

BRENDAN O'HARA MP

Constituency Newsletter February 2018

WESTMINSTER GIVEN A TASTE OF ARGYLL & BUTE

LAST MONTH I invited thirteen local producers to the House of Commons to showcase some of the finest food and drink in Scotland. Co-hosted with the Duchess of



Argyll, we welcomed Loch Fyne Oysters, the Scottish Salmon Company, Bute Brewery, Mull of Kintyre Cheese, the Puffer Restaurant

Lussa Gin, Gigha Halibut, Inverawe Smokehouse, Ritchie's of Rothesay, and Argyll Hill Lamb. I didn't want just another tasting event at the House of Commons so I was delighted that we



persuaded a number of UK based food buyers to come along to meet the producers. Their feedback was fantastic and they all felt that it was

worth making the near 1000 mile round trip. Many contacts were made and I hope some orders get on their books. My thanks to Food from Argyll and Highland and Islands Enterprise for their support

CRAGGY ISLAND RESCUE CASH

THE GOOD FOLK of the Oban Mountain Rescue team are £5000 better off this month thanks to the Craggy Island Triathlon. The now legendary triathlon, which is held every October was so successful that having covered all their costs, they were still able to make such a significant donation to this hugely worthwhile cause. Back in October I blew the starting horn to begin the event and I can confirm that thus far, I have resisted all attempts to become a competitor in 2018!



LOCAL ACTIVISTS CAMPAIGN TO HALT RBS CLOSURE PLANS

ON SATURDAY I was joined by local SNP activists in Inveraray as part of the party's national Day of Action against

the Royal Bank of Scotland's decision to close 62 local branches, including those in



Rothesay and Inveraray. Earlier in the month, I cautiously welcomed the news that the RBS has given a short-term reprieve to the branch at Inveraray, but promised to continue with the campaign to halt ALL the proposed branch closures across Argyll & Bute. Saturday's Day of Action gathered more signatures for our parliamentary petition; a petition that will be presented on the floor of the House of Commons in the next couple



of weeks, alongside dozens more from across Scotland. The importance of the issue locally was emphasised with

both a BBC Alba news crew and the editor of the Argyllshire Advertiser coming along on to cover the event.

The SNP have opposed this RBS closure issue since day one and I think our fight is being recognised in the communities who will be affected, so I am extremely grateful to all of the local SNP members who turned out on Saturday to help with this campaign.

COMMITTEE REFUSES TO “RUBBER STAMP” POLITICAL APPOINTEE

IT IS VERY rare that a House of Commons Select Committee



refuses to “rubber stamp” a candidate for a government appointed job. But that’s exactly what the DCMS Select Committee did last month when it refused to sanction the appointment of



Baroness Stowell as the new Chair of the Charity Commission for England and Wales. Baroness Stowell, until recently was the

Conservative Leader of the Lords and while she may be the government’s preferred candidate the committee told the government, without experience and vision, that was not enough to secure a top job like this. You can view the proceedings here: <https://goo.gl/8nc9Ye>

“GAME-CHANGING” RENEWABLE PROJECT HEADING EAST

A TIDAL-ENERGY platform, with “game-changing” technology built by Scottish company Sustainable Marine Energy, has been going through its final test underneath the Connel Bridge for the last few months



before being taken to the Philippines to be put to work commercially. Before it left Argyll & Bute on its long journey to Asia, I visited the platform with Christoph Harwood

of Sustainable Marine Energy, not just to see how the platform works but also to better understand why, despite the abundance of fast flowing water in Argyll & Bute, this sort of technology wasn’t being utilised and better supported by the UK government to help get its cost down to a commercially viable level.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

AT A TIME when we see the rise of bigotry and prejudice against minority communities and religious groups, both in the UK and across the world, the Holocaust Memorial Day is a poignant reminder to us all that we have an obligation to



challenge this whenever and wherever we see it. On behalf of the people of Argyll and Bute I again signed the Holocaust Educational Trust’s Book of Commitment to honour those who were murdered during the Holocaust and pledged to do all I can to stop it ever happening again.

FINALLY MEETING BOTH BILLY AND YVONNE

FAR TOO OFTEN in the last couple of years I have had to meet up with Yvonne MacHugh in London, either to join her in delivering a petition to Downing Street or to attend a meeting with the Foreign Office or accompany her to one of the many public meetings campaigning for the release

of her fiancé Billy Irving from jail in India. So I was absolutely delighted a few weeks ago when



she called to say that both she and Billy would be in London for a Human Rights meeting about protecting British nationals being held abroad. After so long it was great to finally meet Billy in person and to share a drink with them. Billy and Yvonne are finally getting married later this month and I’m sure everyone will join me in wishing them all the very best for the future.

