

NORTH HIGHLAND CONNECTION

NOVEMBER 2023



CAITHNESS
CHAMBER of
COMMERCE

STRONGER
TOGETHER

INSIDE

Chamber Comment page 3

Industry News pages 5+8

Movers and Shakers page 9

Members News pages 6+7



DRIVING SUCCESS IN THE NORTH HIGHLANDS

 @CaithnessCoC
caithnesschamber.com



Our region already has the knowledge, experience and energy to help accelerate Scotland's drive to Net Zero.

It's our people that make us.

But we need more.

- More opportunities to learn locally
- More training and apprenticeships
- More inward investment
- More business start-ups and growth

In partnership with world renowned solutions provider, Jacobs, Focus North is launching a Skills Strategy which will leverage public and private sector investment to help us grab future opportunities.

By working together, we can make sure that local communities benefit from the natural resources on our doorstep.

Can you help?

We need industry partners to help us shape our Skills Strategy and Action Plan. We want your ideas, feedback, challenges and support.

To get involved, email Nicola Sinclair, Business Development Manager, Focus North - nicola.sinclair@hient.co.uk

**FOCUS
NORTH**
↑

Jacobs



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S INSIGHT

CAITHNESS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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As the nights draw in and we move into Winter, the year too draws into its finale, bringing with it a time of reflection. At our AGM this October, we contemplated on the year passed, and there is no denying it has been a difficult year for business, but of course, there have been many great highlights too.

We celebrated our 49th Annual Dinner in September, with a keynote address given by Dr Liz Cameron CBE, Chief Executive of Scottish Chambers of Commerce, praising the creativity and resilience of the North Highland businesses community. It is always a great privilege to host this event and welcome so many of our esteemed business leaders, members and colleagues, a true testament to our region. Young Business Awards were presented to North Point Distillery and CC Chocolatier, both praised for their business innovation, commitment to quality and products which reflect the vibrancy of the North Highlands.

There have been some great highs for the Chamber team too, who have worked tirelessly to ensure the voice of the North Highland Business community is part of a national narrative, particularly in the face of ongoing regulatory burdens and legislative pressures. We are also pleased to bring our professional knowledge and experience to the administration of the business and community funds which we administer, the benefits of which can be seen and felt across the region. Looking ahead, as always, we will be kept on our toes! Our upcoming events programme has many opportunities for businesses to build upon skills, seek new opportunities and strengthen networks. We will be welcoming specialist in Fire Safety,



Richard Dunbar, MD of Park Lodge International Ltd to give an overview of the safety concerns associated with lithium-ion battery charging and advice on how to safeguard your business to help mitigate against the associated risks. Throughout November and December, we will be joined by PA Consultancy Group for a series of expert-led workshops on tendering and carbon reduction action planning. We will also be hosting a supply chain event with Thistle Wind Partners, exploring opportunities in the development of the Ayre Offshore Wind Farm, a IGW floating foundation project 57km off the Caithness coastline. We are continually grateful for the support of our membership, who can be assured that we will not rest on our laurels. Despite the challenges we may face the Chamber is here for our business community. Our mission continues to be to nurture a thriving, sustainable and diverse North Highland economy and the stories in the pages that follow exemplify the ambition, expertise, and spirit of our region.

Trudy Morris
Chief Executive,
Caithness Chamber of Commerce



EVENTS

15.11.23

Fire Safety Information Session, Lithium-ion Batteries, with Park Lodge International

16.11.23

Maximise your Membership

27.11.23

Business Breakfast, Carbon Reduction Action Plan Workshop, PA Consultancy

05.12.23

Business Breakfast with Thistle Wind Partners

06.12.12

Tendering Excellence, PA Consultancy

Visit our website for booking information or email
Fiona@caithnesschamber.com

PREMIER PARTNERS





MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT

JOHN BAIKIE PHOTOGRAPHER & FILMMAKER

John Baikie is a multi-award-winning photographer and filmmaker whose accomplished career has taken him across the world, shooting in breathtaking locations and working alongside premium brands; capturing people and telling their narratives through his own unique visual lens.

