

The Shetland Times

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR — HIGHLAND MEDIA AWARDS

ISSUE No. 14

FRIDAY, 9th APRIL, 1999

PRICE 55P

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Julie coming home and in 'good spirits'

THE YOUNG Lerwick girl who made headlines last week was expected home as we went to press yesterday.

Julie Nicolson had continued to make good progress after being flown to Yorkhill Hospital in Glasgow with meningococcal septicaemia. She spoke to her granny Margaret Nicolson on the phone on Wednesday afternoon with the news that she was coming home.

"She was in good spirits," Mrs Nicolson said. "She had been

walking unaided for the first time since being taken ill."

Mrs Nicolson said her granddaughter was still getting tired easily. "It will be a long time before she gets up her strength, but she's thankfully out of all danger now."

The other person who contracted the disease, John Sharp of Tingwall, is also making a good recovery. He was released from the Gilbert Bain Hospital on Sunday afternoon but is expected to be off work for at least another two weeks.

Sullom deal on workers' pay

BP AMOCO workers at the Sullom Voe terminal have agreed a pay deal which will deliver a 3.25 per cent increase this year followed by one per cent of the increased sum next year.

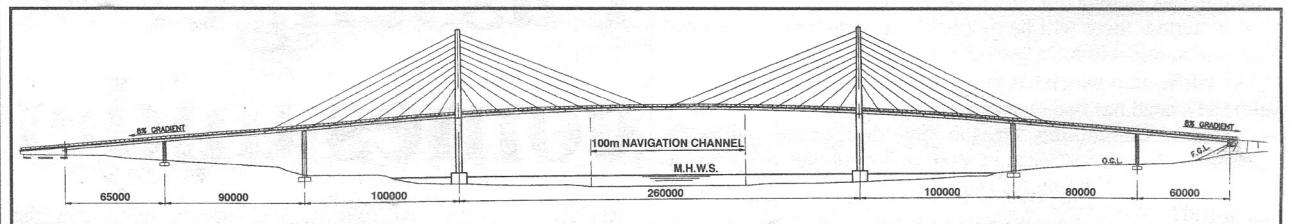
The maintenance and operations branches of the T&GWU, representing around 200 men, approved the deal at a meeting on Wednesday evening.

Operations branch secretary Bob Mitchell said the talks had been concluded "reasonably

quickly" to allow the men to focus on the imminent threat of around 40 redundancies.

The terminal management two weeks ago announced that 40 BP Amoco staff and around 30 contract workers were to be made redundant later this year, following a period of consultation. As yet the workforce has not been informed who is to go, nor which sections of the terminal will be affected.

Bressay bridge on the horizon



An elevation view of a cable stayed bridge, similar in design to the Kessock Bridge at Inverness. This is one of the preferred options for the Bressay crossing if the site chosen requires the length of the main span to be longer than 180 metres.

By Alan Crawford

COUNCILLORS have voted unanimously to press ahead with plans for a fixed link to Bressay, following completion of an initial technical feasibility study by specialist engineers.

Consultant engineers Halcrow Crouch of Glasgow delivered a presentation to the council roads and transport committee on Wednesday in which they detailed the variety of bridges and tunnels they had considered.

Two types of tunnels, a Eurotunnel-style bored shaft, and an immersed tube tunnel comprising sections built on land and slotted onto the seabed, were regarded as suitable for the crossing. But councillors balked at the price tag of between £34 million and £46 million, well over three times the cost of a bridge. They effectively ruled out a tunnel

as an option also since there were increased risks of fire and accidents.

Both high level bridges and low level swing bridges were considered. Three types of high level bridge were discussed: box girder bridges, similar in appearance to the Skye Bridge; through truss bridges, which comprise a carriageway enclosed with girders; and cable stayed bridges, similar to the Kessock Bridge at Inverness. The council had briefed Halcrow Crouch to consider bridges with an "airdraft" — the vertical clearance between high water level and the bridge — of 40 metres. This would enable vessels such as the 7700 tonne *Maersk Euro Quatero* to pass below. Following meetings with Lerwick Harbour Trust, the consultants had also been instructed to provide a clear width of at least 150 metres between the main spans of any bridge, so that ships entering from

the north channel could swing sharply to berth at Gremista Quay.

