

# LANARK GAZETTE

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## Secondary kids need to belt up

By Ross Thomson  
 olgazette@jrsotland.co.uk

**B**US companies will have to install seatbelts for all school pupils in Clydesdale – thanks to South Lanarkshire Council.

The council's education resources committee agreed on Tuesday that any contract it renews with bus companies to transport pupils to and from school will stipulate that the firm provides a seatbelt for every pupil.

While it is a legal requirement to have a seatbelt for every primary school pupil, it is not currently a requirement for secondary school pupils.

Education resources chairwoman Mary Smith said: "The committee has approved a proposal to change mainstream secondary school bus contracts to include a requirement for seatbelts."

"This will be implemented as individual bus contracts are being renewed."

"In terms of mainstream school transport, the council currently operates a transport policy of single deck vehicles and seatbelts for all primary school contracts."

"While the current transport policy for secondary school vehicles meets legislative requirements it does not require contractors to provide buses with seatbelts."

"The council has agreed to move ahead on this in the interests of pupil



Safety first...for council

safety and will include the specification for safety belts in future contracts for secondary school transport. We hope that parents will welcome this."

Concerns were based on accidents, minor shunts and near misses in various parts of South Lanarkshire over recent years.

In Clydesdale there has been a long running campaign to secure seatbelts for all pupils that goes back to the mid 1990s.

In 1994 there was an accident, near Biggar, in which Carnwath teenagers Francis Scorgie (15) and 13-year-old Tony Cousins were killed.

And in March last year 17-year-old Natasha Paton died after a bus carrying Lanark Grammar pupils crashed, near Wiston, in wintry conditions.

Earlier this year pupils at Carlisle High, living in Law, were also involved in a minor accident.

At present legislation only requires seat belts on

coaches but not on double decker buses.

The council renews approximately one third of its transport contracts every year on a rolling basis.

Contracts can be between one and four years depending on the best value criteria set by the local authority.

During the 2010/11 school session there were 134 contracts across the county including taxis, people carriers, mini buses, coaches and double decker buses – a total of 30 contracts did not have seatbelts.

Clydesdale West councillor David Shearer has campaigned for seatbelts on all school buses for a number of years.

He said: "I am very happy that the council is finally going to bring this in."

"Childrens safety should be the number one priority and this means giving all of them a seatbelt."

"It has taken a bit of time, which has not been ideal."

"Ideally I wanted it brought in last March but bureaucracy got in the way. However, I am pleased that from now on contracts will not be given unless the bus companies can provide seatbelts for all pupils."

"The minor accident involving pupils in Law earlier this year could have been a lot worse."

"No-one wants to see any fatalities on the roads going to and from school."

It was estimated by the education resources committee that the cost of the proposal would be around £100,000 – which is undoubtedly a small price to pay for pupils safety.



**WARM WELCOME:** For Jacqueline Vicart and Marie-Paule Canthard as they were given a helping hand to find their way around from the Gazette guest interpreter Edith Ryan.

## C'est bon to see you again!

TWO French ladies said 'Allo 'Allo to Lanark again this week – having spent the majority of WWII here as evacuees.

Jacqueline Vicart and Marie-Paule Cantard (nee Sergeant) spent the war years at the Smyllum orphanage having left Boulogne aboard HMS Venemous.

It has been almost 70 years since the pair have been to Lanark but on a damp and dreich morning they made their way from their hotel in Edinburgh.

With French not being one of the Gazette staffs' strong points at school, we were grateful for the company of our interpreter for the day, Edith Ryan, as we greeted their belated return.

Childhood pals Jacqueline and Marie-Paule were greeted at the train station and were pleased to

be back in a town which means so much to them.

Jacqueline said: "It is overwhelming to be back here. We left here almost 70 years ago."

"I was very young when I came here and even though it is a long time ago it holds a lot of happy memories for me."

"The whole atmosphere of the town is making me very excited."

The ladies also brought with them a picture of their time at Smyllum as well as a copy of the Gazette article which featured them three weeks ago.