With his heart rooted in his North Highland home, the Caithnesian creative has brought his focus back towards his roots, returning his attention to helping to promote businesses and success stories in the North Highland region. With an ever-increasing move towards video in marketing and visual storytelling, John's perspective, lived experiences and in-depth local knowledge of the North Highlands help offer a new approach to documentary storytelling in the commercial world.

WHAT IS YOUR SPECIALITY OR NICHE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY?

Spending my life in the North Highlands has given me inspiration to be creative. The landscapes and people here are very special. There are so many stories out there which need to be told, and I think, there is a trend in the Highlands to underplay success. So many businesses and people in the region are doing amazing things, often taken for granted or played down. I have worked on some projects which nobody knows about, yet we are talking about groundbreaking stuff. This is where I come in. My passion is for telling stories, be that through moving or still images, or sometimes both. I love to create documentary-style films, and they can show the personality and ethos of a business.

HOW DO YOU STAY UPDATED WITH THE LATEST TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGIES IN YOUR FIELD?

I was entirely self-taught as a photographer, beginning my creative career in 1997, but I was eager to learn and travelled the UK and overseas attending seminars and workshops to improve my skills. My filmmaking started in a similar vein, but I recently completed a four-year BA honours degree with UHI and am currently working through a Master's in filmmaking. This has really helped me to progress at a much faster rate. I have a passion for learning and constantly push to be better at what I do. I have also completed drone training courses and can commercially fly these, which is another great perspective



to add to films. In this industry, it is important to constantly invest in training and equipment.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH PRICING AND PACKAGING YOUR SERVICES?

One thing I do which has been popular is to offer ongoing packages, where businesses can save money on creating content by booking for monthly or bi-monthly sessions. It takes a lot of pressure off businesses knowing they have high-quality content being created without too much involvement. I like to think my film production is very competitively priced and will come up with bespoke solutions to suit all budgets.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORKFLOW FROM INITIAL CLIENT CONTACT TO PROJECT DELIVERY?

The filmmaking/video production side of the business is very bespoke. I work extensively with clients on the pre-production elements, to ensure we are on the same page, and to ensure the video production is a smooth process. This usually involves creating a brief and laying out a very specific plan. Quality and customer satisfaction are hugely important to me. It is great to build up a working relationship with clients, where you begin to really understand each other, and feel part of that business and truly invested in their progress.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR YOUR BUSINESS AND CAREER?

My MA in filmmaking will bring a whole new level of skills and knowledge to the business and increase the production value of every project. The goal is to spend my time showcasing Caithness and the North Highlands; and build up a body of work showcasing the area, the place, the people, and the inspiring stories which I come across almost daily. I am passionate about documentary films and have a few personal projects which are ticking along in the background too.

www.johnbaikie.co.uk

DUNNET BAY DISTILLERS

– RECOGNITION FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

Regarded Caithness business leader Martin Murray of Dunnet Bay Distillers has been recognised by the Gin Cooperative as the recipient of its inaugural Outstanding Contribution to Scottish Gin Award. The prestigious accolade recognises an individual, business or organisation's positive contribution to the Scottish Gin Industry.

For Martin and his wife Claire, the Dunnet Bay Distillers journey can trace its beginnings back to their university days when they would talk of one day returning to Caithness to set up their own business together. Turning their dream into reality the award-winning distillery has gone from strength to strength, creating significant employment opportunities, establishing a five-star visitor experience and launching an array of artisan spirits, inspired by Caithness and its unique cultural and natural heritage. With the distillery widely praised for its innovation and commitment to sustainability and quality, it's clear

why Martin was the perfect choice to be the first person ever to receive this new award, Natalie from The Gin Cooperative explained:

"We're delighted and thrilled to award the very first Outstanding Contribution to Scottish Gin Award to Martin Murray. Over the last five years, one name has come up in conversation a lot. And in a really positive way. We have lost count of the number of times we've heard how Martin has helped others by providing distilling insight or guidance around HRMC regulations, email exchanges about where to find the best Negroni in a certain city or

just a general chat about the Scottish Gin category.