The consultants looked at three points to cross the Sound: at the Greenhead, Point of Scatland and North Ness. The Greenhead site would mean a minimum distance from the quay and the Bressay shoreline of around 280 metres, while at Point of Scatland the distance between high water marks on each side of the Sound is some 385m. The North Ness crossing would be the longest, with a width between high water marks of about 610m; but it could make use of rock outcrops at the Loofa Baa and Holm of Cruerster.

Halcrow Crouch were not asked to make recommendations to the council, but it soon became apparent during the presentation that the maintenance costs of a swing bridge would be prohibitive. The time a swing bridge would be unavailable to traffic was also significant, and

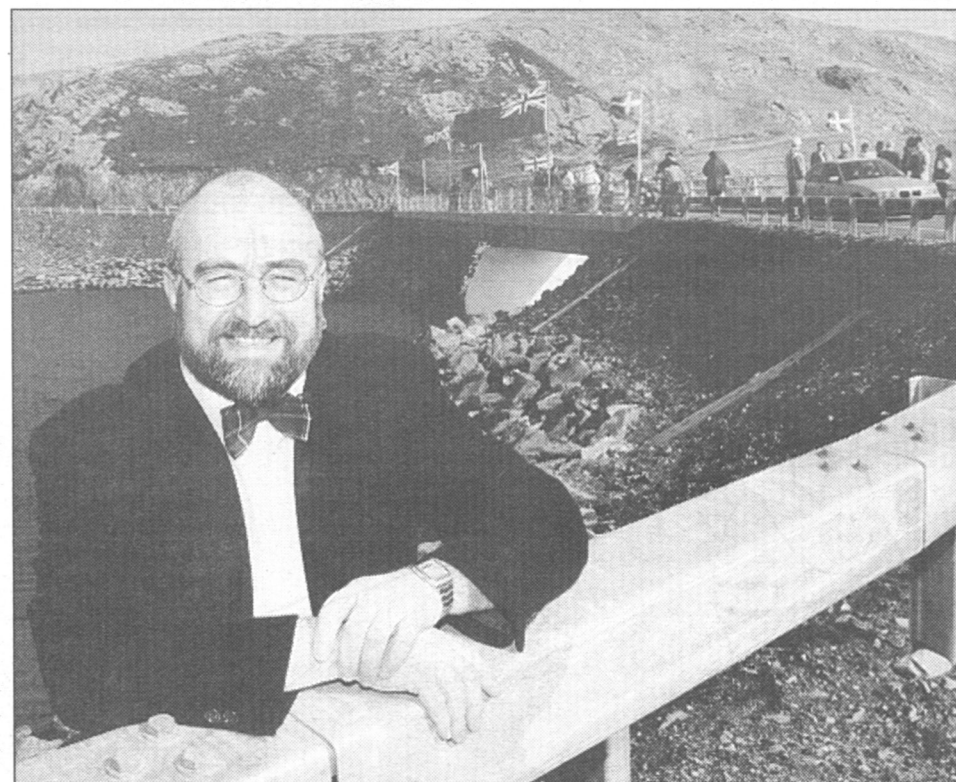
councillors agreed to discard the option.

Construction costs for the other bridge types ranged from £11 million to £18.5 million. In addition, the design cost was in the region of £495,000. Interestingly, the consultants said the costs involved were relatively low to be considered for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) — the cause of so much controversy over the Skye Bridge tolls.

