



Morvern Community Development Company

Quarterly Newsletter

February 2024



MCDC Latest News

Live Life Morvern shortlisted for Scottish Planning Innovation Awards

We are thrilled to announce that our local community plan, Live Life Morvern, has been shortlisted for the Scottish Planning Innovation Awards. Live Life Morvern was a joint initiative, led by Morvern Community Council in partnership with Morvern Community Development Company, and Morvern Community Trust. Their steering group worked with Planning Aid Scotland, and the whole community of Morvern to deliver the plan. Congratulations go to the steering group who worked tirelessly alongside Planning Aid Scotland to bring this plan into reality. Joe FitzPatrick, the Minister of Local Government Empowerment and Planning said "This extremely strong short-list represents the pinnacle of innovative planning achievement in 2023." The other shortlisted projects include: Aberdeen City Council's City Centre and Beach Masterplan, Fife Council's Creating Pathways into Planning project, West Dunbartonshire Council's Rediscovering the Antonine Wall project and Aberdeen City Council's Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap.



A Note from the Editor



This edition was originally due to be published in December but was held until after the completion of the AGM in January. We apologise for delay in publishing and also for the longer than usual length. This is to reflect the busy period we have recently had and we hope that you all enjoy reading about it. The next edition will be published in March/April to launch the summer season. Sitting amidst the cold now, it is lovely to think of the warm weather we may be enjoying whilst we are reading the next one!

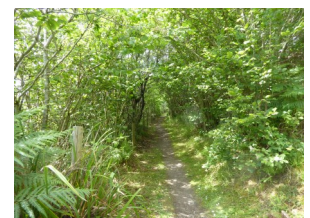
Thanks to Retiring Directors

At the recent AGM four of our hardworking directors stood down from the Board. MCDC is very grateful to each of them for the significant amount of time and energy they gave to the community during their time as director. Kenny McLaughlin has been a director since 2022 and was also involved with MCTC where he served as the Chair and was instrumental in running the Harbour. Jennie Robertson has been a director since 2018 when she joined the existing hub and single-bed housing sub-group and worked on the project through to its completion in 2021. She then worked on the beginning of the family homes project until its current stage within the planning process. Jennie continues to work on the family housing project as a volunteer to continue to provide her insights along with Sarah Jones, who also served as a MCDC director in the past. Amy Stammers has been a director since 2019 and served as Vice-Chair. She was also part of the housing sub-group developing the hub and housing alongside Jennie. She worked to develop digital platforms for the car and the bikes and was also a director of MorVolts alongside Nick. Nick Tordoff has been a director since 2018 and was an integral part of the development and commissioning of Barr Hydro and MorVolts. He worked on the project from the early stressful stages of planning and securing the funding to enable the development to go ahead right through to managing the current operations that are starting to generate income for the community. Nick remains a director of MorVolts and is now the Chair. We're sure the wider community will join us in our sincere thanks to each of these board members for giving so much of their time and expertise for the significant benefit of the community. Thank you very much to you all.



The Hazelwoods

At the February public board meeting, the Hazelwoods were discussed. Shiel Buses are no longer able to park the bus in the village hall carpark and so MCDC have agreed to let them use the Hazelwood carpark instead. As part of this decision, MCDC will be organising a tidy up of the car parking area. It was also raised at the meeting that the climate group is keen to organise a volunteer party to thin out the woods a little. Anyone willing and able to help with that, please get in touch. The Hazelwoods are a fantastic community asset that MCDC is very proud of and is very glad that they provide so much enjoyment to all those who live in and visit the area.



New MCDC Board Directors

At the recent AGM, five new directors were welcomed to the Board. Sam Firth, Keith Laidlaw, Kevin Laurie and Angus Robertson were elected as new board members and Clara Montgomery joined as a new Morvern Community Council representative. Kevin has since resigned as a director due to the pressures of his work load and therefore not being able to dedicate as much voluntary time to MCDC as he would have liked to. We thank him very much for his useful input during his time. Below is an introduction to each of the remaining new directors in their own words. If you would like to contact any of the directors, please email admin@morvern.org and your message will be passed on.



