



Helensburgh Community Council

Annual Report 2022-2023

Acknowledgement

A great number of members of the community support the town in a variety of ways, none more so than Stewart Noble the Community Council Treasurer. Under the rules of the game he has to demit office having completed slightly more than eight years in post. In addition to his function as treasurer he has been a stalwart member of the Heritage Trust for many years and is a notable historian in his own right. He continues to lead tourist parties around the area and remains on the planning committee for the John Logie Baird centenary event which takes place in 2025/2026. He continues as a community councillor, but his financial management and expertise over the period was greatly appreciated and is formally recognised.

General

An annual review of the work of the HCC reveals the wide scope of our interests in support of the community. Much has happened in the intervening period from our last AGM in June last year to the present. In many instances it represents a continuation of action yet to be resolved, but it is perseverance that prevails in local government, not dynamic energy.

We are also extremely fortunate in having a full complement of 20 members serving on the HCC since our local elections in October 2022. We are a fine mix of professional and experienced individuals who bring considerable expertise and knowledge to bear in benefiting the town. We maintain close links with the various support agencies and voluntary groups who support the social fabric of the town and lend assistance when required. Because of their diverse and broad-ranging interests, in addition to the work of the HCC, our community councillors have an embracing knowledge of the underlying aims and ambitions of the community.

There are limits of course. Lack of funding and resources bedevil both Argyll & Bute Council and ourselves in maintaining the infrastructure of the town to a reasonable standard. There are also aspects outside our control which the public could improve with self-education on such as, disposal of litter and dog refuse. Nevertheless, we need to persevere in maintaining standards in the town if we wish to capitalise on attracting visitors and tourists to enjoy our amenities.

Major Projections

There are two major items foreseen in the future which will impact the town. The first is the outcome of discussions on the Waterfront development currently underway. The HCC ran an engagement programme with the community from 2019, culminating in a two-day public exhibition in March 2022, called Visions for Helensburgh, in which the community expressed

their wishes. The details and data are on our website. Argyll & Bute Council have also recently commissioned a commercial consultation along similar lines. As the situation develops it is worthwhile emphasising that any development in the centre of Helensburgh has got to be the best solution that will enhance the town for the future, particularly for our young families and our youth. We should not have to bear the consequences of any overbearing agenda on financial gain which we will have to live with for many years. Luckily, Peter Brown our Vice Convener and Norman McNally have a wealth of experience and knowledge to make sure that the interests of the town are paramount.

The second project is the Taylor Wimpey golf course housing development of circa 300 homes. This is obviously a major undertaking and we wish it well. There are evident problems of the potential disturbance of peatlands during construction, but equally, thought has to be given to the impact of a considerable influx of inhabitants who will require the service support of schools, medical services and access to convenient shopping. It is hoped that due consideration is given to these matters as the project proceeds.

Community Clubs and Societies Event

In March, in conjunction with the Rotary Club, we held a day-long exhibition for the local sports clubs and societies to advertise the varied talent and expertise they offer to the community. The event was organised by Elizabeth Lambert in the Hermitage Academy with the kind permission of the Headmaster and was very well received by the strong public attendance at the exhibition.

Environment

We have formed a strong alliance with a voluntary environment group called Plastic Free Helensburgh. Several of our community councillors are members and we seek common cause in trying to reduce the amount of plastic and marine detritus that pollutes our coastline. It is a thankless task but authorities are beginning to sit up and take notice, so hope springs eternal.

Beach Cleans

The HCC has been organising routine beach cleans for a number of years and the evidence of our effectiveness is apparent. It presents the town in a favourable light to our visitors. We are deeply indebted to our community volunteers who regularly support us and without the support of our local farmer Davie Howie and his tractor to do the heavy lifting, we would be disadvantaged.

Shrub Beds in the Square

The HCC continues to maintain the shrub beds in Colquhoun Square and we rely again on our marvellous volunteers to help us. It is a work in progress because much of the original planting did not work in the beds. But we are getting to a more colourful and settled horticultural arrangement. Our collective appreciation goes to Roger Clarke for his efforts.

Much of our work goes unheralded and unsung but as a flavour here are the more prominent initiatives.