Councillors questioned the Met Office weather statistics used by Halcrow Crouch to calculate the total time that high winds would cause a bridge to be closed to traffic. According to the consultants, a Force nine wind would close the bridge for the equivalent of just 21 hours in a typical year. It would be closed to high sided vehicles for 34 days in a year and a wind warning would be in place for 95 days a year. A variable

(Continued on page 2)

Muckle smiles on the brig



Councillor Drew Ratter beside the new brig at Muckle Roe, after performing the opening ceremony on Saturday. Report and more pictures on page 10.

Photo: Keith Morrison

Oil lab workforce to be cut in half

PLANS to cut half the workforce at Sullom Voe Terminal's laboratory have been confirmed.

Up to nine jobs could be lost in six months if contractors Inchcape Testing Services (UK) Ltd (ITS) go ahead and transfer the offshore samples part of its operation to Aberdeen.

The news comes hard on the heels of BP Amoco's announcement two weeks ago that they were to axe up to 70 posts at the terminal during the third quarter of this year.

ITS have just been awarded the contract for provision of laboratory services for a period of five years with options for extension.

Sullom Voe Terminal spokesman Andy Bradley confirmed that the further job cuts were not part of the announcement made at the end of March.

"The situation regarding the transfer of some jobs to the UK mainland is one directly related to the transfer of offshore analysis

work which was previously performed at the terminal and will now be conducted in Aberdeen," Mr Bradley said.

Spokesman for ITS Raymond Perry said it was a logical step to move the testing of offshore samples to Aberdeen. "At the moment the samples are brought first to Aberdeen and then taken to the laboratory in Shetland," he said.

"We may transfer up to nine people but it may be less than that," Mr Perry said. "At this point in time the whole concept is very much a proposal."

Mr Perry was keen to point out that no-one would necessarily lose their jobs if the move went ahead. "We have talked to staff to advise them of the possible outcome," he said. "The best option would be for people to transfer to Aberdeen."

He added that they were not at the point yet of selecting individual candidates but that

everyone had been made aware of the situation.

The Shetland Times spoke to a number of the laboratory staff this week. Understandably none of them wished to be identified but they were unanimous in their condemnation of the proposed shift.

One worker said: "We're all worried and morale is about as low as it can get."

"We have been asked about relocating, but the majority of staff are Shetlanders or have been here a long time. No-one wishes to move of their own accord. Shetland is where we want to be."

"This is another blow to Shetland's economy. The most galling part of it is they [ITC] kept saying we were providing a very good service. We only heard a couple of weeks ago the company had been re-awarded the contracted for another five years."

(Continued on page 2)

The Shetland Times

"The Old Rock"

Lerwick, Friday, 9th April, 1999

Campaigning heats up

WHILE some may think it has gone on too long already, campaigning got under way in earnest this week, and on 6th May Shetlanders will be able to choose from four local candidates who is to represent them in the new Scottish Parliament. We look forward to bringing you news of their activities in the coming weeks before this historic moment.

Scottish Lib Dem leader Jim Wallace this week called for rational debate on the issues during the campaign. It would be a pity, he said, if those who shouted loudest were heard above those who talked common sense. Would that it would be so, but a little shouting has to be expected. Party politics is, after all, the stuff of emotions.

We do not expect to see it here, but already there are some party spokesmen who are concentrating more on rubbishing the ideas of the opposition than explaining their own policies. We hope that those who take such a negative attitude will reap their just reward on polling day.

Every little helps

A HEARTBREAKING stream of human misery has been seen on our television screens flooding out of Kosovo as the Nato bombing continues unabated and the ethnic cleansing takes on a new lease of life.

So far the bombing has not resolved anything, quite the reverse. And while a majority of people, if the opinion polls are anything to go by, approve of the bombing campaign, there are still a substantial number of people who do not. We do not think that this action has been properly thought through, that all the consequences were taken into account. And if Nato cannot finish what it started, there will be more suffering rather than less and bloody dictators will have been given more power.

