

Gael Hillyard's **Continuum Exhibition & Associated Dark Skies Talks** (with Strathnairn's Dr Andy McGregor & Julie Macrae presenting).

A BRIEF REPORT

ON CONTINUUM | *Light & Life on the Atlantic Edge*

"*Continuum* brings together work by artists, architects, astronomers, and poets, shaped by sky, sea, weather, light and darkness. Moving across the Atlantic Edge, the exhibition considers how illumination alters what we see, how darkness supports life, and how the living world is changed when night is disturbed.

'Continuum' is the second exhibition of 'What Remains', a five year project by Gael Hillyard exploring light pollution, ecology, darkness, development and life at the edge of visibility."

The exhibition ran from 09-18 July 2026 at Wasps Creative Studios, Inverness; with an evening of 'Dark Skies' talks & community outreach held on 16 July 2026.



CONTINUUM | EXHIBITION & READING SPACE (09-18 July 2026)

Gael Hillyard, is the artist behind the exhibition *Continuum*; an exhibition curated at Wasps within which the Dark Skies talks took place. The exhibition centred around Gael's wider body of work around darkness, observation, and what may be lost through increasing artificial light. It extended to include fellow artists, photographers and collaborators, exhibiting works associated with the same theme.



For Gael, this exhibition also forms part of a five-year project called *What Remains*, in which the artist is exploring the creation and protection of dark sky corridors within urban spaces, including their heritage and planning dimensions and their potential development through contacts which Gael has in organisations such as the Royal Society of Arts.

You can see some of Gael's wider thinking behind her work on the 'Dark Skies' section of her website:

<https://www.gaelhillyard.com/observations>

CONTINUUM | DARK SKIES TALKS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH (16 July 2026)

Gael Hillyard chaired a well-attended evening of community outreach talks at Wasps Creative Studios, Inverness. This was aimed at increasing awareness, local engagement and promoting debate on 'Dark Skies': from Current development and challenges compromising – Dark Skies; Active works to protect – Dark Skies; and Shared experience of – Dark Skies.



Speakers:

01 | Gael Hillyard, Artist | FRAS [Fellows Membership | The Royal Astronomical Society](#) & FRSA [RSA Fellowship](#)

Having actively observed & recorded landscapes, wildspaces & exposed environments over a body of work as an artist, Gael has noticed subtle to significant changes taking place, which compromise biodiversity. These changes are seen across the natural world, from a reduction of habitat which supports ecosystems, to the increasing light levels or accelerated loss of darkness associated with polluting overhead skies. Focussing on just one nocturnal species, the moth, Gael shared her personal observations in their declining numbers, patterns and health. She associates this with competing interests (aligned with development & growth), a resultant and incremental reduction of darkness, and consequently a decline of habitats that support this species.

Gael's focussed the audience on 'What Remains'.

02 | Pauline Macrae, Chair of Highlands Astronomical Society (HAS) [Highlands Astronomical Society | Highlands Astronomical Society - Astronomy Club and Group for Inverness, Dingwall, Ross-shire, and Highlands, Scotland](#)

Pauline briefed the audience on the Highlands Astronomical Society and its evolution; including the contributions she has, and continues to make, to this organisation over a 20+ year period to support it. HAS has been instrumental to opening community access to, increasing engagement on and enjoyment of, Dark Skies, in and around the Inverness area; through the opening and operation of the Jim Lowden Observatory at Culloden Battlefield and more.

Pauline captured passionately, across words and actions, what it is - as a human - to observe the night sky, associated Solar System, Milky Way and more from our base in the Highlands; and be blown away by the '*Wonder*' that is overhead, when true darkness is experienced and preserved.

03 | Daniel Main, jointly developing a 5-year Scottish Dark Skies Campaign [Scottish Dark Skies Campaign — Protecting Scotland's Night](#)

Daniel introduced his role within the 'Scottish Dark Skies' Campaign, to a Highland audience.

The campaign has secured the backing of Catherine Heymans, Astronomer Royal for Scotland [First woman appointed Scotland's Astronomer Royal - BBC News](#) plus the wider Royal Astronomical Society and continues to grow. At present a 5-year Campaign Strategy (with targets) is being developed with the aim of informing and bringing about policy change to recognise *unwanted* artificial light at night (ALAN) as a source of pollution and protect Scotland's Dark Skies. Along the way the team is continuing to build engagement & secure support from all the regions.

04 | Julie Macrae, Project Advisor to Strathnairn Community Council [PLANNING | HC Guidance for CCs, LPPs & Community Development | Strathnairn Community](#)

Recognising our Dark Skies and Valuing Darkness, was the theme of Julie's talk. Focussing on the Highland context, and exploring the competing pressures and development opportunities aimed at addressing environmental, economic and societal needs, she looked at the resultant development planning, at a regional and national level. With this the Highlands are visibly undergoing a period of 'transformative change' - as perceived by many - entirely interdependent on natural capital (renewable and non-renewable resources) within the region.

However, learning from the past, we know that an equilibrium was exceeded, with natural assets over-exploited and insufficient protection of the environment; evident across peatlands, wetlands, and woodlands. With hindsight we appreciate that these natural assets - host to diverse ecosystems and supporting biodiversity - were not sufficiently understood,

nor valued; all of which has contributed to an acceleration of climate change and environmental degradation. Now - as we seek to restore and repair these - is it time ahead of any further loss of darkness to our night skies, to recognise the asset that this is, and put adequate policy and protection in place. Arguing that the timing is optimum now - but finite - to prevent further and intrusive sources of light pollution coming in as a by-product of increased development works; and before we again are forced into retrospective or reparative actions to restore darkness to our overhead skies.

05 | Dr Andy McGregor, Chair of Strathnairn Stargazing Group [Strathnairn Stargazing Group](#)

Opening with what first piqued his interest in Dark Skies; Andy related how a camping trip to the Scottish Highlands, was where he first experienced real overnight darkness. This, to him, was a world away from the light pollution he accepted as the 'norm', from an urban base of Glasgow. This formative experience has led to him initially pursuing Astrophysics (along with Engineering) - through higher education - and he can trace the thread of this back through all that he has done since.

Locally Strathnairn - the South Loch Ness rural community where Andy is now resident - has taken a stance against the introduction of light polluting sources at night, associated with 'development' works and an ever-expanding Inverness. This can first be traced back to the millennium. In 2025, this culminated in the formation of Strathnairn Stargazing Group - a recognised Community Group - to increase engagement on and locally protect Dark Skies. As part of this 'Sky Brightness Surveys' have been undertaken to record the baseline (now) and support a live application to DSI UK, to recognise and protect South Loch Ness Dark Sky Communities; ahead of proposed major energy infrastructure and other associated developments potentially being realised in the locale. This work is being led by SSG for the community of Strathnairn plus Stratherrick & Foyers.

[01-why-dark-skies-matter.pdf.pagespeed.ce.vy3BDPTENL.pdf](#)

[02-how-dark-skies-are-measured.pdf.pagespeed.ce.z1dK2oIPLq.pdf](#)

[03-the-strathnairn-survey.pdf.pagespeed.ce.rIR9onTM7j.pdf](#)

A Q&A session followed the talks, and opened up debate, with participation from the attending audience.