Jacqueline and Marie-Paule stopped off for the day in Lanark having spent a couple of days in Edinburgh.

They were part of a party of 27 French schoolgirl waifs and nuns who were caring for them

who had to leave the Boulogne orphanage where they were staying to escape the impending Nazi war machine.

And despite the rationing and no doubt colder weather they experienced in Lanark compared to their new home in the North of France both ladies were delighted to be back in the Royal Burgh.

Marie-Paule added: "I am very happy to be here. I have wanted to come back to see Smyllum for many years."

"It was a part of me growing up and I can still remember some parts of Lanark well."

The ladies trip only came to light after the work of independent publisher Bill Forster, whose late father William was on HMS Venemous when the school girls were evacuated.



Happy to be back in Burgh... friends Jacqueline and Marie

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## Joy as town's children get thirty grand of play money

CHRISTMAS Day came three months early for the children of Lanark this week – a huge boost for plans to give them a dream playpark.

And playing the part of Santa Claus was South Lanarkshire Council which approved a £30,000 donation from the Lanark Common Good Fund to the town's Playparks Action Group and its scheme to transform the Loch Park into a play paradise.

With an earlier donation of £50,000 from a windfarm spin-off fund, this means that the Group is now more than halfway towards its £150,000 target to create a range of new fun and leisure facilities at the lochside which will include a Wallace-themed play-fort plus new cycle and walking paths.

It was the Gazette's happy duty to break the news of the council decision on Tuesday to Action Group founder member Isobel Watson.

Her reaction was instant and heartfelt: "What tremendous news! I am absolutely delighted to hear this and so will the rest of the group when I phone round them to tell them about this."

"This really is a big step forward and I am absolutely sure that we'll now get the remaining funding commitments to get this project underway next year."

She went on to say that fundraising for the new facilities wasn't all going to come in big grants and the group was "extremely grateful and touched by every gesture of support, big and small".

Isobel said: "I must say a big thank you to Sarah Colquhoun of Lanark who has just given us a £150 donation, half of which she raised by asking friends not to buy her a birthday present but to make a charitable donation instead. I understand the other half has gone to another very worthy national cause."

"We're also sticking to our programme of running our own fundraising events and we'll be staging a couple in the next few months so watch this space!"

The grant was approved at Tuesday's meeting of South Lanarkshire Council's



Great news...thousands have been secured for the Loch Park play plan

finance committee at which details were given of the current state of the Lanark Common Good Fund, details that have concerned some members of Lanark Community Council.

The figures show that the Fund – the property of the people of Lanark but administered by the council – stands at £145,000. Of that, £57,000 has already been earmarked for "expected commitments", leaving a balance of £88,000 from which the £30,000 playparks grant will be drawn.

The Gazette was given access to community council correspondence which alarmed some members who said that the relatively low reserves of the Fund had not been made clear to them a few months ago when they supported the playparks application.

They also claimed that the council had not informed them far enough in advance of Tuesday's decision to give them a chance to discuss it, notification being given only after the August meeting with the next Community Council meeting not scheduled until next Monday – too late for them to discuss the matter further.

A council spokesman said that it had properly informed the community council of the matter and members had sent a letter of support for the Action

Group's application for Common Good funding as far back as May.

Community Council chairman Frank Gunning told the Gazette that he, at least, did not regret the original decision to support the group's application.

He said: "Yes, it does leave the Fund with only about £58,000 in it which is relatively quite low and I hope South Lanarkshire Council recognises that this is a one-off donation and they don't continually use the Fund as a substitute for spending its own money on Lanark's play and other facilities."

"The Common Good Fund should be getting a major boost to top it up anyway with the money South Lanarkshire Council will pay into it for use of the fund-owned land at Springbank Farm as the new cemetery."

Frank admitted making this comment half tongue-in-cheek as the community council has already expressed concern that SLC's own valuer will decide a "fair market price" for the land rather than seek an independent valuation.

When the SLC gave final approval for the Springbank site to be used for the new cemetery last week, no mention was made of what price it will eventually pay for it, a figure avidly awaited by the community council.

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