

## Item 6: Convener's Report for the period June 2023 to June 2026

I would like to start by acknowledging the support Police Scotland, Ministry of Defence Police and Commander Peter Noblett, HMNB Clyde give to our Community Council, not only for their attendance at our meetings where they provide detailed reports, but also for their presence and support throughout the year.

I would also like to recognise the unsung but dedicated group of volunteer beach cleaners who regularly comb the foreshore of Rhu and Shandon picking up litter and plastic waste. This group, led by Lynda Baylem and supported by Plastic Free Helensburgh, do a fantastic job for our community and the environment. Anyone wishing to volunteer will be made most welcome, please contact Lynda, her contact details are on our website.

### **Play Park Funding**

In November 2023 Rhu Play Park was allocated £50,000 priority funding for an upgrade of the existing facilities and guidance was received from Hugh O'Neil, Argyll & Bute Council on how the money should be spent. We will consult and fully engage with Play Park mothers who are most involved and know what is needed and we are confident this will lead to the appropriate development of the park.

### **Proposal to revise Scottish Parliament Boundaries**

Last year notice was received that Boundaries Scotland is making recommendations for the boundaries and names for constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament. This review and report to Scottish Ministers must be submitted by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025 and recommendations accepted will be implemented May 2026.

The proposal is to redraw the boundary between Rhu and Helensburgh and for Helensburgh to join Dumbarton to form a new constituency. The rest of Lomond North will move into the constituency of Argyll & Bute. This proposal throws up many difficulties for our residents such as schools and education and the availability of political representation when needed.

In December 23 Jean Cook, R&SCC; George Freeman, Garelochhead, Dame Jackie Bailie MSP and many others gave evidence to this enquiry held in Clydebank. All speakers were against the proposed redrawn boundaries. We have also submitted a formal objection, which can be viewed on our website and await the outcome.

### **Local Place Plans**

In March last year we were notified about forthcoming participation in developing Place Plans for our community. Place Plans are important as once in place they are considered as 'material considerations' in planning applications, giving the community more control over local matters.

Members agreed we should engage in a process of consultation with residents to establish their views and priorities which would produce the basis for either a Community Action Plan or Local Place Plan. Thomas Baylem volunteered to lead but thereafter reported he had to take an extended break from Community Council business, returning in July 2024. It was agreed to pause work on this project until Thomas can return.

Item 6: Convener's Report for the period June 2023 to June 2026

### **Cycle Path Consultation – Community Engagement Stage 3**

The first meeting of this Active Travel project was on 27 June 2023, its aims is to create a sustainable and improved transportation system as an alternative to motorised transport by developing a new walking, wheeling, and cycling route from Helensburgh to Garelochhead. This is ongoing and Thomas Baylem is again our representative on this project.

### **Forestry & Timber Haulage**

Gresham House received a Preparatory Grant to explore an alternative timber transport route to Pier and Station Roads and negotiations have been ongoing for some considerable time. Unconfirmed reports indicated the various parties have been unable to reach agreement on access so there is no pathway to apply for a Scottish Timber Transport Scheme (STTS) Grant to build an alternative route to join with the A818. However, further information suggests these negotiations are in fact not concluded.

We agreed to wait until these matters were fully exhausted and we will honour that commitment however it must be recognised we have a duty to serve our community. In the meantime, we will hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

The afforestation and development of Letrault & Stuckenduff as a commercial forest continues to afflict our community despite numerous attempts by the Community Council to address its negative impacts with the industry and regulator Scottish Forestry.

This project already attracted two enforcement notices with one designed to mitigate damage being done to a recorded archaeological site and there is evidence peat soil, more than 0.5m deep, has been planted with Sitka Spruce.

Commercial felling has resulted in polluted burns, again to such an extent that SEPA had to issue an improvement order and locked gates, removing public access to our hillside, remain despite pedestrian access being promised and the disappearance of protected birds from their breeding grounds treated simply as a mystery.

We are exhausted trying to tackle the lack of proper consultation and engagement where this industry consumes huge sums of taxpayers' money while our taxpaying community is being treated with contempt.

After almost 2 years the Torr Wood Forest Management Plan, was recently delivered by Scottish Forestry (SF) as a *fait accompli*. SF and the landowner had promised that after the site meeting in 2022, attended by 29 representatives of the community including our MSP Jackie Ballie and a ward councillor, that they would produce a second management plan for community consultation. The action taken by the regulator circumvents the promised community engagement which is not the way Government should discharge their duty.

Therefore, we have submitted letters of complaint to Scottish Forestry and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Government Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands setting out comprehensively the negative impacts that bedevil our community including disenfranchisement and exclusion from meaningful engagement and inclusion in environmental and forestry matters, the full details of which can be seen on our website

## Item 6: Convener's Report for the period June 2023 to June 2026

### Planning

Planning matters dominate much of our time and effort as a Community Council and this year our Planning Group are again due much credit for all the hard work they have put in. There are three significant planning applications yet to be fully resolved.

**The Blairvadach site** is listed as a development zone in the Local Development Plan 2 and when so allocated, it is effectively giving it planning permission in principle for 164 houses, in addition to the 34 already approved. The site was also subject to a Tree Preservation Order which, according to planners, was solely put in place to protect the trees from removal while any consideration for the housing proposal was considered. Once planning permission is granted the removal of trees protected by the TPO can be negated, allowing their felling and removal.

