

Dunollie Museum, Castle & Grounds Update

Seasonal Opening & Winter Activities

With our first full seasonal opening since the COVID-19 pandemic almost at a close, we are pleased to have welcomed 13,958 visitors to the site so far.

These visitors are some of the first to access the first floor of Dunollie Castle since the 2019 Conservation works made it possible, as well as also being able to take advantage of the introduction of a new annual pass system. At the same cost of a day ticket, the visitor is able to visit as many times as they like over a year from the date of purchase, and for those eligible Dunollie is able to claim 25% gift aid from HMRC.

Dunollie will close to the public on the 28 October, with a series of events planned over the winter months aimed at our local families and community. This will include Halloween, Dunollie Makes Christmas, as well as garden walks at the start of 2023, to take in our magnificent display of snowdrops, daffodils, and bluebells.

Funding & Development Projects

At the end of November 2021, the National Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Trust £114,854 from a year-long project focused on Gardens, Links and Digital (GLAD). The project, which will cost £120,597 in total, began in March 2022. Supported through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Dunollie GLAD has concentrated on adding to and upgrading Dunollie's Historic Woodland Grounds, providing engaging activities for the local community, as well as family days out and activities for a younger age group and identifying and capitalising on further digital opportunities, such as QR codes. Through the grant, we were pleased to welcome two Heritage Garden Leaders under a Job share, as well as a Digital Content Assistant in February 2022. These posts will be in place for the duration of the project.

We have completed Phase I of a project to install a handrail along the Dunollie Castle Path to assist visitors in climbing the steep path. Lining the path are series of logs tethered to a wire mesh, which will provide a safety barrier and the base for a handrail constructed from wrought iron posts and rope donated by CalMac. The handrail installation will form Phase II and we hope to have this element in place for visitors by the start of the 2023 season. The initial costs of this project of £4,725 were funded through the Clan MacDougall Society of North America, and the project ensures that no excavation of the scheduled monument takes place during the installation of the handrail.

Social Impact

Through the work of a Heritage Engagement Officer initially funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we have been very pleased to be able to restart some of the Dunollie Links Programme.

New Routes Health and Wellbeing Group provides participants referred to us from the Oban & Lorn Mental Health Team with a sense of purpose, the chance to meet new friends, and the chance to enjoy the benefits of spending time outdoors in nature. We've found this has been particularly useful in the wake of lockdown periods where isolation and anxiety seriously impacted people's mental health.

Current participants are enjoying spending time working in the garden and have been invited to help with the GLAD National Lottery Heritage Fund Project, creating decorative woodwork for a new handrail to improve castle accessibility.

From April – September 2022, we have funded 130 hours of supported volunteering for this group.

The **Threads and Yarns Group** is one of Dunollie Links' skilled volunteer teams and provides a space for local people to embrace their love of crafting, explore new techniques, and create products that are then sold in the Dunollie Draper's Shop. There are currently up to 5 attendees per session, which take place on a weekly basis.

We offer **Gaelic language sessions** online in partnership with the Furan Gaelic Centre, to both locals and participants further afield, supporting the local Gaelic community and celebrating Dunollie's importance in the story of Gaelic in Scotland. Both the online and onsite groups now welcome up to 15 people per session, and sessions take place at least once a month.

Through the GLAD project, we have been able to welcome 2 **Oban High School Pathway Students** back to Dunollie to assist with projects in the Grounds. We are also in discussion with the High School about further opportunities for pupils next year. We have also been pleased to welcome 7 classes from **local primary schools** and approximately 140 pupils to take part in education sessions at Dunollie.

The Dunollie Links Programme this financial year has been supported through many individual donors, as well as the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are now in the process of investigating grant funds for 2023 onwards.