The vilification which has been heaped upon SNP leader Alex Salmond's head has been very revealing. The implication that he is virtually committing treason by disagreeing with the government is a sign of weakness on the part of that government. Is freedom of expression no longer allowed in Labour's brave new world?

But whether or not people agree with the military action which is being taken, there are positive steps which can be taken to alleviate some of the anguish which we can see so clearly. In Shetland the aid trust has had a big response to its plan for another mission to Kosovo, and we are sure that people will also give generously to the national appeal for cash. It does not solve the problem, but every little helps.

Tide Tables

High water times for Lerwick and Scalloway for the week commencing Friday, 9th April. All times are G.M.T. For British Summer Time add one hour.

LERWICK			SCALLOWAY		
Friday	03.50	17.04	Friday	02.00	15.14
Saturday	05.07	18.30	Saturday	03.17	16.40
Sunday	06.37	19.39	Sunday	04.47	17.49
Monday	07.44	20.32	Monday	05.54	18.42
Tuesday	08.38	21.18	Tuesday	06.48	19.28
Wednesday	09.25	22.01	Wednesday	07.35	20.11
Thursday	10.09	22.42	Thursday	08.19	20.52

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WEEKLY FORECAST

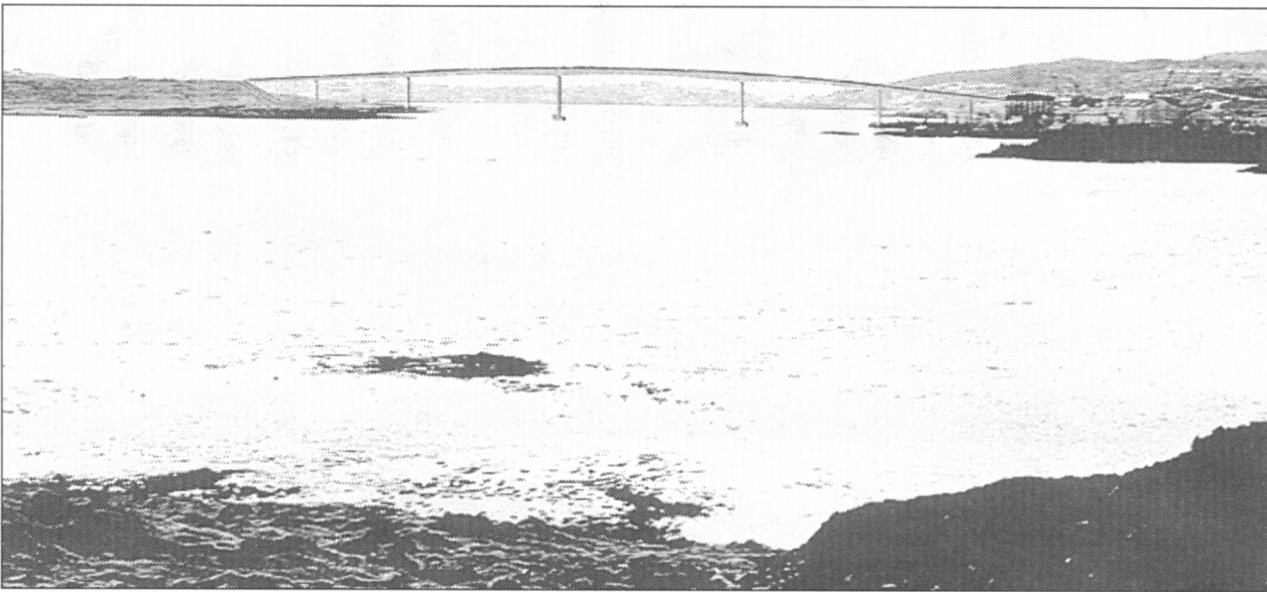
From the Met. Office, Sella Ness

General situation: A waving cold front will cross Shetland from the north-west but will return as a warm front tonight before eventually clearing south tomorrow morning. A weak ridge of high pressure will build over the area on Sunday.