Sam Firth

I'm originally from Walthamstow in East London. I've worked in the film industry since 1996 and have my own production company. I produced, directed and edited a feature film which is now on Amazon Prime as well as numerous short films.

I've also delivered over 13 community film projects to schools and community groups across the Highlands funded by the BFI, Community Land Scotland, HIE, and the Highland Council amongst others so I'm used to raising and managing publicly funded projects with a wide range of budgets and scope. Some people might remember the film I did with the Lochaline children about freshwater pearl mussels.

For the last seven years I've taught the MA Filmmaking at the University of the West of Scotland and was programme leader for the BA Filmmaking and Screenwriting for a while. I also help look after Rhemore Croft with my husband Alasdair which is a site of scientific interest and has some of the best examples of Hazelwood rainforests in the UK.

Before moving to Morvern, I lived in Knoydart for seven years and spent a lot of time on Eigg. I still have a strong connection to these communities. So, I have a good understanding of the long term benefits community land ownership can bring to a place, particularly for local young people. I was chair of the Knoydart Trading company while there as well as being involved in lots of other community projects like making films with community archives.

I met Jake Willis while I lived in Knoydart and so got roped into being involved in Morvern Community Woodlands as soon as I arrived which I have been involved with on and off ever since. I love doing community projects because you get to work with people from all different backgrounds and walks of life which is also what I loved about growing up in east London.

Keith Laidlaw

I had put myself forward to serve on MCDC to assist in areas where I think I can add value to the board and therefore the community I live in. After an interesting AGM with an even more interesting deadlock, I suggested I step down from the election to allow the process to move forward and was then appointed until the next AGM to serve.

MCDC really does punch above its weight class. With approx. £8 million of assets with only 2 full time employees and 2 part time. The rest of the work provided by the volunteers we have in the community. *(Continued on page 4)*



Keith Laidlaw continued - My impression and part of the personal push for me to apply to serve was my perception that although MCDC really is an asset to the community there was a lack of communication with and from the community. A lack of governance within the group companies and stakeholders and a need to improve the transparency of all of our activities. With the new board now in place as from 6th January the new Chair suggested I take on the role of Treasurer for MCDC which is in effect a group CFO role. I have shared this interesting development with some of my old colleagues from my corporate days... The general reaction was one of mirth, rolling on the floor laughing and general ribaldry. However with my numerate background in running large IT groups of people and managing small to large budgets I do feel I can serve in this position and support Angus the chair, the MCDC board and the associated companies of Morvolts and MCTC .

Clara Montgomery

I am currently secretary of the Morvern Community Council and am on the MCDC board as a community council representative. I was born and raised in Morvern and have lived here most of my life. I moved away to study Zoology when I was 18 but continued to come back to Morvern to work in my holidays, building fences and removing rhododendron. I took to city living like a fish out of water, so those summers were my respite.



After receiving my BSc degree, I moved to Thailand to work for the Karen Wildlife Conservation Initiative. This is a small organisation working with the Karen ethnic group in Eastern Myanmar to help them to protect their remote and highly biodiverse forests and local livelihoods. I worked for this organisation for 6 years, in a particularly politically sensitive environment.

I have always known that I thrive being out and about on hills and in jungles but during this time in Thailand I also garnered a deep appreciation for working with small communities. Working with the communities living in the nature I had originally gone to protect was what made the job so special. This is a people fighting for the preservation of their traditions and their sustainable land management practises, which by default keep people connected to nature. Since then, I am deeply interested in how people are part of the landscape as opposed to simply an ecological disaster on it, and how a balance can be struck for everyone to thrive.

During the covid-years I was living in Sweden, undertaking my Masters in Conservation Biology, making the most of pre-Brexit free top-quality education and adapting my work experiences gained in conservation to a northern European environment. Ultimately it has always been my own home that I wanted to protect and work in, so having completed my MSc in June 2023 I moved straight back to Morvern. Currently I work for the John Muir Trust as the Wild Places Data Officer, learning about Scottish land management policies and gathering evidence data linked to these, with everything from historical ecological data to UK-wide opinion polls.