As the co-founder of one of the early Highland-based gin brands, Martin Murray along with his wife and co-founder Claire, acted as a great example of what a remote Scottish distillery could achieve. Often leading the way with new export deals and distribution opportunities for the Rock Rose Scottish Gin brand, Martin has been at the forefront of the true craft distilling revolution that's taken shape in Scotland over the last decade.

Humble and hard-working, whilst balancing family life and growing an international Scottish Gin brand is no mean feat at the best of times. But to always leave the door open for advice and helping others in the industry so everyone benefits, really does go above and beyond in business and in life. We have benefited from his help, guidance, generosity, kindness and support whenever we've needed to pick his brains."

Looking to the future, with ambitions to enter the craft whisky market, the duo has started work on their latest project with a £4 million restoration of Castletown Mill underway. Martin and Claire are proud to have been entrusted with the custody of the mill and are working to conserve and revitalise the 200-year-old building into a destination landmark and home to a new Caithness single malt whisky – Stannergill Whisky.

www.dunnetbaydistillers.co.uk



Cyber Security Scotland

Whether in preparation for formal certification or simply for directors' assurance, the demand for independent advice in cyber security has never been stronger. As a result, the specialist services of Cyber Security Scotland have been sought by many organisations including government, public bodies, NHS Scotland, SMEs and charities.



"This has been a great year for us", explained founder and Executive Chair, Dr Keith Nicholson, "we are highly trusted because we offer genuinely independent advice to organisations, we don't take commission or sell products, so businesses know that the advice they receive is not coloured by a hidden sales agenda."

Cyber Security Scotland specialises in assurance services geared to helping firms achieve a level

of security that is proportionate to their business needs. This includes a range of services from developing cyber security and IT strategies, certification to Cyber Essentials, ISO27001 and compliance with the Public Sector Cyber Resilience Framework. Dr Nicholson continued "Understandably business owners know from the media about cyber-attacks but don't know what they need to do to protect their company. We guide firms through this minefield, offering plain-English guidance coupled with cyber risk assessments, audit and assurance services against relevant standards as required."

The approach has certainly paid off for Cyber Security Scotland, winning contracts in 2023 worth over £1 million. This non-profit organisation now has staff based across Scotland and is looking to expand its specialist services into Europe. "People like working for us and that is very rewarding for me personally" Dr Nicholson explained "From inception, we have always offered a flexible working model, long before this became more common since the Covid lockdown. Staff work remotely and as a result, are able to fit work around the demands of their domestic life. Without this flexibility, they would not be able to work and we would lose out on their experience and expertise."

A real win-win situation for this Highland-based firm, demonstrating the benefits of technology to deliver a specialist service and an innovative work-life approach.

www.cyberscotland.com



ONE:
Jacobs

The Jacobs team based at Scrabster Harbour took advantage of a sunny Friday afternoon to carry out their fifth successful beach clean.

The first event took place in 2019 and coincided with the Great British Beach Clean initiative. Since then the combined team of engineers, consultants, graduates and managers have cleared over 150 kg of beach waste from the beautiful Caithness shoreline.

Team member Suzy Ryder said: “The beach cleans have changed my perspective on the responsibility we have to keep the areas we live in safe and tidy, both for ourselves and the natural environment.”

The Jacobs office recently increased its capacity at Scrabster and continues to recruit for talent in engineering, safety case and project management to serve our clients in nuclear, space, defence and other industries.

TWO:
Venture North’s Talking Tourism series has returned for 2023!