The immediate concerns of residents involved the likelihood of increased water runoff from the land due to the removal of trees which could lead to major flooding in the area. With the amount of increased rainfall this year it didn't take long for extensive flooding to take place in areas which had never flooded before, but as many had feared and predicted.

On 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 we wrote letters to Argyll & Bute Council, Dame Jackie Baillie MSP, SEPA, Scottish Forestry and local Councillors outlining these matters which included photographs of excessive flooding in burns, on long stretches of footpaths, on steps and on roads.

This failure to protect the infrastructure and environment has left many residents feeling betrayed by the authorities. Efforts are being made by the Community Council to start reviewing woodland areas and record and map trees protected by a TPO and identify other trees in areas where a TPO would be appropriate and suitable for similar protection.

To finish on a more positive note, a very impressive conversion into flats has taken place on the main house at Blairvadach.

**The Battery Energy Storage Site** application proposes the creation of a BESS which would occupy about 1.5 acres of land between Ardencaple Farm and the railway line. An initial meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 run by the agent and developer was an ill prepared event and justifiably given a hard time. Since then, further meetings have been held by the agent which we attended. Consequently, we have submitted a detailed objection to this development which can be seen on our website. Councillor Mark Irvine has indicated that because of the number of objections, the application will go before the PPSCL.

### Luss Estates 10-year Development Plan

**This** included notice that Luss Estates (LE) are proposing to develop housing on the Empress Fields, an area which lies between Ardencaple Hotel and Rhu Road Higher. LE hope to have the Green Belt status this area currently holds, by virtue of Local Development Plan 2, removed. Given LDP2 is currently in force, the Green Belt status remains, so this matter is safe for the present. None the less R&SCC has submitted an objection to this proposal in the Luss Estates consultation process, a copy of which is on our website.

It appears LE can only achieve their objective via a similar proposal submitted in the next LDP3 process. To strengthen the protection of this Green Belt status would require submitting a request

## Item 6: Convener's Report for the period June 2023 to June 2026

this area be designated as an Open Space Protected Area (OSPA). R&SCC will monitor this situation and act appropriately if required.

### **Christmas Tree Lights Turn-On Event**

Many thanks to all who helped with this event at Rhu village green and especially the pupils from Rhu Primary School who successfully carried out the turn-on. It was great to see such a very good turnout and so many happy people, especially the kids.

Given the previous year's success it was difficult to imagine it could be bettered. However, that was before the introduction of a pop-up stage with fantastic light effects, an excellent DJ providing music, singing, disco dancing and prizes and a Santa's Grotto where Santa was kept extremely busy, handing out presents to lots of happy children. On top of all that, who would have believed that a donkey turned up wearing a Santa hat and it started snowing - this was a recipe for an extraordinary successful night.

The church was delighted to be involved and distributed 160 cups of hot chocolate, receiving excellent Church Tower donations as was the school whose fundraising stall did very well. There were also Santa's dancing elves and very talented professional singers to entertain the crowd, Hog Roast food stall, candy floss stall, tombola stands and a children's carousel.

Feedback from the community confirmed it had been a super evening which had provided a tremendous sense of community spirit, leaving many families in a great Christmas mood.

Once again, the co-coordinator of this entire event was then Community Councillor Alistair Moore who worked tirelessly for many weeks to ensure its successful outcome. Congratulations to Alistair, not just for organising a great Christmas event, but also providing the opportunity to raise money for several local community organisations.

### **Community Council Membership and the way forward**

Last year I reported that our membership fell to 8, the bare minimum for our Community Council to continue. We subsequently increased our membership to 10 however only 60% of members managed to attend meetings. Within the last few months, we have lost Jim Duncan, Laura Freeland and Alistair Moore who have decided to stand down. Can I take this opportunity to thank them all personally and on behalf of the Community Council for the support, dedication and hard work they contributed for the betterment of our community and the function of the Community Council.

However, I am delighted to announce that several residents have now volunteered and put themselves forward as Community Councillors, in alphabetical order: Fiona Baker, Nick Barton, Arnold Bretman, David Lang, Calum McNichol, David McFadyen, Rob Stuart and David Whitham taking our membership up to 14.

Each year the Community Council is required to hold an Annual General Meeting by the end of June, for the purpose of receiving and approving the Annual Reports of the Convener and the independently audited Annual Accounts, the appointment of office-bearers and for the setting of the annual meeting programme. Then consideration and membership of the old Standing Working Groups of Planning, Forestry, Timber Haulage and Health along with any possible new groups

Item 6: Convener's Report for the period June 2023 to June 2026

such as the Environment, Invasive Plants, Identifying and Mapping of Trees suitable for Tree Preservation Orders, and Recording and Mapping the Status of Culverts in Rhu and Shandon and the organization of the Christmas lights switch-on will be considered at this meeting.

These undertakings will require commitment and teamwork which I am sure we are more than capable of delivering. I shall finish this report by sincerely thanking all members of Rhu & Shandon Community Council, old and new, for their support and commitment to the Community we all strive to serve.

John McGall