Forecast for today: Cloudy with hill and coastal fog. Outbreaks of rain will become more persistent and heavier during the morning. It will become drier and brighter for a time through the afternoon and evening but some rain, drizzle and mist will return tonight. The strong south-westerly wind will veer westerly and moderate this afternoon. Maximum temperature today: 10°C (50°F). Minimum temperature tonight 7°C (45°F)

Outlook for tomorrow and the weekend: A fresh north-westerly wind and showers on Saturday. Showers will die out on Sunday as winds back south-westerly.

Narrowing the options



A mock-up of one of the Bressay bridge options put to councillors by consultant engineers Halcrow Crouch at Wednesday's presentation in Lerwick town hall. The bridge, from Point of Scotland, is an example of a box girder bridge.

(Continued from front page)

message system would be used to inform drivers of wind warnings.

Following the presentation, councillor Brian Gregson said he fully supported the Bressay link. But he added: "Only a few weeks ago it was the express desire of the council that serious consideration be given in the very near future to the possibility of a fixed link between Yell and Unst. Some people will be of the

opinion that the Bressay bridge should go on hold."

Committee chairman Magnus Flaws urged a narrowing of the options to get rid of the suggestions deemed less practicable. "It's important we do away with what we don't need," he said, adding that the council had always to bear in mind that Lerwick was a working harbour.

The council will now carry out a study of the

financial, social and economic considerations of a fixed bridge to Bressay from Point of Scotland.

Walls and Sandness councillor Jim Gear, a Foulfa man, indicated he wanted to speak. "No, you can't have one," he was told.

Halcrow Crouch representatives, meanwhile, were due to hold a public meeting in Bressay last night to discuss the various options.

Passenger service charge comes under scrutiny

BRITISH Airways and subsidiary British Regional Airlines may be in breach of Trade Description and consumer legislation as a result of its new practice of displaying the passenger service charge (PSC) separately on tickets.

In reply to a letter sent to the consumer affairs minister by Scottish Liberal Democrat transport spokesman Tavish Scott, parliamentary under secretary of state Glenda Jackson said she was "concerned about the practice of displaying the PSC on tickets as if it were a tax" and that the department of the environment, transport and the regions was working with the DTI to check whether the airlines breached Trade Description legislation.

Ms Jackson added that the Office of Fair Trading had written to BA and was considering whether the addition of PSC breached the unfair consumer contracts legislation. Crucially, however, in the same letter she appeared to rule out any scrutiny of the overall cost of flying to the mainland.

The furore over levying a separate passenger service charge was sparked in February when it was announced that from 1st April British Airways and its franchise operators BRA and Loganair would no longer include the charge in the ticket price. The separate charge, which relates to landing charges at airports, would bring them into line with airlines operating in other EU countries.

At the time it was feared ticket prices would rise by up to 10 per cent. But while the fully flexible fare has risen to £268.60, including PSC and tax, the current lowest fare, a World Offer, is a more modest £108.60. The cheaper fare is available until the end of June and requires passengers to stay over a Saturday night.

In her letter to Mr Scott, Glenda Jackson continued: "With regard to the costs of flying from Shetland ... the market for air

travel within the UK is liberalised, and airlines are free to enter and exit routes as they choose and to offer the prices they wish. This is in line with our policy of keeping regulatory burdens on airlines to a minimum. We try to leave as many commercial decisions as possible to the airlines themselves, including decisions on the level of fares, subject to safeguards designed to prevent an airline abusing its dominant position by overcharging passengers. However, the CAA's [Civil Aviation Authority's] experience is that UK domestic routes are difficult to operate profitably, which makes their intervention in domestic fares unlikely."

Tavish Scott welcomed the Government's "acceptance that airlines may be pulling a fast one on ticket prices" but expressed concern over the minister's failure to act on the cost of flights to and from Shetland.

