

Conveners Report for the period June 2024 to June 2025

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the support Councillor Maurice Corrie, Police Scotland, MoD Police and Cdr Jon Fletcher MBE RN HMNB Clyde have given to our Community Council this past year.

I would also like to acknowledge our dedicated group of volunteer beach cleaners who regularly pick litter and plastic waste around our shore. This group, led by Clare Dickson and supported by Plastic Free Helensburgh, provide a great service to our community and environment. Anyone wishing to volunteer will be made most welcome, so please contact Clare who's contact details are on our website.

Planning

There were a couple of major planning applications directly impacting the Rhu & Shandon area in the last year.

- The planning application for a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at Ardencaple Farm, Helensburgh which we objected to, was ultimately refused.
- Planning application for the demolition, refurbishment and change of use of Lochside Nursing Home at Gully Bridge to form residential accommodation and erection of four dwellinghouses. We submitted a letter of objection with regard to access/egress of the site as the current driveway access is dangerous. This application is still ongoing.

Local Place Plans

In August 2024, Fiona Baker and Nick Barton were selected as our representatives in the Place Plan Group. This consultation with our community is perhaps the most important document the CC can produce on behalf of our community, as it feeds into the next Local Development Plan (LDP3) which determines development areas and attendant budget strategies for the next decade once LDP3 is adopted.

In March we held a 3-day drop in Community Consultation in the Church Hall, where residents were invited to fill in questionnaires and give their views about how our community should be developed to shape the future of the area. Other local institutions were invited to have posters and a stall at this community engagement event. Additionally, survey forms were distributed to local prominent premises within the village.

The survey was seeking to gather much wider community views than an LPP, which is primarily concerned with land and buildings. A section of the survey related specifically to Ardenconnel Wood. The information collated will be submitted in a report to LPP based on the survey and consultation results and these results will be published. A big thanks to all the volunteers who provided members of the public with objective information and guidance.

Rhu & Shandon Community Trust (RSCT)

In September 2024 Ardenconnel Wood was put up for sale and Rhu & Shandon residents raised sufficient funds to place a community bid which was accepted. A steering group was established and at a subsequent public meeting, the community purchase and formation of a charity was voted through. It was decided to call this entity Rhu & Shandon Community Trust and a committee was formed with Fiona Baker as Chairperson and Rob Stuart as Vice Chair.

In February 2025 the newly created RSCT constitution was approved by the Right to Buy Team at the Scottish Government and thereafter an application to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation was approved, giving it full charitable status. Much work and due diligence is ongoing but we feel this will be a wonderful asset for the community.

Scottish Governments Initiative - reduce speeds on Scotland's Roads

At a meeting on 15th May with Mr Hugh O'Neill, Head of RIS we discussed this item and other matters. We appraised him regarding our communities concerns about the excessive speed of driving on the A814 in Rhu which continues out of the village, through Shandon and onto the Base. In a recent poll,

significant numbers of residents support lower speed restriction, as does the Base. As many other communities in Scotland have already changed to 20 mph and A&BC hadn't, we asked him why?

Mr O'Neill explained he was generally in favour of reducing speed limits and it was important that the community and the Base also support it. The delay in this process was entirely due to difficulties trying to employ a suitably qualified person to run the initiative. A&BC are now close to doing so, and as soon as that is completed, the initiative will start. He also opined that the suitability of average speed cameras was extremely effective but the cost of installing them extremely prohibitive (in excess of £200,000), especially with this year's very limited budget.

Flooding and culvert Issues in Shandon

Following the significant flooding in Shandon and the subsequent collapse of an MoD embankment in November 2024, the Deputy Head of Infrastructure, HMNB Clyde issued full time contacts to make repairs to the embankment and the related toe ditches. In addition, Clyde Coast Cutters have been instructed to clear the toe ditches on the hill behind Faslane and the rest of the ditches associated with the track of the old railway line, although there is no time scale for the latter.

A culvert maintenance plan is not yet available and liaison between Network Rail and the MoD is ongoing. Water running across the A814 is dangerous particularly outside the Peace Camp, at the entrance to the Briars, down the hill from Blairvadach and opposite the end of Aros Road.

The CC presented a schedule of papers, maps, and photographs where we had identified current hot spots showing how serious a problem exists and informed the meeting that the network is fragile and unable to cope with significant weather events. The immediate need is to schedule regular cleaning of silt traps versus current contract which means drains only get cleared out when reported as an issue. Longer term we need to have infrastructure which is fit for purpose and sufficiently resilient to withstand the increasing weather challenges we are experiencing which are linked closely with climate change.

Mr O'Neill agreed with all of our assessment of the situation and although that is his goal, a new way of working within the Council is being introduced and the backlog was likely to take 2 years. He said he will look into our submission and promised to speak to the head of drainage within the Council to try and alleviate the problems at Blairvadach.

Forestry matters and related issues.

The CC expressed concern about the state of the road on the haulage route with a deep rut in the roadway at the mini roundabout at the Pier / Station Road junction caused by vehicle loading and where the mini roundabout lines have disappeared. Further up Station Road there was a second long deep rut which is particularly dangerous to pedestrians and cyclists. Although the long rut has since been patch-repaired, the roundabout area, with a surface like the moon, was left untouched.

The CC appraised the meeting over the historic process of how, in 2017, A&BC had decided, without any form of community consultation or accountability, Station and Pier Roads were a Consultation Route for the haulage of timber despite there being no HGV passthrough and many other hazardous conditions which renders this route dangerous and unsuitable. This year A&BC have imposed a ban on parking cars on the pavement which means cars parked on Station Road may additionally affect the ability of the large logging HGV and emergency vehicles safe passthrough. It appears the haulage route decision is 'written in stone' and we asked if there was any reason this decision could not be officially reviewed.

Mr O'Neill stated he could not think of any reason not to hold a review and if we could send him details, he would look into this matter.

The Blairnairn/West Kilbride New Woodland Creation was still at the planning stage in December 2024. In February 2025, RDS forestry, agent for Luss Estate, sent us updated maps and subsequently submitted their plan to Scottish Forestry. R&SCC have submitted a letter of objection, the contents of which are on our website.

In the Letrault & Stuckenduff New Woodland Scheme, ground preparation and planting has been completed. No further road construction has been undertaken. Assurances received from Scottish Woodlands was the peat depth assessment they conducted was accurate, we have expressed concern and lodged evidence to the contrary.

Christmas Tree Lights Event

Once again, a big thank you to HMNB Clyde for providing our community with a splendid fir tree and staff to erect it, on our village green. Much praise goes to the challenging work of Community Councillor Arnold Bretman who organised this event, the many volunteers who helped put the lights on/off the tree, put up / took down the gazebos, attended at the various stalls, performed singing on the night, and brought Santa Clause and a donkey to the event. Also, many thanks go to Mirren and Milo from Rhu Primary School for switching on the lights. Despite the weather, the event turned out to be very successful and joyful occasion.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the recently retired members for all their contribution and hard work. I would also like to thank the existing members and new members, and the officers of the Community Council, for their enthusiasm and support in the past year.