and to help coordinate the delivery of the project on the ground.

They'll also support the re-establishment of a local woodland owners' group and help shape woodland management plans across the region.

This project is about much more than ecology—it's about empowering our community, building local knowledge, and reconnecting people with the rainforest landscape we're lucky to call home.

We'll be sharing updates as things progress, and we hope you'll get involved in this exciting journey to protect and restore the Sunart rainforest for generations to come.

Together, these two woodland initiatives (Longrigg Community Woodland and Sunart Rainforest Project) represent a major investment in Sunart's natural heritage and our shared future.

Sunart Paths Update: A Year of Progress on the Ground

Over the past year, the Sunart Footpath Volunteers have quietly transformed our local path network—one gravel-filled wheelbarrow at a time! With monthly work parties, often in partnership with the Lochaber Countryside Rangers, this committed team has improved access, safety, and enjoyment across some of our most loved routes.

Most recently, in March, volunteers returned to The Back Road in Strontian, laying fresh gravel and ensuring it's in top condition as we head into the busy summer season. It was a sunny afternoon filled with good spirits and great teamwork—exactly what our volunteer sessions are all about.

That session was particularly special, as it also marked 12 months of the new path volunteering partnership with High Life Highland Ranger Service. To celebrate, the group gathered at Café Sunart for a well-deserved lunch in the sunshine. A huge thank you to everyone who has joined in over the past 12 months—whether for a single session or every month—your time and energy has made a massive difference.

Back in February, another fantastic session saw the group complete work on the Ardnastaing Beach path, following earlier improvements. The path is now far more accessible, and we were delighted to spot Tilly the dog and her owner as the first users of the upgraded route! Another big win for local access is the long-awaited repair of the Fairies Walk bridge over the River Strontian, a collaboration between Sunart Community Company and Sunart Community Council.

Closed for several years due to structural issues, the bridge has now been made safe and reopened, thanks to coordinated efforts behind the scenes. It's a key link in the local walking network and a huge asset for residents and visitors alike.

From everyday paths to vital infrastructure, it's been a year of meaningful progress—powered by people who care.





Oakwood Update

Oakwood Tourism & Crafts in Strontian has reopened for the 2025 season - welcoming both familiar faces and new visitors to our community-owned hub.

Managed by Karyn Simpkinson and supported by a dedicated team of volunteers, Oakwood remains a vibrant showcase for local artisans and a friendly first stop for those exploring Sunart. Over the winter, our talented crafters have been busy creating new stock—from handcrafted jewellery and bespoke textiles to unique gifts and keepsakes. There's something fresh each time you visit.

Our volunteers do more than run the shop—they share local knowledge, point visitors to walking routes and hidden gems, and help make each visit that bit more memorable. The season has already welcomed a steady stream of guests enjoying the spring sunshine, many praising the warm welcome and personal touch that Oakwood offers.

Looking ahead, Oakwood continues to support the local economy and celebrate community spirit. By showcasing local makers and offering a hub for information and connection, it reflects all that makes Sunart a great place to live, work and visit. Whether you're a local popping in or a visitor passing through, we'd love to see you. Stop by, enjoy a cuppa, and discover the creativity and stories Oakwood proudly represents.



Exciting Developments for Sunart's Heritage

Dualchas - Sunart Heritage Group is looking forward to another busy season, with plans for a stall at this year's Sunart & District Agricultural Show and new exhibitions in the works.

After years of consultation, surveys and negotiation, the long-awaited community buyout of Strontian Parish Church is nearly complete. Once finalised, this much-loved building will become a local heritage centre—a space to protect and share our history for generations to come.

Meanwhile, group members—especially Mary and Joan—continue their work recording memorial stones in the churchyard and old Drimnatorran cemetery. Their efforts have helped people around the world trace family history and connect with Sunart roots. We also continue to receive requests for help with local history research and are steadily growing our collection of photographs, documents and artefacts. These, along with the Sunart Archives, will form part of future displays in the new centre.

It's an exciting time for Sunart's heritage...watch this space!