Following the success of last year’s Talking Tourism series, businesses and communities in Caithness and Sutherland are invited to participate in a program of live online webinars held over the autumn and winter. The sessions offer valuable support, information and networking opportunities across the region.

The new series kicked off in September with an informal catch-up with businesses and community organisations from around the region to share how the 2023 season had been. In October, Philip Waite, Outdoor Access and Long-Distance

Route Manager for The Highland Council gave an insight into this year’s visitor management and explained the work of the Highland Council Access Rangers in encouraging responsible tourism.

Cathy Earnshaw, Destination Strategy Manager for Venture North, said “Talking Tourism is an opportunity to hear an update on tourism from a regional and national perspective, whilst also having the chance to engage with the industry and network with other organisations.”

The team have many more exciting webinars planned, including a catch-up with Visit Scotland, a discussion on Community Tourism with SCOTO (Scottish Community Tourism) together with Wick Development Trust, and a session with the Caithness Chamber of Commerce, to explain support available to businesses in the region.

THREE:
Ask the Expert

Orkney-based creative consultancy, The Strategy Collective, has launched its innovative new “Ask the Expert” service. Created with small businesses in mind, “Ask An Expert” sessions are designed to help businesses facing a specific challenge in their marketing efforts.



The 1:1 expert-led sessions help with all manner of marketing challenges from Strategy to Social, Web Development to Analytics, and Creative to Google Ads. The consultations provide in-depth issue resolution, expert advice and insights and real-world ideas and inspiration. Hassel free and commitment free, just an open and honest chat! Find out more at thestrategycollective.co.uk





MEET THE MEMBER

Based in the Orkney Islands, AMB Remote Bookkeeping, offers expert, accurate and ethical bookkeeping which puts personal service at the heart of its business. Founder Michael Taylor explained what makes AMB a trusted partner for financial success;

“With my background as an independent business owner, I understand first-hand the weight of responsibility that goes into running a successful business, no matter the size. I remember all too well the days of rushing away from the family dinner table, back to the shop and the paperwork waiting for me.

It was this that inspired me to establish ABM Remote Bookkeeping, using my skills and knowledge to help businesses to gain access back to their time and to concentrate on the things that matter, like family and the reasons they started their business in the first place.

We help keep complex finances simple, helping businesses to make informed decisions and our customers’ success is our priority. Our model allows us to be responsive, and approachable and we are committed to exceeding expectations.”

To find out more, speak to Michael at enquiries@abmremotetobookkeeping.co.uk

AWARDS

BBM Solicitors

BBM Solicitors has again been recommended by the prestigious international directory Chambers and Partners for our Restructuring and Insolvency work. Chambers said BBM Solicitors was notable for its work on cross-border mandates and its strength in matters in the oil and gas sector.



Andrei Rybak

Congratulations to Andrei Rybak who has been announced as the winner in the category Leading Providers of Card Payment Services 2023 – Highlands, in the SME News’ seventh annual Scottish Enterprise Awards 2023.

On winning the award Andrei Rybak commented “Many thanks to my clients for your custom and trust.



Your interests are my priority.”
 “In other news from the sector, Clover Flex 3rd generation equipment is now available in the UK market – its bigger screen compared to the previous generation now makes it suitable to use not just as a fully portable card payment terminal, but as a fully portable Point-of-Sale equipment, if required. Any enquiries are very welcome.”

THISTLE WIND PARTNERS -

FLOATING WIND DEVELOPERS REACH OUT TO HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS SUPPLY CHAIN

With so many new offshore wind projects planned around the Highlands & Islands region, many local businesses are keen to understand the opportunity for them over the coming decade and beyond.

One project, which is currently in its consenting and development phase, is the IGW Ayre Offshore Wind Farm, which will lie to the north of Caithness (about 57km from Wick). The company behind this major new floating wind venture is Thistle Wind Partners (TWP), a consortium founded in 2020 by DEME, Qair and Aspiravi with a focus on Scottish renewables.

