

John McLuckie 0:19

Welcome to this episode of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning podcast. My name is John McLuckie, Partnerships Lead for Community Planning in Argyll and Bute, and following the recent approval of the Community Planning Partnership Climate Change Strategy, joining me today is the person who wrote the strategy, Climate Change Project Manager Andy Macpherson. Andy, welcome to the podcast.

Andy Macpherson 0:40

Hi, John. Thanks very much for having me along. Thank you.

John McLuckie 0:43

Thank you. So could I just start by asking you what your role involves as Climate Change Project Manager and how it links to community planning?

Andy Macpherson 0:52

Certainly, yeah. You introduced me as the guy who wrote the Climate Change Strategy, and I think that's quite an important point. I did the the actual writing down of it, but it's very much gathering the views from as many people and organisations that I possibly could. It's quite a big one. Argyll and Bute is a big place. There's an awful lot to cover and so I was very keen to try to get a good understanding of what we're trying to achieve within the strategy. And thinking about what can we focus on as much as possible, that is within the ability of the Community Planning Partnership to do something about either by controlling or seeking to influence. There's some things you can't change, and thinking about things that are the right sort of scale as well for the CPP to look at.

John McLuckie 1:41

Yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah. So just maybe taking it back a little bit before that. What's your background in climate change and how did you come into this post?

Andy Macpherson 1:51

I've been working in the environment sector most of my life and the last few years I was actually doing projects on the ground, mostly in more disadvantaged areas in the central belt. But having moved to Argyll myself, just coming up for five years ago now, I was thinking this is something that I know I've got a bit of an understanding on. I've done a lot of strategy and policy work in the past, but also I felt as though rather than doing one

for a single organisation, to try to develop a strategy for the partnership that the CPP represents is actually a really exciting opportunity, because I've been doing a lot of partnership projects for projects on the ground and then to actually bring that together with the strategy element that I was used to from working for single big organisations, but thinking about what these organisations can do jointly, I just thought this is a really exciting challenge and those words have come back and haunted me quite a few times over the last 18 months.

John McLuckie 3:00

I think that there's quite a lot for us to discuss in this episode in terms of climate change and its links to community planning, but if you could just give an overview of why climate change is so important to community planning in Argyll and Bute and maybe also in terms of the new Outcomes Improvement Plan.

Andy Macpherson 3:17

Yeah, I think just to start out with, there's a lot of noise at the moment around whether net zero is still a thing. And when you've got the whole of the United States now wanting to sort of turn its back on the climate change agenda and more political parties in the UK as well, starting to question our commitment to that, that represents quite a change from the fact that there used to be unanimous agreement across parties on this. So for me it's that thing about thinking there are significant climate challenges facing Argyll and all the stuff around rising sea levels because we're such a coastal region, heavier rainfall, longer, drier summers. Not everyone will believe that after the miserable summer last summer, but when you look at the wildfire risk that we've got at the moment when it's we're still in spring, but above all, the fact that every one of those climate change threats then gets magnified because of Argyll's, geography and economy.

Because all of our transport links and communications links are all so stretched and all very, very vulnerable, we've got a lot of isolated rural communities. We've got an ageing population, we've got reliance on a few key industries and a lot of the wealth that we produce leaves the region rather than staying in it and climate change just acts as a multiplier for all of those things.

And so as much as looking at the actual climate change impacts themselves is looking at the particular way that they affect Argyll and I think ferries is a great example of that. We use so many ferries in Argyll every time that you have a high wind event or something like that, you feel impacts that a more kind of mainland or metropolitan area wouldn't be experiencing.

So that's a few of the key challenges that struck me when I started in the job.

John McLuckie 5:27

Yeah, yeah. I'm just thinking back, climate change has been a topic for discussion in community planning over a number of years, and you know, you mentioned there politically things have shifted within that period, and important as well you're mentioning the kind of impacts.

Storm Eowyn being an example of that and you know the roads experiencing landslides, we're aware of that only too well across the whole of Argyll and Bute. So just thinking about the strategy that was approved recently for the Community Planning Partnership, what does the strategy actually cover, what's some of the highlights from the strategy if you like?

