

COMMUNITY NEWS

SPRING 2026

INTRODUCTION

In numerology 2026 is a 1 Year, the beginning of a brand-new nine-year cycle; 1 Years are all about initiation, courage and self-choosing, with an energetic theme. With the upcoming FIFA World Cup, Glasgow's Commonwealth Games and a Blue Moon on May 31 we're entering a period of excitement, opportunity and activity for all.

At Mount Stuart our spring flowers - bluebells, azaleas and rhododendrons – have burst into life reflecting the season, reminding us of the power of nature and the optimism of springtime.



This year Mount Stuart is honoured to have been invited to curate an art exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia, in collaboration with Scotland + Venice and Bugarin + Castle, and we look forward to bringing the exhibition back to Bute for 2027. Scotland + Venice's Professional Development Programme features paid opportunities for early-career visual arts professionals to spend time at La Biennale di Venezia, and two artists based on the Isle of Bute have been selected as Exhibition Associates in partnership with The Bute Family Trust.

Closer to home 2026 will be a year to further collaborate with our stakeholders and the wider Bute community, and continue to be accessible good neighbours. We plan to host a Drop-In community event in early summer, its details will be shared very soon.

New Trustees



New trustees have been appointed to Mount Stuart's Board of Trustees following an open call for Trustee applicants, each bringing their experience and skill set to an area of our operations.

Lee 'Bil' Bilson

Bil is a heritage professional working at the intersection of craft, architecture and cultural history. His work spans strategic leadership, technical conservation practice, and the stewardship of historic buildings and cultural assets - with a clear focus on the conservation of historic buildings and stained glass.

Isobel Cockburn

Isobel studied History of Art at Oxford University, during which time she undertook an internship at Mount Stuart. Having worked on restoration projects and managing capital projects at the V&A and V&A East Storehouse Isobel is now Assistant Project Manager, London Barbican Renewal, working on the estate's refurbishment.

Luke Syson

Luke has held curatorial positions at the British Museum, V&A, the National Gallery and was Chair of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, where he led refurbishment of the British Galleries. Luke is currently Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Raoul Curtis-Machin

Raoul is Executive Director of Gardens at Kew Gardens following previous roles within the horticulture and heritage sectors, including being Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. He co-authored the best-selling Garden Plants for Scotland and advises on our Policies and Gardens, Governance and Sustainability.

Mount Stuart's full list of Trustees can be found at www.mountstuart.com/meet-the-team.

Achavoulaig Tree Planting



Last month our Woodlands team completed Phase 1 of a project at Achavoulaig on the north west side of the island, planting 36,000 native broadleaf trees, with Phase 2 planned for October this year. A further 1000 trees have been planted across Mount Stuart's policies and other plantations.

The 40 acre site, which was previously unsuitable for agricultural use, will be opened up for public access once the trees have become established.

Community Engagement

As it's 3 years since we published our Community Engagement Plan, later this year we'll be reviewing its practice and laying out the plan for the next three years.

Meanwhile we continue to hold our monthly access meetings where we're available to discuss any topic of interest with members of our community, near and far.

We encourage members of the public to contact fiona@mountstuart.com to make an appointment for the first Wednesday of each month and we'll have the appropriate staff member meet with you.



Mushroom Tree Planting



In March, P5 children from St Andrew's Primary School joined Professor Paul Thomas, Lyndsay McFarlane of Mycorrhizal Systems Ltd, and Mount Stuart Trust's Garden Team Lead Lisa McFarlane to plant specially inoculated mushroom trees in Mount Stuart's Kitchen Garden as part of one of the world's first trials of this kind.

This hands-on planting at Mount Stuart gives young visitors and the wider community the opportunity to engage with sustainable forestry, discover the fascinating world of fungi, and see cutting-edge research in action.

Red Squirrels on Bute

Mount Stuart's red squirrel population is rising and will feature on an upcoming 'Bute special' episode of BBC Scotland's Landward programme on May 7.

Our little red neighbours are regularly spotted in several areas within the grounds and seem to be thriving, even being given pet names by residents whilst maintaining a polite distance!



Deer Management

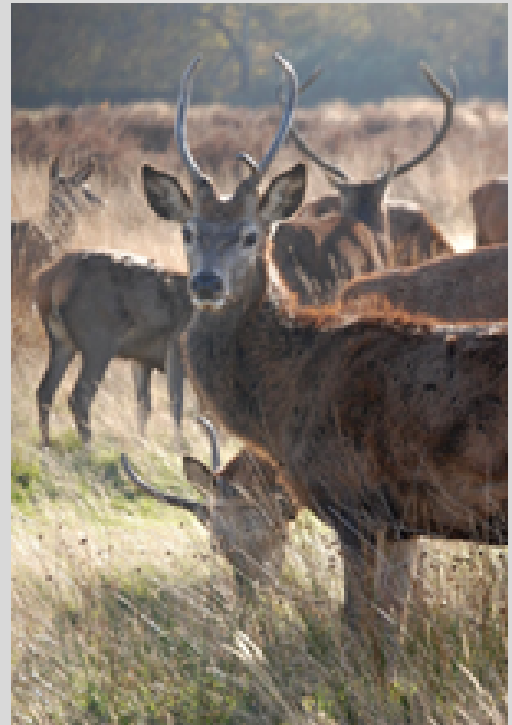
Whilst protected under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996, without natural predators deer populations have increased.