Further down the coastline, TWP is also planning a second project (this time, a more traditional fixed-foundation offshore wind farm) off the coast of Aberdeenshire – the IGW Bowdun Offshore Wind Farm. Both projects, which fall under the ambitious ScotWind drive, are expected to enter construction in 2029. Ayre, which is divided into two distinct zones, will be built in two phases: learnings from the construction of the first zone (2029 – 2031) will be fed through to construction of the second zone (from 2031).

While TWP is still whittling down its choice of turbines and foundations, the current base case is for 40 – 60 turbines using semi-submersible or tension-leg foundations. Turbines are being considered in the range from 15MW onwards.

Throughout November, TWP will be meeting businesses and the local

community in Caithness to introduce the project and planning for related onshore infrastructure in the region. On 5th December, TWP will hold a Business Breakfast in collaboration with the Caithness Chamber of Commerce and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. An exhibition bus

and community events will also run throughout November, with the public encouraged to meet the TWP to find out more about wind farm technologies, electrical and grid, and planning.

Full details can be found online: www.thistlewindpartners.scot



NEW NAME. NEW ERA: INTRODUCING ATKINSRÉALIS

Our company has been steadily evolving for years while working with clients to design, deliver and operate some of the world's most complex projects.

As we've evolved, we've strengthened our offering through a number of acquisitions as well as a focus on group-wide collaboration to help deliver better outcomes for clients, communities and the environment.

We've now reached an inflection point in our journey, as we're harmonising our brands to establish one company, one strategy and one integrated offering.

SNC-Lavalin, Atkins, and Faithful + Gould are now known together as AtkinsRéalis, a world-leading design, engineering and project

management organisation that connects people, data and technology to transform the world's infrastructure and energy systems.

AtkinsRéalis better reflects who we are, what we do, and where we're heading as a single organisation, that engineers solutions to humanity's toughest challenges and pushes the limits of what's humanly possible.

What doesn't change, though, is our commitment to our clients, projects and stakeholders.

We believe that uniting our organisations into one, AtkinsRéalis, will make it easier for everyone to bring the best of our global capabilities to you, by thinking globally and delivering locally, we'll be more effective, more efficient, and more innovative.

www.AtkinsRéalis.com

AtkinsRéalis



NEW NAME. NEW ERA.

AtkinsRéalis is a world-leading design, engineering and project management organisation.

We connect people, data and technology, which enables us to transform the world's infrastructure and energy systems.

Scan the QR code to find out more



AtkinsRéalis, Rutherford House, Crow Park Way, Westlakes Science & Technology Park, Whitehaven, Cumbria, CA24 3HY

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atkinsrealis.com

MOVERS + SHAKERS

SINEAD HARGAN & HELEN MOORE

| Lyth Arts Centre

Lyth Arts Centre (LAC) Scotland's most northerly mainland arts centre has appointed two new temporary Co-Directors. Over the next 12 months, Caithness-based artists Sinéad Hargan and Helen Moore will lead the creative, cultural hub in presenting its annual programme of live performance, contemporary visual art and an extensive participatory programme of educational and socially engaged arts projects across the North Highlands.

In 2024 Lyth Arts Centre is planning to expand its reach across the North Highlands by programming events in interesting buildings, spaces, and halls. With this exciting approach to programming, they hope to reach more audiences and combat access and transport barriers across the region. If you have an interesting space that might be of interest then get in touch - info@lytharts.org.uk



West of Orkney Windfarm progress continues apace

The West of Orkney Windfarm is continuing to progress on schedule with its ambitious plans to develop a £multi-billion offshore windfarm which will deliver significant social and economic benefits to the north of Scotland.

In October the project reached a major milestone by submitting comprehensive offshore consent applications to Scottish Ministers. It is the first ScotWind project to have applied for offshore consent, doing so only 20 months after being awarded the site.