Craft Hub & Men's Shed News

Since launching the Craft Hub project last year, we've been working hard behind the scenes to transform the space into a vibrant community hub. While the portacabin was in worse repair than we had anticipated, significant progress has been made, which would not have been possible without additional support from the Sunart Community Benefit Fund

Two internal walls have been removed to create larger, open work areas. We've replaced the rotten flooring and insulation, and resealed parts of the roof to improve the building's condition. Work continues to ensure the space will be welcoming and functional for everyone.



New vinyl flooring has been installed, while our fantastic volunteers have been fitting out the interior. One end of the Craft Hub will become a dedicated workshop, complete with workbenches, storage cupboards, and tools — we will begin the inventory shortly. At the other end, a large communal table and small kitchen area will offer a relaxed, flexible space for craftwork and gatherings. We also have plans to improve the outdoor space, including the addition of raised beds and seating areas—ideal for future projects and community use.

In other exciting news, SCC has recently acquired the old forestry shed in Polloch. A local committee is already making plans to renovate this site into a community workshop and storage facility for local residents. We'll be sharing more updates on that project with you soon!

If you're interested in using the Strontian Craft Hub or would like to volunteer and help us prepare for the opening, please contact Annie at crafthub@sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk

Sunart Socials - A Year of Memorable Events

We're delighted to share that our Christmas Auction was a resounding success, raising nearly £2,000 for community initiatives! A heartfelt thank you goes to everyone who bid on prizes, helped spread the word, or simply cheered us on. Your support made a real difference.

We're especially grateful to our dedicated volunteers who worked tirelessly both behind the scenes and on the night itself. Huge thanks to our brilliant auctioneer Neil Mellis and our ever-reliable prize distributor Robert Dunn. And of course, an enormous thank you to the generous local businesses who donated such fantastic prizes – we simply couldn't have done it without you!

Our Hogmanay Village Party was another joyful highlight, and we'd like to thank all who joined us to see-in the New Year. The atmosphere was buzzing, and it was wonderful to see so many members of the community come together in celebration. Special appreciation goes to Robert and Justine Dunn, Morag Jones, Neil and Jane Mellis, and the talented Adam Morris for their contributions on the night. And of course to SCC Directors Laura Cameron-McGregor and Rowena Henderson for their fantastic work planning behind the scenes! Together, we raised over £1,000 for future community projects!

Looking ahead, the Sunart Community Company team has some excited events planned:

- Solstice Splash (21 June): Celebrate the summer solstice with kayak tasters, wild swimming, boat trips and a BBQ.
- Longrigg Woodland Celebration (22 June): Discover more about the Longrigg Woodland project through activities and displays.
- SAVE THE DATE: AGM - (25th October) followed by family ceilidh (Sealladh band) to celebrate 20 years of SCC. Licenced bar.

These events reflect our commitment to building a connected, vibrant Sunart. We can't wait to welcome you along!



JOIN US - IT'S FREE!

Application for Membership (Free!) Scan the QR Code to complete online, or tear this page off and hand in to Oakwood Centre, Strontian.

I wish to apply for membership of the Sunart Community Company and can confirm that I support their aims and objectives as outlined in the Memorandum & Articles of Association (available on our website).

Please enrol me in the following membership category, (please tick one):

☐ **Full Membership** I am resident within the Sunart catchment area and I am aged 16 years or over. I am entitled to vote at local government elections in the area.

☐ **Junior Membership** I am resident within the Sunart catchment area and I am aged between 12 and 15 years.

☐ **Associate Membership** I am not resident within the Sunart catchment area. I am aged 16 years or over.

I understand that membership is FREE and in the event of the Company being wound up, my liability will be limited to a maximum of £1 (one pound).

Full Name:.....

Address :

Postcode:..... Date of Birth (Junior Members only)

Email address:.....

(We will not share your email with anyone else but will occasionally update you on community initiatives and the work of the Company.)

Tel No (optional):..... Date:

Signature:

Please return your completed application to the address below. Full members are entitled to elect and be elected as Directors. All members will receive regular updates and are welcome to comment on, support and get involved in our activities.



A snap from our Show Day Burger Stall, where we presented the late John Tyldsley with his "Grill-Master silver spatula" in recognition of his many years of BBQ service. John is sadly missed, having dedicated so much time to the SCC as Chair, offering wise counsel, and the inspiration for the Sunart Men's Shed, which will re-open this year