



Helensburgh Community Council

Annual Report 2021-2022

Vale

I start this report by paying tribute to two community councillors whose recent untimely deaths came as a sudden shock and robbed the Community Council of their sound advice and public service experience.

John Tacchi contributed greatly to public life in Argyll & Bute over decades, firstly as an Argyll & Bute councillor and subsequently as a Helensburgh Community Councillor. He was completely involved in community life across a range of interests. He was chairman of the Horticultural Society and a particularly enthusiastic supporter of our rugby club.

Roger Ferdinand died in a swimming accident in Greece. He was a prominent figure in the retail sector of the town and a forthright member of the Chamber of Commerce. He extended his talents and abilities by becoming a Community Councillor for the past four years as our Secretary.

Both men shared a deep affection for the town and had a strong sense of community spirit to make the town a better place. Both embodied the ethos of the volunteer spirit which is a strong component of community life in the town. The actions of volunteers and volunteer groups are instrumental in keeping the town from the borders of decay. These cover a range of diverse activities from community groups and hubs, woodland groups, tree conservation, shrub beds maintenance, and beach cleans.

Annual Review

With the assistance of ZOOM, the HCC succeeded in functioning during the epidemic and its subsequent aftermath. We will continue with our ZOOM experiment, since it allows members of the HCC and the community wider access to meetings. As a result, we were able to pretty well carry out our normal functions and also, we managed to pursue various initiatives on behalf of the community. Our series of webinars via ZOOM, orchestrated by Tariq Durrani and covering a wide field of topics continued to be a success and also engaged the community. We also finally brought to realisation an exhibition titled; 'Visions for Helensburgh' which had been delayed by the COVID epidemic.

Visions for Helensburgh. Norman McNally and his team brought together a greatly appreciated display inclusive of most of the community organisations and groups within the town. There was widespread interest and appreciation from the community and the

exhibition was deemed as success. The themes discussed included the environment, new development, health and well-being, the Navy and community assets. The community gave us clear indications of their views and expectations which formed the basis of the statistical analysis of the event. It presented a comprehensive picture of community priorities and expectations. The subject of a waterfront strategy attracted significant interest, ranging from Craigendoran through to Kidston Point. But the rejuvenation of the pier to become usable again and the 'grey area' of phase 2 of the waterfront development were the subjects of most debate at the exhibition.

The Pier. The concept and proposal for the pier was very well received and there were no negative comments from the community. A small sub-committee has been formed involving our Vice Convener Peter Brown, the Visions coordinator Norman McNally and Maurice Corry, now Provost of Argyll & Bute, along with Tim Henderson a maritime civil engineer. The aim is to make the pier functional and commercially viable by extending it into deeper water to attract vessels the size of the Waverley and perhaps smaller cruise ships to earn revenue through berthing fees etc. Initial reaction has been positive and supportive. We now need to press on with technical issues and design concepts and a business case.

War Memorial Garden Survey. The HCC conducted a survey of the Memorial Garden in Hermitage Park which had fallen into neglect and was a poor advertisement for the town. Since the survey, tentative correction measures are taking shape to improve the situation but it will take a concerted effort from the community to restore the garden to its former status as a credit to the town.

Litter Bin Survey. In conjunction with Plastic Free Helensburgh, the HCC recently conducted a survey of litter bins in the town principally concerning their inadequate function and appearance. Litter is a source of concern not only from a hygiene perspective but also it presents a lasting unfavourable impression of the town to visitors particularly tourists. On the waterfront it is a particularly bad problem and encourages seagulls to become more of a nuisance than they normally are. We hope to proceed with remedial action on the survey in conjunction with Argyll & Bute.

The 'Grey Area'. This area of the waterfront development takes its uninspiring name from the current prediction that the area enclosing the current carpark and the prospective demolition of the old swimming pool will be left with a cover of Grade 1 hard core. This is in the absence of any planning consideration for the space apart from the Council pursuing a retail option. The HCC has been seeking discussion with Argyll & Bute on the future of the space and the statistical results from the Visions for Helensburgh exhibition will allow us to reflect the firm views of the community. We are pursuing progress on this issue as a matter of urgency. This is in line with Scottish Government policy under the Community Empowerment Act of 2015 which allows communities greater oversight on decisions that matter to them.

Helensburgh Leisure Centre. The construction of the new swimming pool and leisure centre is nearing completion and handover. The contractors, Heron Bros, have attended to the construction phase extremely well and the project manager kept the community informed of progress. The site was maintained in a clean and tidy condition and the contractors kept very well to the schedule. The building occupies a commanding area of the waterfront and is an

impressive structure which will be greatly appreciated by the community and outlying areas in the future.