At 28 years old, I am primarily interested in simply learning how a community development company works, and using my community council role to get engaged in understanding what the wider community wants to see happen locally. Personally, I am interested in how to keep Morvern a vibrant place for young people to live in (I don't say 'make', because I already think Morvern is vibrant). I am keen to think about working with developing and maintaining what we have already got, bringing the best to Morvern while also changing as little as possible. Having lived in several really wonderful places, I have only grown to appreciate Morvern more. It is home as it is and has always been.

Angus Robertson

I have been actively involved in community things in Morvern ever since I arrived here in the spring of 1984. I worked as manager of Ardtornish Estate until my retirement in 2018, when Jennie and I moved from Garden Cottage, Ardtornish, to our own home at Sruthan. I have engaged with all manner of community activities and initiatives throughout all of that time, so that makes 40 years of volunteering and still counting.



Highlights have included: renovation of the old pier in Lochaline with LOPA (Lochaline Old Pier Association), a long early stint as Sec of MCC and another shorter one recently, the setting up of MCDC and construction of the community petrol pumps. Then the growth of MCDC with the help of project officers and including projects such as: the community hazelwoods in Lochaline, setting up the allotments, building and operating Lochaline Harbour, Miners Court housing and the Hub and playing my part in the birth of the Live Life Morvern plan. The low points have probably been all those other exciting ideas and projects that failed or haven't yet seen the light of day.

My biggest project and the one I am most proud of, so far, has undoubtedly been the Barr Hydro, not least because Hydro development has been such a large part of my working life and Barr is up there amongst the best of the lot. Maybe ten years in the early development stage followed by around five in actual financing and development and now, three years to date of actual and successful operation. The consequences and potential of this scheme for the development of the communities aspirations for Morvern has yet to be realised or even properly understood, but the potential makes me very excited. I am very pleased to have recently been re-elected onto the board of MCDC, and honoured that the board has elected me to take the Chair, for the time being at least. My own hopes are that MCDC can work together with other key groups and all the amazing, skilled and dedicated members of our community to realise the most out of the opportunity we have to deliver as much of Live Life Morvern and other such good things as we can over the coming years.

New Morvern.org website



The new morvern.org website was launched in December with thanks to George Riddle for his excellent drone work providing the stunning header highlighting the beautiful peninsula we are all lucky enough to live in. The website is still a work in progress and we are adding or amending the pages as things come up. If you spot anything that is out of place or missing, please get in touch with admin@morvern.org and we will fix it as soon as we are able to. The Barr Hydro Reports which were missing from the new site have now been uploaded and are all there to view for anyone who is interested in following the progress of the hydro scheme.

MCDC Newsletter and Social Media

We are glad that the newsletter has proved popular in the community. If there are any articles you have particularly enjoyed and would like to see more of, please let us know by emailing admin@morvern.org and we will do our best to include more similar content in future editions and through our social media accounts.



We are now on Instagram so for those of you with Instagram accounts, please give us a follow on [morvern_mcdc](https://www.instagram.com/morvern_mcdc). We also have a new Facebook account so for those of you with Facebook, please follow Morvern Community Development Company.

We are aware that some of the contact information we have for our members may be out of date so if you think you should be receiving the email and are not, please get in touch to let us know your preferred contact information. Similarly, if you know of anyone who is interested in receiving the newsletter by email and isn't, please encourage them to get in touch and we can add them to the mailing list. You do not need to be a member to receive the newsletter.

Hub Electricity

As was discussed at the February public meeting, MCDC is currently in the process of downgrading the meter and capacity at the Hub to allow us to make significant on-going savings with our electricity bills. We are also grateful to Miles Welsh who has kindly volunteered to use his expertise to assist MCDC with an attempt to recover funds from past Hub electricity connection and supply contracts which we all feel have been unfair and to advise on improvements that might be made in the future.



Oil Club

In the past, Morvern Community Development Company set up an oil club following community desire for one. However, it has not been running for some years. The purpose of the oil club was to be able to buy oil in bulk and aim to reduce the cost to the end user. Following recent interest in a Morvern oil club, MCDC is looking into whether there is sufficient interest locally to consider setting up an oil club again. MCDC does not have the resources to dedicate to running the club once it is set up so would also be looking for anyone in the community who was willing to volunteer to take on the day to day management of the club. Could anyone who would be interested in participating in an oil club or in volunteering to manage an oil club please get in touch with us via admin@morvern.org.

