

Free cashpoint is 18 miles away

Post Office withdraws the only no-charge ATM in Fort Augustus

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NEWS REPORTER

THE Post Office has come under fire over a decision to withdraw the only free ATM service in a small Highland community.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) claims the move will force residents in Fort Augustus to travel 18 miles to get cash from the next nearest free-to-use ATM in Drumnadrochit.

Locals will be able to withdraw money over the counter at the newly-located Post Office, but with opening hours they will be forced to pay £1.99 to withdraw cash from the village's other ATM.

In a letter to MSPs and councillors covering Fort Augustus, CAS also claims that it has "significant concerns" over the way the decision was pushed through.

The letter states: "I am writing to express our concern regarding Post Office Ltd's (POL) decision to remove the free-to-use cash machine (ATM) from Fort Augustus post office, as part of the relocation of the branch from its current premises to the village's Londis store."

"Following public consultation on this proposal, CAS scrutinised the proposed branch relocation and raised significant concerns about the loss of the ATM facility

with Post Office Ltd. Although local residents will be able to withdraw cash or check their account balance over the post office counter, which will open for longer opening hours as a result of the change, the only alternative means to access cash when the post office is closed will be to use the external ATM at the Londis store of the Glen service station, which according to the latest LINK data charges £1.99 for each transaction."

It adds: "CAS also has significant concerns about the way in which

"This decision has been taken outside of the agreed consultation process"

Post Office Ltd decided to proceed with the loss of the ATM facility.

"This decision has been taken outside of the agreed consultation and decision-making process for the ongoing post office restructure programme, which is reflected in a Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the Post Office and the CAS."

CAS also claim that, while there was a consultation on the relocation of the Post Office, there was no mention of the withdrawal of the cashpoint.

A Post Office spokesman said: "The decision to relocate Fort Augustus Post Office was made to provide a sustainable post office for people in the area. The move offers considerable benefits for customers including significantly longer, seven days a week opening hours and dedicated customer parking..."



Office ATM as the store already had a contract for a pay-to-use external ATM."

The politicians who were sent the letter include Drew Henry MP, Fergus Ewing MSP, Dave Thomson MSP, John Finnie MSP, Jean Urquhart MSP, Rhoda Grant MSP, Mike McKenzie MSP, David Stewart MSP, Mary Scanlon MSP and Jamie McGrigor MSP.

Highlands and Islands MSP Rhoda Grant has written to Post Office chief executive Paula Vennells calling for a "rethink". She said "Many people in the Highlands already face more challenges than most in accessing cash, and this decision will only make that more difficult for local residents."



Ban hails Ireland's backing for gay marriage

UNITED Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon has declared Ireland's overwhelming support for gay marriage is a message to the world.

In the country to mark its 60-year membership of the UN and tradition of international peacekeeping, Mr Ban praised Irish voters for making history in the landmark ballot.

"This is a truly historic moment: Ireland has become the first country in the world to approve marriage equality in a nationwide referendum," he said.

"The result sends an important message to the world: All people are entitled to enjoy their human rights no matter who they are or whom they love."

Within hours of the gay rights' victory, the reform was being billed as a massive boost for the Republic's reputation on the international stage, sentiments backed by former foreign affairs minister Eamon Gilmore, a key figure in forcing the vote.

"Around the world today



BAN KI-MOON: 'This is a truly historic moment.'

there are countries that have people who are looking at Ireland and looking at it favourably, want to visit, want to be part of it, and see it in an entirely new light," he said.

"I think we also have an obligation to take that decision, to take that mandate, to take the moral authority from that vote and to become international advocates for the rights of LGBT people who are being oppressed."

Rock star Bono dedicated U2's playing of Pride (In the Name of Love) to the verdict at a gig in Phoenix, Arizona. He said: "It's a moment for us to thank the people who bring us peace to our country."

The country's prime minister Enda Kenny praised the courageous step by Irish voters, including the tens of thousands who registered for the first time and many who travelled home to cast ballots.

"The decision makes every citizen equal and will strengthen the institution of marriage for all existing and future marriages."

"All people now have an equal future to look forward to," he said.

Already the resounding victory for gay rights campaigners is being billed as a massive boost for the Republic's reputation on the international stage.

Doctor said I had to buck the trend when I was diagnosed with a rare cancer at 27

Woman now in remission and speaks at Race For Life event



BARRY DIDDCOCK

WHEN Heather Duff received the news last spring that she was only the 19th person in the UK to be diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cervical cancer, it is fair to say her world was turned on its head.

She was 27 at the time, had just completed her first marathon and was engaged to be married. Matters weren't helped much by the fact that when she asked doctors about her chances of survival, she was told she should concentrate on "bucking the trend".

One year and one almighty buck later, Mrs Duff found herself yesterday addressing 1,200 women at Cancer Research UK's Race For Life event at Hopetoun House near Edinburgh, telling them her story and – the important bit – informing them that she is now in remission.