He went on: "The Ministerial letter says that Government wants a free market in air traffic, but this is exactly the point. Shetland doesn't have competition — we have a monopoly with fares to match. I will be pursuing the Government over this point."

The continued controversy over

the price of air fares comes just one week after British Regional Air Lines Group announced record profits in its first year of trading on the London Stock Exchange. BRA posted pre-tax profits of £5.165 million, up by 33.9 per cent, for the year ended 31 December 1998. The group refused to disclose whether the Shetland route was profitable or otherwise.

Drunk and incapable

A REPORT will be sent to the procurator fiscal following an arrest near Lerwick Police Station last Thursday. A man was found to be drunk and incapable at noon.

Car found damaged

A CAR was damaged while it was parked in St Magnus Street, Lerwick, between 8.30pm on Saturday and 2.30pm on Sunday.

Anyone with any information is requested to contact police at Lerwick.

Dismay at relocation

(Continued from front page)

There was no mention of this then."

Someone else said ITC had probably been under pressure to make the decision. "We're not necessarily blaming our own company."

Another member of staff said relocation was just not realistic. If they moved to Aberdeen they would lose the shift and island allowances.

"The money is not particularly high. It's nothing like what BP pays. About £20,000 is as much as anyone here earns. If we agree to move to Aberdeen that could go down to around £12,000 or £13,000.

"Some of us have been here a long time. They've made a lot of money out of us in the past. I don't think anyone would be willing to move. They would rather look for something else in Shetland."

A fourth worker said it was a downright insult. Some of them had been there since the terminal opened. While BP staff would be walking away with huge payoffs their company historically never paid more than the legal minimum.

"They've just not levelled with us. They tell the press it's only a proposal but we've been told the work is definitely going to Aberdeen.

"It's also a kind of double whammy as some of us have partners who work for BP and they're worried as well."

SMIRK'S VIEW



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In Brief

Cannabis seized

A 45-year-old man was in court yesterday after police seized suspected cannabis with an estimated value of £18,000.

Innes Irvine, from Lerwick, appeared from custody in private to face charges under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

He made no plea or declaration, was committed for further examination and released on bail.

Officers stopped a vehicle for an “intelligence led search” outside Bell’s Brae Primary School at around 5pm on Wednesday and made the seizure.

Shetland’s chief police inspector Angus MacInnes said: “We will continue to target those involved in the illegal drugs trade here in Shetland.

“We would again like to thank the public for providing us with information. The more information we receive the more pro-active we can be in the fight against drugs, which are a scourge on society.”

Dead man named

Police have confirmed that a man who was found dead in a house in Lerwick on Tuesday last week was Neil Williams, 44, who lived in the town.

A report has been submitted to the procurator fiscal. The police said their inquiries into the death are ongoing but there was no information at this time to indicate any suspicious circumstances.

Trial date set

A new trial date has been set at Lerwick Sheriff Court for a man facing charges of stealing aluminum and copper from Lerwick’s Co-op and 60 North Recycling on 2nd and 30th June last year.

Nigel Timberlake, 50, of Queens Lane, Lerwick, will go to trial on 17th May.

Sentence deferred

A man who admitted stealing two bottles of wine from Tesco on 27th January had sentence deferred for reports when he appeared at Lerwick Sheriff Court on Wednesday.

Steven Irvine, 26, of Sandveien, Lerwick, will appear in court again on 21st March. He had been on bail and this was continued.

Latest Althing on coalition

The coalition government in Westminster comes under the scrutiny of Shetland’s high school pupils in the next Althing debate.

“The coalition government is bad for Britain” is the motion under debate and all four speakers are pupils at the Brae High School. A number of other pupils are expected in the audience which should ensure a lively evening.

Speaking for the motion will be Drew Manson and Rachel Smith and opposing them will be Ben Raikes and Shaun Alderman.

The annual meeting of the Althing will be held the same night. The debate is in the Tingwall School starting at 7.30pm on Saturday 3rd March.