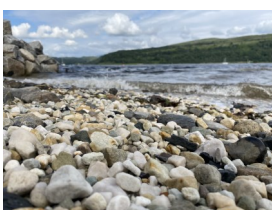


Project Updates

A day in the life of your harbour master. What does he do?

The Harbour Master's role is varied and is integral to the local community of Morvern and Lochaline.

The summer months especially bring in visiting boats and tourists to our area which have an impact on all of the businesses in the village. With the summer brings an early start and I usually am down at the Marina for 8am to welcome new boats in and to ensure that any that have come in later in the evening have everything they need and of course have paid their fees! Every boat is different, and we are lucky here at Lochaline that we can accommodate small day boats right up to 20 meters! This means that the type of assistance they need varies. Our Marina facilities include toilets with showers and a laundry room, which during the summer months is on a constant cycle during the day. As well as my "normal" tasks for the day I keep the Marina and surrounding area safe and clean and tidy with working facilities and the odd visit to the snack bar to refuel, both on food and any local gossip!



As well as being responsible for the Marina, I also look after the community fuel pumps and make sure that we have enough fuel and that they are in safe working order.

I act as a tour guide to our local walks and wildlife info, and direct visitors to the shop and food facilities in the area. I facilitate The Morvern Community Car Hire which is available for visitors to join as well as locals and they use it to see further afield. I also work with other organisations such as CAOLAS on the Lochaline Native Oyster Project and this involves local groups such as the Primary school visiting the Marina.

Over the winter months, as things get quieter and only the hardy sailors visit, it gives me the opportunity to do some maintenance around the Marina and look ahead for the new season to see what else we could do to capture more boats to come in to visit our beautiful village. This year things are a little different on the maintenance side after the fire and destruction of the storage shed, which has kept me busy working with the insurance companies and planning boards to get that replaced. The weather for the last couple of months has provided some challenges but fingers crossed as Spring arrives it brings with it a great 2024 season.

Heath Gairns—Harbour Master

Project Updates

MorVolts



The autumn has provided some interesting moments for MorVolts and the Barr Hydro scheme but over all things are running fine.

Following the wet summer and early autumn, October and November were very dry. December was then a very wet month followed by January which despite the snow and the current wet and windy spell has been pretty dry. The big events have been the pigging (cleaning the inside) of the pipes in September which, we are pleased to report, restored the flow through the pipes very effectively. Predicting how often this needs to happen is very much an art rather than a science, at least until you get to know your own hydro scheme. After this first pigging it looks likely that we will have to carry out this work at least once every two years. We are now building up a better picture and the sense is that we will need to do this a bit more often than we hoped but well within overall expectations.

The biggest event that the heavy rains in November caused us was a turbine shut down as a consequence of voltage fluctuations on the grid in wider Lochaber. Restarting required a visit to the turbine. Unfortunately, this coincided with the collapse of the forestry road from the side of Loch Arienas. You may have seen the pictures of the lower landslide on Facebook. Unfortunately, there was another slip further up. We had alternative access to get a vehicle around the lower slip but not the higher one. Fortunately, there was enough of the road left for Douglas to get around on a bike, so we were able to get the scheme running again rather than wait for the road to be repaired. Even so, it meant we lost a couple of days of production when the scheme should have been running at full power.

On the financial front the picture is that the exceptionally good prices we negotiated for this year and next are now kicking in. This is counter-balanced by the drier than expected year to date (don't forget how dry the spring was), by some additional costs and by the additional cost of some of our debt due to the increase in bank interest rates. MorVolts annual accounts are published on Morvern.org but if any wants more information on these, please ask.

Words by MorVolts Board. Photos by Douglas Taylor

If you would like to donate, volunteer or become a member of MDCD please email Isla at admin@morvern.org. All that is required to become a member is to fill in a short form providing your address (to show that you are a resident of Morvern) and to pay a £1 lifetime membership fee - which is non refundable in the, hopefully unlikely, event that MDCD goes bust!