



Helensburgh Community Council

Annual Report Years 2019-2021

Introduction

Since my last report, the years 2019-20 and 2020-21 have welded together due to the COVID pandemic. For the majority of the period a lockdown period has been and continues in force. The HCC decided to keep in touch and continue to function via a video conferencing platform called Zoom. It had a reported security issue which precluded its interaction with Argyll & Bute Council. However, we continued to maintain our external communications with the community. We also introduced a public webinar programme of general interest and information which proved to be a success. By this means we have managed to maintain our function and carry out a wide programme of varied actions and interests. Nevertheless, many of our initiatives were slowed down significantly.

Detail

Because of the passage of time, the timescale of the report has been grouped into three-month periods.

August – October 2019

August. The 2019-2020 session commenced in August 2019 and at the AGM, Norman Muir was elected as Convener, Peter Brown as Vice Convener, Stewart Noble continued as Treasurer and Roger Ferdinand as Secretary. There were 18 community councillors in post against an establishment of 20 councillors.

We received an update from the Community Woodlands Group seeking to adopt Cumberland Avenue woodland and Castle Woods. The mechanics of raising funds and getting the administrative requirements were time-consuming and frustrating but there was progress and hope for the future.

There were low levels of crime; an annoying incidence of graffiti in Hermitage Park and vandalism of car mirrors.

The development of the swimming pool continued. The projection of the scheduled opening of the pool was now May 2022. In a parallel but unconnected event the Helensburgh pier was C-listed by Historic Environment Scotland.

Much local objection was raised by a planning application to build a Care Home on the site of a former Argyll & Bute depot in Sinclair St. It was the inappropriate scale and size of the building that was at issue. There was sufficient objection for the PPSL Committee of Argyll & Bute Council to order a Public Hearing on the subject later in the year.

Our Vision for Helensburgh study continued and a survey was underway. Monthly beach cleaning continued as did maintenance work on the shrub beds in the Square.

September. Jean's Bothy, the mental health support hub gave a presentation. A Lottery-funded development manager has been appointed. Duchess Woods has been closed to the public due to unsafe trees perhaps prompted by ABC relinquishing its responsibility for the Woods and a lack of maintenance work. It was also confirmed that the HCC would organise the Remembrance Day event. It was also confirmed that the wooden extension of the pier required major repair. A Public Hearing was expected in mid-October on the proposed Care Home construction in Sinclair Street.

October. The Financial Position of the Helensburgh Community Council was solvent. Restricted Funds showed a balance of £1434.60 still to be spent on Colquhoun Square. The Community Council's own funds stood at £2848.76p.

The Police report showed no serious crimes with and low levels of road traffic offences, disorder related offences. The closure of the Logie Baird Bar has resulted in fewer calls of disorder. Ongoing issues are speeding through the square, speeding on the dual carriage way, red light running on West Clyde in the mornings and graffiti.

We received a presentation from the Chamber of Commerce by Vivien Dance.

EKOS, Economic and Social Development Consultants Glasgow, carried out a retail and town survey to find that Helensburgh has an attractive town centre with heritage, the quality of buildings has been rated 7 out of 10. Town is outstanding for its very active voluntary sector. Helensburgh Tree Trust is active in planting trees and has now a notable tree collection in the town.

Vision for Helensburgh. Collection of information open until end of November 2019. A workshop was planned with Environmental Groups of Helensburgh, business & retail groups, Chamber of Commerce, Clubs & Organisations that do something for the public. So far, just under 700 returns have been received.

November 2019– January 2020

November. An ABC budget proposal was comprehensively answered by HCC. However, it was not acknowledged until HCC queried its receipt by ABC. The HCC continued to attempt to recruit Year 5/6 pupils from the local secondary schools as an unofficial youth forum for the HCC. Hermitage Academy was very supportive, Lomond School less so. The HCC made contact with the Glasgow School of Art to participate in our Vision for Helensburgh project. A HCC initiative to start up an Influencers Meeting with the Secondary Schools, Faslane Naval Base, Babcock, Lions Club, Rotary, Round Table to examine a perspective of town improvement was enthusiastically received and would be developed. The initiative developed by the HCC to provide an Innovators' Hub in the town library was now ready to be open. Remembrance Sunday was successful with much appreciated coordination and support.

No meeting held in **December 2019**

January. The Helensburgh Orchestral Society gave a presentation on its work and ambitions. The orchestra has 50 regular players and wants to broaden its support base. It aims to hold 2 concerts per year each of which requires 2/3 months rehearsal.

February - April 2020

February. A presentation was given on the Garelochhead Station Trust by the project co-ordinator Morvain Martin. This is a £350k project of which £117k has already been secured. Fundraising of £7k is required to buy the lease. Care for Veterans is the aim of the Trust.

The Helensburgh Seafront Development Project gave an update from chair David Castello and member Brian Robertson. HSDP had raised funding for a feasibility study that was completed last year. Current intention is for £70/80k partial refurbishment. A&B estimate £1m cost to restore the pier for use by Waverley. The Pier does not generate revenue and receives no income.

Tariq Durrani has been progressing a town-twinning since last meeting and has received a positive letter from the Mayor of Le Taillan-Medoc in Nouvelle Aquitaine Southwestern France expressing interest in twinning with the town.

Waterfront Project. Tender set to be agreed in June.

March. Planning concentrated on the planning application for a new residential care home on the site of the old ABC maintenance yard off Sinclair Street. The difficulty of assessing the application on the drawings that currently exist was highlighted. There is a minimum of available information on the project. Planning group will meet with residents to discuss the application further.

