

Meeting of Helensburgh & Lomond Area Committee attended by Laura Freeland, Alistair Moore & John McGall (Convener) representing Rhu and Shandon Community Council at Helensburgh & Lomond Civic Centre - Tuesday 14 March 2023

Before presenting our question(s) John presented a brief overview of the issues from his report, namely,

My name is John McGall and I am the current Convener of Rhu & Shandon Community Council. I have a question to ask but before I do so, I have some background information which I hope will put this matter into context.

In October 2017 or thereby, Argyll & Bute Council (A&BC) roads authority in collaboration with Argyll Timber Transport Group (ATTG), under the Agreed Routes Maps Scheme decided to classify the minor roads of Station & Pier Roads as a consultation route for the purposes of timber haulage by large 44 ton HGV's. In consequence a Timber Transport Management Plan (TTMP), a voluntary agreement without legal status, was developed by a Roads Officer and a ATTG representatives in private and without community consultation.

It authorised up to 5,000 HGV journeys per year and included agreed preconditions, rules to be adhered to including for example set periods to be avoided for school runs times when children would be walking on the road. Unfortunately the rules of this agreement were ignored and 30 individual breaches were recorded and reported.

Residents and councillors were subsequently advised by a Roads Authority manager, the basis of this decision was, among other things, on their understanding "there was no other route available".

This route has been an area of significant concern and investigation for several years by the Council, Police Scotland and Community Council to try and find a solution to a significant number of hazards including;

- *Roads so substandard in width that HGV's cannot pass in opposite directions causing obstruction and at times complete blockages*
- *Narrow carriageways at a mini roundabout with a 90 degree blind bend where swept path of large HGV's causes encroachment into opposite lanes in both directions, leading to obstructions and near collisions*
- *The volume and speed of traffic constantly cause near collisions when traffic is trying to emerge from blind junctions and driveways*
- *Sight lines at junctions and driveways have zero visibility due to existing boundary walls, road configuration and overgrown foliage. This can also cause near collisions because emerging traffic attempting to exit onto the road with swept paths that require encroachment into the opposite lane causing obstructions.*
- *The safety of pedestrians due to the absence of a formal footway with no safe step-off onto a verge or no verge at all which has caused numerous near misses despite pedestrians walking in the formal pedestrian lanes the Council provided*

R&SCC objected to any use of Pier & Station Roads in the interest of road safety as these roads are dangerous, compromising pedestrian safety in particular and are clearly, in our view, totally unsuitable as a timber haulage route. In 2021, after Phase 1 of timber harvesting was completed, we surveyed residents neighbouring the haulage route area and 96% of those who participated, fully supported the Community Council's objections.

It has recently been ascertained that in February 2017 the Scottish Woodlands forest agent attended a specially convened meeting with two members of our Community Council in Rhu Village Hall where it was revealed for the first time, the intention to use Station and Pier Roads as a haulage route.

One Community Councillor advised these minor roads were not suitable for vehicles of that size and proposed an alternative route east of Highlandman's Wood across agricultural land behind Helensburgh Reservoir, as this was a far more sensible and safe route to take directly onto the A818. It was explained a road already existed from the A818 to the disused Water Authority Pump House behind the reservoirs, which is a favoured doggy walk.

It appears A&BC may not have been made aware of this alternative route when conducting their discussions about the proposed haulage route.

At a meeting on 16 September 2022 between our Community Council, Scottish Forestry, Scottish Woodlands, and the Argyll Timber Transport Group, all present agreed the local community have legitimate concerns with the current haulage route provided by the council and also agreed in principle, every effort will be made for a new route that will serve both Highlandman & Torr Woods and afforestation of the former Letrault, and Stuckenduff farms, in total 1400 acres of phased tree felling which is to be carried out in perpetuity.

The Regulator - Scottish Forestry - has expressed a desire for an alternative extraction route. Luss Estates support this and now the current woodland agent at Scottish Woodlands also supports this and has confirmed he is consulting with Gresham House about a new alternative route.

We have highlighted the existence of a 2014 detailed plan for a haulage route from A818 to a proposed wind farm site east of Highlandman's Woods which failed to come to fruition, part of which could be used and adopted for this purpose.

We believe Phase 2 of Highlandman's Wood harvesting could begin later this year. In light of the foregoing information can I ask our Councillors to ensure that proper communication and consultation with our community will take place in good time prior to any forest activity and that serious consideration is given for the current Highlandman's Wood TTMP to be paused until the conclusion of these recent developments are resolved in the interest of road safety.

These question(s) were immediately picked up by elected member for Helensburgh & Lomond North Maurice Corrie. He implied he had a good awareness of the situation by immediately stating the crux of this issue lay with Gresham House and offered to arrange a direct bilateral meeting for talks. Although it was noted Maurice had failed to address the questions put to Committee, John accepted Maurice's invitation to have this meeting and talks. (It is intended the answers to these question will be addressed with Maurice in the near future).

Cllr. Fiona Howard opined that in light of previous speaker who had complained about the lack of effective communication and consultation in relation to another unrelated project, that here we go again with another instance where a community hasn't had the proper opportunity to be heard. Her view was that this trend must stop and communities must have the right to be consulted and have their say in such matters.

Cllr Ian MacQuire (SNP) shared that he had been involved in the 2014 wind farm application in his capacity as a resident so was fully aware of the planned route across the hill. He also advised he believed there could be a developing interest at looking again at a proposed wind farm in this area but perhaps in a different location.

This concluded Public Question time and a number of individuals, including R&SCC members and Maurice Corrie left the meeting hall. .

Maurice approached John in the café and thanked him for his question(s). He said he thought talks with Gresham House would be a good way forward and asked if we could arrange diary dates for a meeting with him to discuss the issues in greater detail before any meeting was arranged. John advised this would be best served through a meeting with our Forestry & Timber Haulage Sub Committee and that he would speak with our Secretary Jean Cook to make suitable arrangements.