Earlier this month the project submitted its onshore planning application to The Highland Council for onshore works required to deliver renewable energy to homes and businesses across the country.

The onshore application provides detailed information on the proposed cable landfalls on the north Caithness coast and the underground cables which will extend around 20km and connect to the project's substation at or near Spittal, in Caithness.

Commenting on the Caithness work, West of Orkney Windfarm Development Manager Jack Farnham said:

"The onshore connection is a vital component of the project and will enable us to export clean, green electricity sufficient to power around two million homes. The cables to our substation will all be underground and once installed, the land will be reinstated.

"I'd encourage any individual or business with an interest in the project to make representations direct to The Highland Council," Farnham said.

In other news, the windfarm developers have recently participated in a number of supply chain events across the north of Scotland, including a well-attended meeting in Thurso, co-hosted with the Caithness Chamber of Commerce.

The project has also provided £125,000 support to the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Catapult, enabling them to deliver their industry leading F4OR supply chain growth programme to up to seven companies in Caithness, Sutherland and Orkney.

Once selected, companies will be able to take part in the rigorous 12-18 month development programme, designed alongside offshore wind industry experts, and focused on improving business readiness for the offshore renewable energy market.

www.westoforkney.com

subsea 7

Subsea7's pipeline fabrication site at Wester, is playing a significant role in making secure and sustainable energy possible.

Our latest pipeline bundle projects will commence in 2023 with launches in 2024 and 2025 taking us beyond our 90th bundle milestone.

subsea7.com
Follow us @subsea7official

Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram icons

MAKE POSSIBLE

INVESTING IN SCOTLAND



The West of Orkney Windfarm is being developed 30km off the west coast of Orkney and 25km from the north Sutherland coast.

With an expected capacity of around 2GW, and first power scheduled for 2029, the project will be capable of powering the equivalent of more than two million homes.

Over the life of the project, we aim to ensure that 60 percent of the work is delivered by UK businesses, with 40 percent from Scotland. This will be enabled by:

- **Committing to a £105 million investment initiative** to develop the supply chain, that will be enhanced to at least £140 million by match funding from third parties.
- **Direct support** for the enhancement of ports and harbour infrastructure in Caithness, Orkney, and across Scotland.
- **Working with local partners** to deliver a targeted skills improvement programme.
- **Supporting the transition of Scottish companies and workers** into offshore wind and playing a critical role in helping the country achieve its net zero targets.



The project is being developed by a joint venture comprising Corio Generation, TotalEnergies and Renewable Infrastructure Development Group (RIDG).



Co-founders Struan Mackie and Alex MacDonald.



Inside the North Point Distillery gift shop.

Pointing in the direction of the local community

CAITHNESS business North Point Distillery has been given ‘further motivation’ after picking up a coveted award in their local area.

The team picked up the young business award in the SME category at the Caithness Chamber of Commerce Awards, and it was an assurance for them that they are making a difference in their community.

Speaking about their win, managing director Alex MacDonald said: “It’s a fantastic success story for us, as it’s been an interesting journey over the last three years, but one that we’ve gone from strength to strength with.

“Being recognised close to home for the work we’ve done and the young and dynamic team we have means so much and is a real boost for all of us.”

Over the past year the company has faced several challenges, including the controversial Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), the proposed alcohol advertising ban alongside internal changes.

However, it has managed to thrive within these circumstances as the team has grown to 14 members

of staff, and it has increased its production capacity with a fourth still on site.

Alex said: “We have been recognised as the best craft distillery in the world, we have won sustainability awards, and we have won awards for the best gin and the best rum. But the best thing for us is that it is people focused, and our people is what makes our business function.

“A big part of our business ethos is working with the community and what they need. We try to assist individuals at risk of unemployment,

provide training in schools and to sponsor our local teams as we want the talent in our area to be represented.”