Town Improvement Group reported on the successful first maintenance session on the shrub beds on the Square and our appreciation for the volunteers who continue to support our work wholeheartedly. The first beach clean of the season took place on Saturday 6 April at 10.00 am at the pier.

April. The HCC was now in the throes of lockdown due to the pandemic and conducting its business via Zoom. AB are not using this due to government restrictions on security so contact is now solely via email or telephone.

The Helensburgh – Dumbarton cycleway has surfaced as an issue. A paper which summarised the situation was produced by Christine Woods and indicated a long, drawn-out process for its completion. The principal reasons seemed to be bureaucracy, funding of consultations and procurement of land.

HCC financial accounts for the year end March 2020 were examined and found correct and passed by the HCC at our meeting. They have been forwarded to ABC.

May – July 2020

May. Annual funding received from ABC. Lockdown continued. Tariq Durrani instituted a series of webinars for us to keep in touch with each other and the community. The cycleway was discussed further and the HCC has agreed to concentrate on the section which directly affects the town, namely the stretch between the Academy and the town centre.

Webinars

4 June 2020 Helensburgh Past and Present Stewart Noble

18 June 2020 Vision for Helensburgh Norman McNally

2 July 2020 Strengths Weakness Local Democracy Norman Muir

30 July 2020 Destination Helensburgh Michael Baker

6 Aug 2020 Rotary Movement John MacPherson

20 Aug 2020 Friends Hermitage Park Fiona Baker

3 Sep 2020 Helensburgh New Normal Nigel Millar

24 Sep 2020 JLB Innovation Hub Nigel Millar

June. Communication continued via Zoom. We have taken out an annual subscription of £96 plus VAT and our webinar attendees numbered 50 persons.

ABC have now removed themselves from the stewardship of Duchess Woods and ownership has reverted to Luss Estates. The HCC will take a more active part in proceedings and Roger Ferdinand has agreed to join the management committee of the Woods organisation.

July. The swimming pool has a start date of 10 August and we have established liaison with the project manager. A planning application has been proposed for a pub and office accommodation on a site adjacent to the Morrisons supermarket. The lockdown has closed down much activity within the town.

August – October 2020

August. HCC has formed a liaison with Plastic Free Helensburgh through Sarah Davies. Duchess Woods are seeking to reinstate its position as a Local Nature Reserve.

September. Heron Bros gave a briefing on the pier and the timetable of progress.

October. Xmas lights were now installed and a tree was being sourced. Remembrance Sunday came under threat from COVID. A suggestion from Irina Agostinelli that free parking should be initiated for the Xmas period and our representation on behalf of the town and the rest of Argyll & Bute was agreed by the Council. Town entry signs are in a poor state of maintenance and steps are in hand to replace them.

November 2020 – January 2021

November. The pier project and the cycleway continued to dominate discussion. We were asked to become more aware of recycling and will make it the subject of a webinar. A truncated ceremony took place on Remembrance Sunday.

December. Presentations were given by; Duchess Woods; Community Hall; Community Woodland Group; Heritage Trust.

Webinars

4 Jan 2021 Curating TV Iain Baird

4 Feb 2021 Henry Bell and Comet Stewart Noble

18 Feb 2021 Climate Change Sarah Davies

11 March 2021 Plastic Free Helensburgh/Recycling Irina Agostinelli/ Fiona Macleod

1 April 2021 Ancient Woodlands Protection Audrey Baird

15 April 2021 The Planning System Nigel Millar/Stewart Noble

February – April 2021

February. The cycleway was making slow progress from Dumbarton to Helensburgh and Rhu to Faslane. Planning discussion was started for a Taylor Wimpey housing development of 300 houses on the Helensburgh Golf Course. Traffic was seen as a potential problem with the development. A HCC paper has been written on the repair of the pier. Sarah Davies introduced the concept of a Top-up Tapwater Fountain. The design of the new town entry signs was approved by the HCC.

March. A proposal to celebrate the centenary of the invention of TV by John Logie Baird was introduced and a framework of the necessary organisation was put in place. The roundel marking the John Muir Way became the subject of a relocation study with the future location still to be decided. The Phase 2 of the Waterfront Project was raised as a matter of concern as to the finished state it will be in on completion of the contract. HCC agreed to continue to maintain the shrub beds in Colquhoun Square. The HCC presented proposals for consideration to ABC regarding our empowerment in planning procedures. A third conservation area in Helensburgh has been approved and attracted £1.2m funding.

April. The meeting was taken up with a presentation and discussion on the provision of broadband in the town. Knowledge and information are very hard to come by and Openreach is difficult to make contact with. A long-term problem to be solved. Also discussed was the involvement of town youth in community matters. A survey was conducted by our Youth Forum member Rosie Sumsion.

May 2021

The results of the youth survey were presented and it was agreed to introduce a refocus in the way that HCC conducts its business. There were also shortcomings expressed on the function and conduct of the Community Planning Group which will be addressed. The HCC agreed not to participate in the Argyll Lottery. HCC AGM is now scheduled for Thursday 24 June 2021 under the chair of Cllr Lorna Douglas.

Summary

In presenting the report in this headline fashion it helps to illustrate the variety of interests that the Community Council becomes involved in. I wish to place on record my personal appreciation for the support that the members of the Community Council have given me over this particularly difficult period. We have maintained interests in climate change, the environment, waste disposal and recycling, town planning and its architecture and design, town improvement matters including roads and street lighting, a planning vision for Helensburgh into the future, maintaining community communication using Zoom webinars, and dealing with a wide range of consultations from both local and national government sources. The list spans a wide spectrum under the auspices of the non-political volunteers who serve on the Community Council, whose collective aim is to support the town.

Norman Muir

Convener

17 June 2021