Andy Macpherson 6:02

Yeah. Part of it was to just get a sense of what are those overall climate trends for the region and then just thinking about who are the main organisations in the Community Planning Partnership? What are their interests? What are they already doing in this field? So then I did quite a lot of juggling of spreadsheets and working through the climate change reports that a lot of these organisations already produce, plus all of the transport strategies, economic strategies, basically every strategy I could lay my hands on for organisations operating in or around Argyll. Trying to find out what was happening, where there was progress, which things were most impacted and which were most affected. And then at UK level, the UK Climate Change Committee does its national level climate change risk assessment for Scotland. And gradually just work to bring these two together and used some of the groups within the CPP to just get a sense of what's your experience been of these, do these impacts resonate with you and how would you rank them and through all of this exercise basically just emerged a position of thinking, these are the six sort of key areas for action, that lie within the remit of all of the various organisations operating in the CPP, such that these are the things that are most impacted by and that you have an ability to do stuff about and crucially, that sometimes that can be that they can have a remit to do things individually, but where they could achieve more by doing things jointly.

John McLuckie 7:49

Right, right. OK.

And can I ask what those six areas are to just put you in the spot a little bit?

Andy Macpherson 7:58

You certainly can, Yeah.

They were, and this is in no specific order here.

To seek to influence policy, whether that's regional or national level, because quite often you find that various policies, initiatives that work well in the central belt or something like that, by the time they filter through to some of the more remote parts of Argyll, they don't always seem to work quite as well, or they can have sort of unintended consequences, so sometimes it can be things around how can those work better?

Stuff around skills, procurement and supply chain, and this is a really big one.

Because you know, some people say that one of Argyll's best exports is its young people, and quite often you find that we've got a lot of our young people leaving because they see that opportunities

lie elsewhere, because that's where the jobs are. And so, equally, sometimes it's difficult to get things, especially by the time you get to some of the islands where the costs of some items or the cost of doing things have soared astronomically, and the time scale involved as well.

All of these things in turn are then impacted by climate change. So if you have any disruption to roads, ferry services or whatever, the knock on effects of those are massive.

But also the more that you can bring these things locally, the more ability you have there to generate wealth locally and to address some of the elements of climate change that are actually most adversely affecting the area. And it's funny where I hadn't expected to be getting involved in a sort of an economic strategy and yet the crossovers with a lot of the economic development strategies and so on are really striking in terms of the harmony there between saying this is the way we want to develop Argyll's economy and also that's a good way to tackle climate change.

Risk assessment is a big one to actually know what are the problems facing us out there. We have risk assessment in all kinds of shapes and forms, we do it all the time without even thinking about it, and sometimes it's a way of kind of bringing those things together.

I've got a big one for kind of cross cutting or other things because these issues are so interlinked, but the one that has really risen to prominence, especially since Storm Eowyn, has been around resilience and carbon literacy, and in particular that thing about resilience. Using that example of Eowyn where I live just outside Dunoon, the power's off for a couple of hours. Just down the road, it was five days. No power, no telecoms, no water. So you know when we're talking about resilience here, quite often it's orders of magnitude greater that are required compared to if you might get a brief disruption of service in a sort of an urban area or something like that, and also critically to me it's something that we can do something about, we can all do more about that. It is not something to be taken for granted because quite often a lot of communities and households around Argyll are already living on their resilience. There's not really any left in the tank, so that whole thing about how we can sort of build capacity there.

And finally, the thing is that you can't argue with it. You may or may not think that climate change is important, and you may think that, yes, maybe it's there, but in the scheme of things, the state of the economy, of our roads or housing or well-being or something like that are more important, but resilience is something that to me it seems there's no arguing with so long as we're not going down the road too much of saying it's everybody's job to become more resilient to climate change, as distinct to we should all be in this together.

So those are those those priority areas and I think I've laboured the one on resilience quite a lot because it has just come across so much as this is the thing where people really want to do more and there's a real appetite as well. I found a lot of communities they want to do more and they want to be able to do more, and so trying to work out good ways of doing that, what's the right ways and what are the right things to look for.

John McLuckie 12:37

Yeah. It's really interesting and sort of picking up a lot from the pillars, just how much there's interlinkages with the three priority outcomes in the new outcomes improvement plan as well as

what each individual organisation might be responsible or have a sort of interest in being involved in.

Andy Macpherson 12:56

Yeah, yeah. There's a really nice simplicity, I think to having just three outcomes for community planning and all the rest of it. It's such a huge, big field and you can get lost in the complexity. And you know, a guiding principle that I've had throughout is to try to keep this simple or to maybe try to make it simple and so for me, it's this thing about the CPP have identified those three priority outcomes around housing, transport infrastructure and community well-being. Every one of these is impacted by climate change in multiple ways and has massive impacts as well on the contribution that we make to climate change through our carbon emissions.

I think also that when I was saying the thing about resilience and the way that climate change might not matter to everyone, it reminds me of a meeting that I had before I was in this job where I was doing a piece of work around climate change, and so and so on climate change said, I'm not saying it's not important, but it's not urgent.