North Point Distillery will soon be unveiling a new product which has been in the pipeline for over two years, and the team believes it will ‘make a splash’. They hope it will increase their staff number to 22 by the end of 2024.

Alex says it is thanks to the support and innovation of other local businesses in the area that have helped get them where they are today.

“I think there needs to be a thank you to a lot of the other distilleries in the local area that walked so we could run,” said Alex.

“Both Martin and Clare at Dunnet Bay Distillery and Kerry and Derek at 8 Doors Distillery have all been amazingly supportive. The team at Wolfburn has also been so supportive of our tourism, and we get a lot of referral business.

“Local businesses have taken a leap of faith with us and have supported our product launches and ventures, so that we are able to say we are one of the fastest growing craft distilleries in Scotland.”

He added: “Caithness Chamber of Commerce has also been an incredible support to us. We appreciate Trudy Morris and her team so much.

“They facilitate growth in an area that has historically faced challenges in the socio-economic landscape.

“The Chamber as a whole is a fantastic organisation for young businesses to engage with through activities, networking and learning programmes.

“It creates a difference for a lot of small businesses, so as a call to action I would recommend people to join it!”



North Point Distillery co-founder Struan Mackie and distillery manager Heather Ricker collect the young business award in the SME category from Isaac Connell (right), of award sponsor Pentland Floating Offshore Windfarm.



Fors Business and Energy Park, Thurso KW14 7UZ

W: www.northpointdistillery.com

A big part of our business ethos is working with the community and what they need.

Alex MacDonald



Mandy and Ged Boydell of CC Chocolatier, winners of the young business award in the Micro category, with Rob Heaton (left), of award sponsor West of Orkney Windfarm.

A sweet surprise for Wick business

A CAITHNESS woman who has transformed her career - and home - in the past four years has been recognised for her innovation and graft by her local community.

Mandy Boydell started CC Chocolatier alongside her husband Ged Boydell in 2019, after she had the chance to cook for royalty as the head chef at the Castle of Mey. It was from there her love for delicious treats and cakes was discovered and so CC Chocolatier was founded.

A gap in the market for home-made and locally sourced ingredients meant the business was soon on its way to becoming a recognised name. This has now been boosted even further after winning the young business award in the micro category at the Caithness Chamber of Commerce Awards.

Speaking about what this means to her, Mandy said: "I was absolutely delighted and so surprised to have won the award. It was a total shock for me and I was totally gobsmacked when they called our name."

"We started in 2019, and I was doing workshops with people on how to make artisan chocolate and we were getting really busy. When the lockdown happened I commandeered my husband's man cave and transformed it into my big kitchen and then an afternoon tea room."

Having been a hairdresser previously, founding CC Chocolatier was a brand new venture for Mandy, who was able to turn a hobby into a living.

She now offers afternoon teas,

classes and creates artisan chocolate to sell and for corporate events.

Speaking about her business journey and what she's learned over the past four years, she said: "I've learned that I can build something out of nothing with hardly any money. We hunted around charity shops for all the stuff we needed, and thankfully we managed to get a grant during Covid, which enabled us to buy patio doors for the tea room."

"Covid really taught us a lot, but I think everyone learned something during this time."

Since winning the award, CC Chocolatier has firmly been put on the map, and Mandy has received orders from big to small companies across the north of Scotland.

"We've had lots of enquiries lately," she said, "people have come in to do workshops, afternoon teas, and we have received our biggest order to date from a business that was at the Caithness Chamber Awards."

"We are also now gearing up for Christmas, and we are already starting to think about what we are doing for Valentine's Day."

She concluded: "I feel very lucky to do the job I do, and I feel honoured to have found something that I enjoy doing."



**The Croft, Upperbower Tower, Wick
T: 01955 661369
E: cocosmile46@gmail.com
W: www.cchocolatier.co.uk**



CC Chocolatier offers classes on how to make artisan chocolate.