Parliamentarians join call for an inquiry



The aborted plan to build a bridge to Bressay has now cost the council a shade over £7 million. The full breakdown is as follows:

Compensation payment to Lerwick Port Authority:	£4,825,727
Costs related to the project:	£2,247,935.19,
which is made up of:	
• works contract costs:	£489,795.05
• other operating costs:	£50,658.72
• travel & subsistence:	£43,622.07
• external/professional fees:	£798,294.50
• external legal fees:	£409,410.51
• SIC staff time:	£456,154.34

TOTAL: £7,073,662.19

A mock-up of how the Bressay Bridge would have looked.

Several isles politicians are demanding an inquiry into how the SIC came to spend over £7 million on the Bressay bridge project without anything to show for it.

Shetland’s parliamentarians Tavish Scott and Alistair Carmichael have joined opposition councillors Jonathan Wills and Gary Robinson in calling for the public to be given a full explanation.

During a behind closed doors meeting on Monday when the £4.8 million compensation to Lerwick Port Authority was agreed, members voted 9-4 against asking the audit and standards committee to hold an inquiry.

In a letter to this newspaper (see *Readers’ Views*), Dr Wills raised a host of questions about the legal advice relating to the decision to seek a court order halting the LPA’s dredging of the north mouth of Lerwick Harbour.

He wants to know where the advice came from, whether it pointed out the potential pitfalls of seeking the interim interdict, and whether it was convener Sandy Cluness or

chief executive Morgan Goodlad who decided to exercise the emergency powers.

Dr Wills wrote: “Only a proper inquiry can tell us whether this was indeed an entirely excusable mistake by innocents who all deserved medals, promotions and pensions, or a foolish gamble, recklessly pursued by ill-advised political incompetents and amounting to misconduct in a public office.”

Mr Carmichael, who attempted to broker peace talks between the LPA and SIC five years ago, told *The Shetland Times* he felt it might be best for an inquiry to be carried out by the next council following May’s elections.

“This is a quite remarkable sum of money to have spent on a dispute between two public bodies in Shetland,” Mr Carmichael said. “Local people will rightly want answers as to how this happened. It may, however, be that this will have to be dealt with by the new council after May.”

Mr Scott said it would be preferable for the SIC to examine the matter in-house, rather

than facing the prospect of having its affairs raked over by Audit Scotland once again. He believes the Shetland people deserve to be told how things had gone “so badly wrong”.

“What I’m worried about is the external auditors planning to crawl all over this,” he said. “It is surely in the SIC’s interests to ensure that the explanation as to how the council spent so many millions of pounds and achieved nothing is understood.”

Mr Robinson added his voice to calls for inquiry, saying: “It’s all very well for the council to announce that no-one was to blame for what happened but as a maths teacher wouldn’t accept an answer without the workings being shown, the community won’t accept this conclusion without an inquiry.

“Lessons must be learned, but for that to happen there needs to be clarity as to what went wrong in the first place.”

Mr Robinson added that credit was due to LPA chief executive Sandra Laurenson and council adviser Gordon Greenhill for “thrashing out the agreement and putting the

two organisations back on good terms”, because the outcome could have been “much worse” for the SIC.

But councillor Allan Wishart – a key figure in the dispute dating back to his time at the LPA’s helm – dismissed any need for an investigation. He feels the public are “completely fed up with inquiries and reports” and want the council to get on with its normal day-to-day business.

“To keep on inquiring on events years ago is not going to provide any help or guidance for the future,” he said. “I’m glad it’s been settled, and look forward to working closely with the port authority in the future.”

While regretting the breakdown in communication which took place, Mr Wishart – who says he has given LPA discussions a wide berth since becoming a councillor – believes the port authority has been vindicated. “When I see very large ships going through the harbour now, I’m completely convinced it was the right thing to do at the time.”

Port authority to look at major new investments

(Continued from front page)

the two – a far cry from the picture five years ago when they were not even speaking to one another.