SUPPORTING OUR BOOMING AQUACULTURE BUSINESSES

THE IMPORTANCE of the Aquaculture sector to our local economy is undeniable with fishing, fish farming, marine engineering and marine science all making an enormous contribution to Argyll & Bute, bringing jobs, investment and



very often, world-wide kudos for the quality of what we produce. In the wake of

my China Business Summit and my Taste of Argyll & Bute event, I have taken the opportunity to visit as many of these important local businesses as I can. Last month I visited the world-wide fish farm equipment manufacturer Fusion Marine at their Dunstaffnage HQ as well

as the Scottish Salmon Company at Cairndow, who invited me to see



their new filleting and processing plant in action. Both companies have ambitious future growth plans and both are equally committed to achieving that growth here in Argyll & Bute. I



have often said that we desperately need this type of investment in order to create the long-term employment that will encourage more families to stay and put down roots in this constituency.

OBAN'S UNIVERSITY BID

THE SO-CALLED Beast From The East that battered most of the UK, apart from western Argyll it seems, prevented me from appearing in person at the launch event of *Oban As A University Town*. I was due to speak at the event in The Corran Halls to

add my voice to the many others who wish to see Oban develop as a centre of educational excellence. The massive snow dump over



London prevented me from flying up but thanks to modern technology and the help of the SNP's first-class digital media team here at Westminster, I



managed to record my speech and have it relayed to the packed Corran Hall audience...

who by all accounts were enjoying a balmy spring afternoon! We are extremely fortunate given that we already have the University of Highlands and Islands, SAMS, Ballet West all currently offering degree-level education and with almost 800 students, Oban is already regarded by many as being a

university town. It is hoped that this project will attract even more students and



investment into the educational infrastructure already there.

It is a hugely important piece of the jigsaw to encourage as many of our young people to stay in the town and I have pledged to support this campaign in any way I can. You can view my speech here:

<http://www.brendanoharamp.scot/2018/03/15/brendan-supports-oban-university-proposal/>

PLANES, TRAINS ETC...

JUST A FEW years ago, the idea of me driving from Helensburgh to Oban, to fly to Coll, to spend a day on the island, to then fly back to Oban, to then drive to Glasgow airport in order to catch the last flight to London would have been a bit far-fetched. Now, being the MP for Argyll & Bute however, it's just what you do. And so it was a couple of weeks ago I went on a 17-hour planes, trains and automobiles adventure that took me to



one of the most beautiful places on the planet, to the bustling streets of London's East End. And I loved every minute of it. I hadn't been to Coll for a wee while and I



really wanted to go so with a light-business Monday, I took the opportunity to hold a constituency surgery as well as visit some of my favourite places on this beautiful island, including the wonderful RecyColl Charity Shop...where I found and purchased a brand new SNP Golf umbrella.

DCMS TAKING ON THE TECH-GIANTS

DURING recess, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee visited New York and



Washington to grill the big Tech companies as part of our 'fake news' investigation. Senior

executives from Google, Facebook and Twitter faced 5 hours of questioning on everything from Russian interference in the US elections and the Brexit referendum, their use of algorithms and their social responsibility towards protecting children online.

CATCHING UP WITH THE LOCAL COUNCIL MEMBERS

WHILE I WAS hosting the Chinese business conference in Oban last year, I on the off chance and carrying a plate of sandwiches, popped into say hello to the local council members at their monthly Members'



Day who were meeting in an adjacent room.

We had a brief but very interesting discussion on what was happening in and around the Oban, Lorn and Isles and what issues were likely to emerge in the coming months. We all agreed that it was a useful exercise and that a longer discussion would be extremely helpful. As a result, last month I was delighted to accept an invitation to attend a meeting of the Area Committee where we had a long discussion about a whole range of local issues. So useful was it that I'll be writing to all the other Area Committees offering to have the same kind of meeting with them too ... but sadly the sandwiches.

TALKING POWER-GRAB TO THE FELLOWS AT CAMBRIDGE

THE ONLY upside of being stuck in London because of the snow storm was that I was able to take up a



long-standing offer to speak to the Fellows and PhD students at Cambridge University. I had been invited to speak at Robinson College by Baroness Smith of Newnham and I took as my topic,

Scotland, Brexit and The Westminster Power-Grab.

It was a fascinating evening of a lecture, a lengthy question and answer



Robinson College
University of Cambridge

session, followed by dinner and a discussion in the college. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and although it's often difficult to gauge how these things are received, I suppose when a politics professor at Cambridge asks for your notes and a copy of your speech, it's not a bad sign.