Their control is part of the wider management of our countryside and they're managed for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways.

The Code of Practice on Deer Management sets out how to deliver sustainable deer management.

Although not statutory, it applies to all who manage wild deer, or who own or manage land where wild deer roam.

Mount Stuart works closely with NatureScot to ensure deer management methods used on Bute meet these requirements. This month we're using drone filming to facilitate non-invasive deer counting.

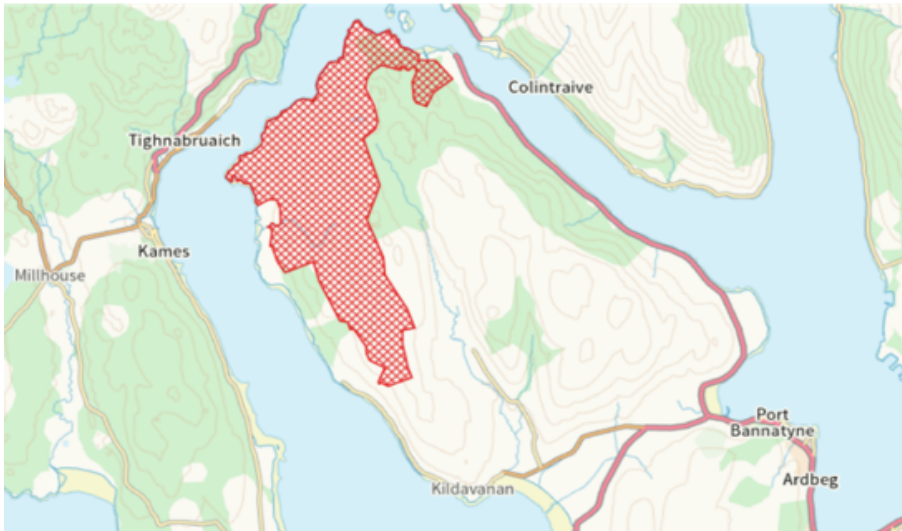


Appletree Nursery Polytunnel

As part of Appletree Nursery's Field to Fork campaign, Mount Stuart's Gardens team, including volunteer Gordon, assisted in the construction of a polytunnel at their McKinley Street site, ready to grow some fruit and veg and hopefully some aspiring gardeners too.



North End of Bute SSSI Visit



Recently Mount Stuart hosted a visit by NatureScot – formerly Scottish Natural Heritage – to one of the island’s Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), based at the north west end of Bute. SSSIs are areas of land and water NatureScot considers to best represent our natural heritage – its diversity of plants, animals and habitats, rocks and landforms, or a combination of such natural features.

The North End of Bute site is notable for providing an upland habitat for a breeding bird collective and an upland oak woodland.

Emerging Artist Residency

Each year Mount Stuart offers an Emerging Artist Residency to give an opportunity to an artist at the start of their career to focus on socially engaged practice on Bute, supported by Creative Scotland.

For 2025/2026 the chosen artist is Amy Strzoda, a graduate of Glasgow School of Art in Sculpture and Environmental Art.

Amy’s project focused on making short films with pupils of St Andrew’s Primary School and North Bute Primary School using their storylines and characters, making props and costumes and will be screened for the schools in June. Amy also led a small singing group at Rothesay Academy, working on three Scottish songs for performance at their Burn’s Night event.

Amy told us coming to a new place as an artist can be challenging, but she learnt a lot of great things about life on Bute from all the children and adults she met during the project and whilst exploring the island.



Image by Craig Stewart

Education Strategy

As a charitable trust with education as one of our key strategic aims, we engage to review, develop and deliver a wide reaching learning program across the Trust. This enables us to deliver education and learning programs for local nurseries, schools and community groups, as well as visiting students and researchers.

In 2026 we're working on refreshing our Education Strategy to increase engagement by continuing to expand the ways in which general visitors learn while at Mount Stuart by delivering a successful annual programmes of talks, tours and events with specific themes, piloting holiday breaks with embedded learning activities, continuing to create opportunities for volunteering and small group skills-based learning and ensuring all staff continue to have support to pursue CPD opportunities.

This June we're delighted to host Developing Young Workforce's annual conference; DYW connects local employers with education so young people develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the world of work.



Green Tourism Update

Recent examples of our practices are:-

- Installation of 5 new EV charger points in the car park
- Change of suppliers for laundry, handwash and cleaning chemicals
- Increased use of Zoom & MS Teams for remote meetings to reduce travel



Communication



Awareness



Community



Health & Wellbeing



Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity

PLACES GOALS



Destination



Experiences



Travel



Food & Drink



Biodiversity

PLANET GOALS



We hope you enjoyed this update.

If you have any feedback on the newsletter or if there is anything you would like to see included, please reach out to Fiona Hardie, Business & Community Liaison Officer Mount Stuart Trust, contactus@mountstuart.com.