McColl Shop at Churchill closure

The shop operated under the stewardship of Morrisons and its closure for commercial reasons left the local community without a convenience store in the area. Despite our best efforts under the direction of Polly Jones and driven by our young co-opted member, Taylor Cameron, - running a petition, organising a public awareness event at the main Morrisons store in town and direct correspondence with the head office of Morrisons management, we were unsuccessful in overturning the decision. Further developments on the future of the shop are awaited.

The Pier

The completion of the leisure centre threw into stark contrast a multi-million infrastructure build adjacent to a rundown historic pier in need of care and attention. At our Visions for Helensburgh exhibition in March 2022 there was unanimous support for remedial action to be undertaken to make the pier a functioning entity for marine traffic and the possible economic benefits that could result. We are now carefully examining the situation. It is a work in progress and there is no good reason not to re-vitalise this potential asset for the town.

Litter Bins

In July/August 2021 in conjunction with Plastic Free Helensburgh we conducted a survey of the disposition and functionality of litter bins in the town. The disposal of litter especially during the summer months is a continuing problem as is the poor design and mechanical breakdown of the 'designer' stainless steel bins deployed in the CHORD project. Hopefully, we see an end to the problem with high capacity replacement bins procured by Argyll & Bute Council and the removal of all broken down steel bins. We are grateful for the Council's support in this matter.

Retail Support

We have a number of retailers serving on the Community Council and it seemed sensible to employ their expertise in getting to know the retail scene in the town and support their aims and ambitions. We held our first meeting in March this year and it was warmly received to the extent that the retailers suggested holding another. This will take place in June the day before our AGM.

Cycleway

We maintain a close interest in the project which procedurally has taken and will take many years to complete. The project officer gave the HCC an update on progress which remains slow. Cardross Community Council are particularly keen on injecting some impetus to proceedings and we shall be engaging with them shortly to examine how best to support the continuation of the project.

Cruise Ship Interest

A recent event which may augur well for the future was the berthing of a small cruise ship at the Marina. Cameron Foy fronted up HCC interest in this potential development which may point to a further avenue of tourist interest.

Possible Twinning Arrangement

Tariq Durrani and Nigel Millar fronted up a visit by a delegation from the French town of Le Taillan-Medoc in response to an approach for possible twinning by them. The delegation were looked after very hospitably and enjoyed their visit. A letter of appreciation has been received from Le Tallian for the hospitality and friendliness extended to them and the formal examination of the twinning process will continue.

Music in the Square

It has long been our aim to bring some form of music onto the square and beyond in the town for the enjoyment of the public in good weather. Helensburgh has a wealth of music talent especially within the school community and it would be great for young musicians to gain public recognition. Nigel and Tariq have also fronted this development. In conjunction with the organisational skills of Elizabeth Lambert they have brought a 'Helensburgh's Got Talent' event at Hermitage Academy to continue this aim. Post-script - the event was well attended and received by both performers and audience.

Summary

It has been a delight to welcome a full complement of volunteers to the HCC and to acknowledge the range and diversity of skills they bring in support. Each one has links to other interests, e.g. our secretary Sarah Davies is a member of Friends of Hermitage Park, among others. It serves to illustrate that collectively we have a connection to the community that allows us to represent with confidence the views of the community we serve.

We have a new website courtesy of Jonathan Meuli, Stewart Steel and Cameron Foy and we find that more individuals are making contact through this medium for help and advice. We shall continue to utilise this facility for the passage of information.

We are more than fortunate to have a steady stream of community volunteers helping with litter, beach cleans and the shrub beds in the square and it is this sense of engagement that we would encourage within the community to take an interest in town business and come forward with suggestions and advice on how to make the town better. We should be in charge of our own destiny and not rely on anyone else to decide our future.

We have broken new ground in other areas. The forum for discussion on the vitally important aspect of ensuring that our retail scene remains alive and vibrant is an indication of how these issues can become raised to public awareness and examined in detail. This was also evident in the Visions for Helensburgh exhibition that enabled the public to become informed and as a result become full participants in the process. Much more can be done on similar issues of concern in the town.

I shall finish this report by thanking most sincerely all members of the Helensburgh Community Council for their support and commitment to the town which continues to be our collective priority.

Norman Muir

Convener Helensburgh Community Council 26 June 2023