As the woman chosen to start the event, it fell to her to sound the airhorn which marked the beginning of the five and 10 kilometre races. Mrs Duff, now 28, completed the five kilometre circuit in a commendable 26 minutes and afterwards spoke about her roller coaster year and how life-changing, and ultimately life-affirming, it has been.

"It was really surreal," she said of the day in April last year when she was given the shattering news that the pelvic pain which had sent her to her GP a couple of months earlier was cancer. "I'm a very fit person. I work in sports development, I'd just run my first marathon, I've played hockey at national level and beforehand I almost felt I

should have been immune to cancer. So when I got the diagnosis initially I was in complete shock. I never thought 'Why me?' I just couldn't believe it. But it's life's lottery. Some people just get cancer and there's nothing you can do."

Mrs Duff's treatment at Edinburgh's Western Infirmary began almost immediately and involved an intensive course of brachytherapy, chemotherapy and conventional radiotherapy. When she asked doctors what her chances of survival were, they were wary.

"My doctor said to me that I just had to buck the trend. Nothing was said directly. But they did say to my fiancé it's very rare for people with this sort of cancer to live beyond three years and their aim was just to reduce the size of the tumour."

"It was quite an aggressive form of treatment. It was very intense for six weeks and then luckily after that, in August, we found out that I was in remission. I'm quite a positive person and I found the whole thing obviously very challenging. But after it, I felt like the whole experience was very negative and I needed to find a positive within it, and I think that's what inspired me to do things like the Race For Life. I also started writing a blog."

Cheering her on yesterday was former fiancé Gordon, now her husband. A police sergeant in Edinburgh, he had come straight to the event from a night shift.

"Gordon proposed to me in May, a month after I was diagnosed," said Mrs Duff. "Again, because of what we'd been told about [life] expectations, we decided to get married within the year".

The date was set for April 11, almost a year to day since



ON YOUR MARKS: Heather Duff gets set to mark the start of the Cancer Research UK Race For Life at Hopetoun House, with some canine support.

the diagnosis. The place was Loch Lomond. By the time it came around, however, Mrs Duff had already been given the best wedding present imaginable: a clean bill of health and her life back.

That said, she still has a list of 50 things she wants to do before she turns 30. "I don't call it a bucket list," she laughed, "but I'm slowly ticking things off."

The couple have just returned from honeymoon in Thailand and next year they plan to visit New York. One of the must-dos which has already been fulfilled was at Mrs Duff's feet yesterday in the blustery West Lothian sunshine – her dog, Parsnip.

Leader comment: Page 16



THEY'RE OFF: Runners set off on the Race For Life.



BIG DAY: Heather and Gordon wed after cancer diagnosis.

Gruffalo Trail set to captivate children

MUCH-LOVED children's book The Gruffalo has been brought to life in Argyll woodland – creating the perfect spot for would-be hunters to finally track down the purple-prickled beast.

The Gruffalo Trail at Ardkinglas Woodland Garden in Cairndow is now open for children of all ages to enjoy exploring scenes similar to those depicted in Julia Donaldson's famous tale.

A metalwork sculpture of the mouse greets visitors at the start of the trail, where they can pick up a map to guide them round, before finally coming face to face with a galvanised steel structure of the Gruffalo.

David Sumsion, owner of the Ardkinglas Estate, said: "The Ardkinglas woods have been explored by generations of children over the years and many of us have our favourite routes, associated with particular people or adventures."

"Having young children, the much-loved Gruffalo story has been read over and over again. Last year I realised that this corner of the Woodland Garden could provide the perfect setting



HUNT: Children prepare to track down the Gruffalo.

for the book's characters." Donaldson, 66, is expected to visit the trail in an event being organised in August.

Originally from London, she penned the Gruffalo at her home in Bearsden, near Glasgow. After living in Scotland for around 25 years with husband Malcolm, a senior researcher in child health at Glasgow University, they sold their home last year and moved back down south to Sussex. She is one of the most prolific authors in the UK and has more than 180 published works, although the Gruffalo remains her best-known and has sold more than 10 million copies.

Star leads tributes to Nobel prize winner

HOLLYWOOD actor Russell Crowe has said he is stunned after the Nobel Prize-winning mathematician John Nash and his wife Alicia were killed in a car crash in the US.

Crowe, who played the Nobel Prize for Economics winner in the film A Beautiful Mind, paid tribute after learning that Mr and Mrs Nash had died after being thrown from a taxi in a collision in New Jersey.

He said: "My heart goes out to John and Alicia and family. An amazing partnership. Beautiful minds, beautiful hearts."

Mr Nash, 86, who won the prize in 1994, and his wife were travelling in a car that lost control and hit a barrier at 4.30pm on Saturday.