Although relations had long since thawed, as recently as last month some sources felt the matter was bound for an eight-day stint at the Court of Session, with all the ensuing negative publicity and vast legal costs for both sides.

Those involved in the negotiations agreed it was that unappetising prospect which had helped focus minds, with SIC chief executive Alistair Buchan talking earlier this month of a long overdue and “very constructive” meeting with LPA chief executive Sandra Laurenson, which may have helped pave the way for this week’s settlement.

Although the LPA has settled for less than the full amount it had sought, Ms Laurenson said it was concerned with more than simply money. She is pleased that by keeping the matter out of the courtroom, Shetland’s reputation won’t be further besmirched.

Ms Laurenson said: “There would have been huge reputational damage, as there was during the dispute. There’s no getting away from that. Shetland was seen to be a place that didn’t seem to be able to get its act together.

“This is a new chapter, it’s out of the way and we’ll be able to engage with the council on future projects that the port is doing in a meaningful way, and we really look forward to that engagement.”

The SIC sought the interdict due to its fears that the dredging work, which the LPA viewed as vital to attract bigger vessels to the harbour, would hinder its plans for the £22 million bridge.

But when Lord Reed conclusively backed the LPA’s position

in early 2007, that gave it the green light to resume dredging. It sparked the long, drawn-out legal negotiations as the port authority sought recompense from the council having had to abandon the original contract with Belgian firm Jan de Nul, and other subsequent losses and expenses.

Asked on Tuesday for his thoughts on what had gone wrong and who was to blame, Mr Simpson responded: “I don’t think there’s anybody at fault.

“People acted on the best advice at the time and we are where we are, but what the agreement is today, I think we saw this coming and there’s a contingency fund set up. It’ll not be another £4.8 million that we have to find, that’s taken care of.”

He went on to thank former senior SIC official Gordon Greenhill, who has continued to represent the council as an adviser during the LPA negotiations, for his efforts.

There are no plans to stage an inquiry, councillors having voted 9-4 against doing so on Monday, though Mr Buchan said there were undoubtedly “lessons to be learned”.

Mr Buchan believes the new governance arrangements already put in place since 2010 will help to minimise the risk of a repeat, in particular referring to the “gateway process” major capital projects now have to go through.

He also explained that the SIC had received outside legal advice that it was not insured against the claim because, having scrutinised the project “with a fine-tooth comb”, its insurers had been “unable to find any evidence of negligence on the part of council officials or elected members”.

Ms Laurenson said the LPA would be holding talks with its bank to see whether it can retain the £4.8 million to spend on a host of important new projects, including a new quay and

fish market at North Holmsgarth and the replacement of its tug *Kebister*.

Most significant of all could be the “massive” deepwater decommissioning facility at Dales Voe, which would be “the biggest project the port has ever undertaken if it goes through”, she pointed out.

LPA deputy chairman Brian Anderson paid tribute to Ms Laurenson and Mr Greenhill for their hard work, helping bring the matter to an end in a “very professional manner”. Now he wants to see “much more contact” between the two organisations, particularly with an eye on oil developments to the west of Shetland.

At the time of his departure as SIC chief executive three years ago, Mr Goodlad told this newspaper he accepted the dispute had reflected badly on Shetland, with both parties “clearly hell bent on meeting what they saw was in their best interests”.

Speaking in May 2009, Mr Goodlad stressed the decision to seek an interdict just days before dredging work began had been taken to protect around £1 million already spent on designs and other work related to the project.

“Had the action to try and save the bridge not been taken at that time, that money would have been lost and very severe questions would have had to be asked about why was this action not defended to save that expenditure,” he said.

“As it was, action was taken and the court ruled the way they ruled, so that was lost anyway. I can’t claim in any way that that money was a good investment, clearly if there’s not going to be a bridge. [But] there’s no council officer involved in that process that didn’t carry through to the best of their ability council policy.”

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