And I don't know whether that same person would be saying that now, as we're feeling the impacts kind of bite more but also in terms of when you look at the quality and availability of housing across Argyll, the condition of some of our transport links and the difficulty of getting from A to B, the overall well-being, especially given our age structure and difficulties with access to healthcare and things like that, it's quite easy to say there in the light of those three priorities, it might be easy to say, yeah, climate change is important, but these things there's clearly urgency and immediacy around all of those. And to me it's kind of like saying, yeah, these are some of the ways in which we feel the impacts of climate change, and these are some of the ways in which we want to make sure that our action around climate change can try to support what we're doing to make those outcomes, to get improvements in those. So to me, it's not an either or, it's very much about those are the ways that our priorities in the CPP have been defined and cast.

And so it's like bringing climate change into that, recognising the links with it and also it's really interesting because there was a time when it used to be called environment versus jobs, you know or economic growth versus climate change or something like that, and yet very much what we're seeing here is that there are lots of opportunities for economic growth from green jobs, green skills across Argyll and making more use of our natural resources, in terms of thinking about care for the environment and reducing both our carbon emissions and our vulnerability to climate change.

And so it's where you actually start to see some kind of harmonious circles forming and getting away from what's at one point, people might have called some of the wicked problems facing Argyll's economy or something like that to actually thinking, yeah, there are some more sort of virtuous circles emerging from there instead.

That's much easier to say than it is to achieve and the big thing for me now is that it's one thing to develop a strategy with six priority areas for action, but when it comes to developing an action plan for that, which is my focus for the rest of the time that I'm in post, getting people to agree, A on

what needs to be done, and B who needs to do it is quite often the bit now where you've gone from talking about the desirability of something to who's actually going to step up and do it.

And so that's where I anticipate calling upon some of the structures in the Community Planning Partnership, sometimes to just say, yes, this group might sometimes need to make a judgement on something and saying yes, we do need to take action on that, yes, we do have to prioritise this over that and to add to the many other decisions that those various bodies are called upon to make at various times. So I'm very grateful that the CPP Management Committee have said, yeah, we can do that. We can review that action plan, and if we see it being short in some areas, that's where the CPP management Committee then can use the seniority of the people on those groups to say we need more action in this particular area.

John McLuckie 17:58

Mm hmm, mm hmm. There's so much work going on and I guess within the time frame of yourself being project manager, now that the strategy's approved, you're talking about actions there and actions are very much the focus now for the next few months.

I'm interested to find out where people can go to look at the strategy now that it's been approved, and how can people stay up to date with the actions as they're kind of progressed and formed?

Andy Macpherson 18:21

Because it's a project funded and led by the Community Planning Partnership, that's the proper home for it. I'm employed by Argyll Countryside Trust, so my e-mail is andy@act-now.org.uk. I do have the strategy documents on the ACT website as well, but the proper home for them and the formal home is the CPP website.

I do welcome people contacting me and in particular, to look at that whole thing about what should be the priority actions, who should lead on them, and those are the sort of two questions that I've been going around and asking the various community planning groups and others, but also in terms of one of the things that the CPP Management Committee have asked me to do, is to have that special focus on resilience and as an action for me, to support communities developing their own community-level resilience plans and working quite closely with the Council's resilience team on that. So again, that's one of the things there and it's very much for me to say, yeah, let me know and let's sort out a time to meet and where we can find what the right things to do are.

But also from the fact that the CPP does just represent such a wide umbrella of people and organisations working across Argyll. So it's been really great to draw upon that and it's interesting to note that the Improvement Service viewed the way that the CPP has collaborated on the climate change work as a good example of a Community Planning Partnership actually doing partnership work together and also on regional climate change projects, it's been held up as a good model for others to use. There's no single model across the UK for them, so that's something that is good to be part of that.

And I think finally, when it looks at trying to create legacy action too, that you can be looking at what various organisations can do to try to embed climate action in their new kind of business as usual, but also when it comes to looking at actions that fall between all of those. And so one of the things the CPP has asked me to look at is something like a lottery-type bid to inform some legacy work for taking forward more of that joint and partnership work over and above what they can achieve individually.

John McLuckie 21:17

Excellent.

I think it's important to reinforce the point that you've been speaking to the four Area Community Planning Groups in Argyll and Bute as well as individual organisations that can make contact with you, and many communities are developing things like Local Place Plans as well at the moment, so all that sort of conversation would tie in with a climate change and perhaps resilience element as well. So, yeah, fantastic.

Thanks very much Andy, thanks a lot for your time for this episode of the podcast, thank you very much for taking part.

Andy Macpherson 21:45

That's great, thanks very much.