The University of Princeton academic was portrayed by Crowe in the 2001 Academy award-winning film which depicted his groundbreaking work in game theory as well as his struggle with schizophrenia.



TRAGEDY: John Forbes Nash and his wife Alicia.

"Both of them were very special members of the Princeton University community."

"John's remarkable achievements inspired generations of mathematicians, economists and scientists who were influenced by his brilliant, groundbreaking work in game theory, and the story of his life with Alicia moved millions of readers and moviegoers who marvelled at their courage in the face of daunting challenges."

The Ron Howard film, which also starred Ed Harris and Jennifer Connelly, won four Oscars at the 2002 Academy Awards.

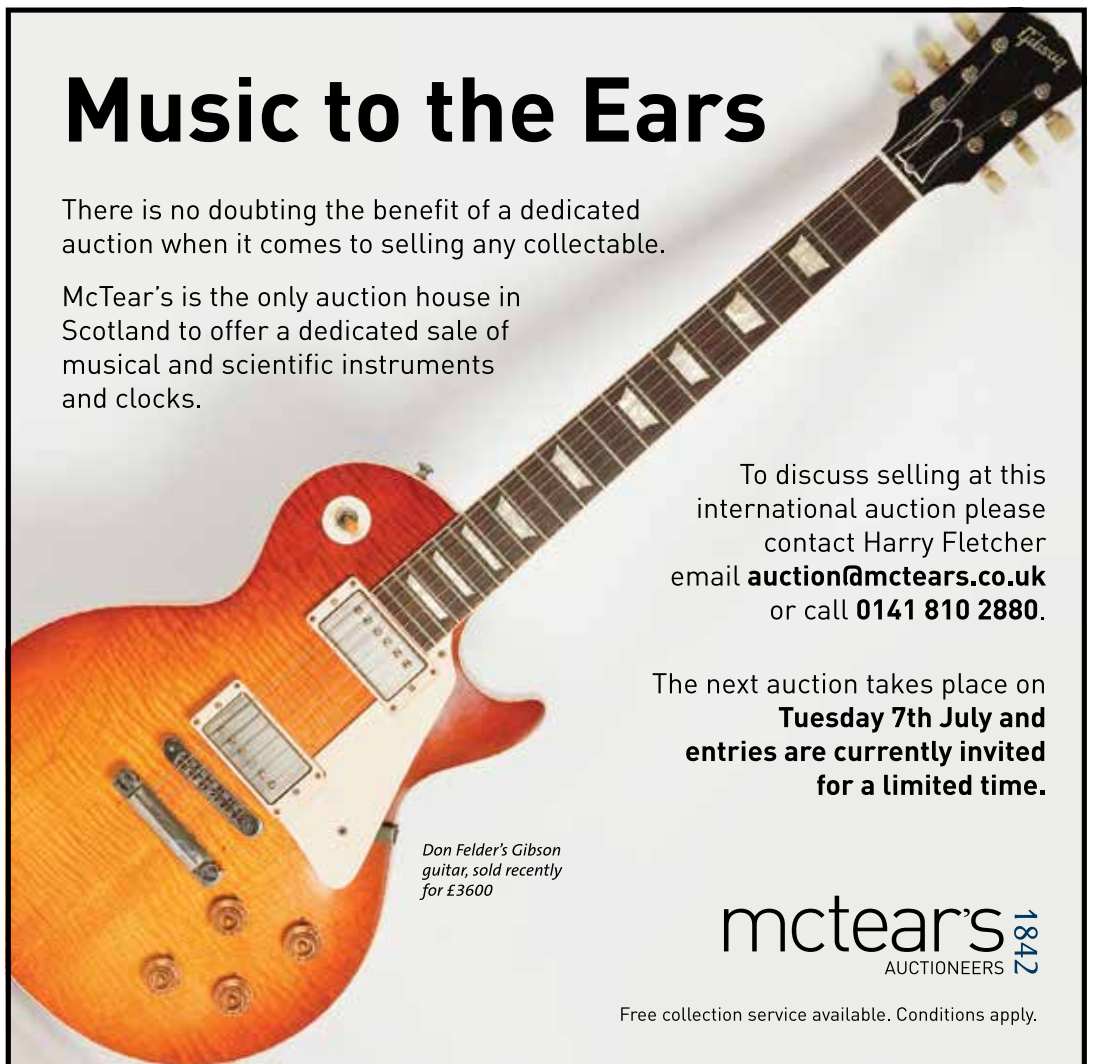
Music to the Ears

There is no doubting the benefit of a dedicated auction when it comes to selling any collectable.

McTear's is the only auction house in Scotland to offer a dedicated sale of musical and scientific instruments and clocks.

To discuss selling at this international auction please contact Harry Fletcher email action@mctears.co.uk or call 0141 810 2880.

The next auction takes place on **Tuesday 7th July** and entries are currently invited for a limited time.



Don Felder's Gibson guitar, sold recently for £3600

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