Problem Areas

Decay. Maintenance of the infrastructure of the town is a constant element of the work that the Community Council is engaged in. Small observations of decay begin to mount up to noticeable issues which can attract the observations of the community and visitors alike. It is therefore important that particular emphasis is placed on a maintenance programme which maintains the standards and functions of the town estate. Examples include, bent cycle stands hit by incompetent drivers; overflowing litter bins caused by inadequate volume and an unsuitable collection regime; the inappropriate procurement of street lighting equipment in which spare parts are difficult to source, leading to long lead times for repair; maintenance and cleanliness of seating benches in the square; CHORD road/pavement repair in the town centre; etc. Outside the town boundary, the cycle track over the hill to the Arden roundabout has potholes and overhanging vegetation presenting hazards to cyclists.

A maintenance schedule for the multi-million CHORD project lies dormant and leads to future concerns for the maintenance of the other multi-million investments in the town, the new Leisure Centre and the Lottery investment in Hermitage Park. It is appreciated that budgetary considerations are very much to the fore in this age of austerity. But it is difficult to reconcile this argument with the community's knowledge that a great deal of council tax is collected from the town without appreciable benefit to the maintenance of local services.

Communication and Engagement. The erratic communication and engagement between the Community Council and Argyll & Bute remains an issue. Anecdotally, this is explained by the volume of communication traffic that Argyll & Bute staff have to deal with. However, the issue is also expressed widely within the community and creates a reputational damage which lingers. The solution lies in a conscious effort to be more pro-active and engaged with the Community Council and treat it as a partner in common cause, rather than an adversary to be treated with suspicion. In this regard, we congratulate the recently elected Argyll & Bute Councillors for the Helensburgh and Lomond area and look forward to future engagement and working together.

Consultation Processes. Like other community councils we are sometimes inundated by consultations on a wide variety of subjects. Responses in good faith are barely acknowledged and any collective information that is gathered is not shared, nor is there any end solution of the consultation process made known. This leads to a less than motivated approach from the public and a diminution of the consultation aims and ambitions. The consultation process requires examination and improvement.

Summary

The Community Council faces a local election in October when all twenty councillor posts will be up for election or re-election. As the serving Convener, I should like to pay tribute to all my colleagues who have supported the community over a number of years and have represented the interests of the community during the stresses and strains of the pandemic. On a personal

note, I have valued greatly the support given to me and the dedication of service they have given to the town. They represent a cross-section of the town, both male and female, serving a common aim of making the town a better place. They are of course volunteers and have a non-political affiliation.

We are constantly on the lookout for councillors who reflect all sectors of the community, from retailers to the young professionals living in the town, including Naval personnel. We also try to engage with the youth of the town to participate in community matters and a notable example of this was Rosie Sumsion a former Hermitage Academy pupil who gave us valuable service and insight on the youth scene in the town, while still at school.

With the results of the Visions exhibition we have a clear direction from the community input on planning for the future. The exhibition also indicated that the Navy was now very much part of the town and Helensburgh was categorised as a 'Naval' town by respondents to our exhibition survey.

We continue to be blessed with a thriving retail sector and our restaurant and café scene continues to gain prominence. Voluntary groups ranging from youngsters in Fun First, the Community Hub, to senior citizens in Grey Matters – Active Aging, do sterling work in support of the town. Our environmental interest lies in the two principal woodlands organisations, the Community Woodlands Group and Duchess Woods and also our Tree Trust who continue to nurture trees on the streets. We have also established liaison with Plastic Free Helensburgh and collaborated with them on several environmental projects. This is not to forget our volunteers who turn out for beach cleans and shrub bed maintenance in Colquhoun Square.

It is not too early to raise the focus on the centenary of the invention of TV by John Logie Baird which will take place in 2025/26. His invention was a major world achievement and is likely to attract considerable attention to the town. A small planning group has been formed to anticipate the event and includes the grandson of JLB, Iain Baird. If the expected influx of tourists and visitors is realised, it is vital for the reputation of the town that the maintenance of our town infrastructure is treated with increasing attention and priority from now until the centenary celebrations.

It has been a year bedevilled by post-epidemic and austerity issues which have to be faced and overcome. The Community Council remains optimistic that the town will survive and prosper but it needs positive attitudes and the willingness of everyone to participate. We shall do all we can to encourage a more pro-active relationship with Argyll & Bute Council to improve communication and engagement between us. In this way we can combine our abilities and energies to benefit the town and local areas and continue to make a positive contribution to local society.

Norman Muir

Convener

Helensburgh Community Council June 2022