

Ardrishaig Community Council Partner Update

Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands Area Community Planning Group – 28/08/24

In relation to the MAKI meeting of 28 August and your requests for agenda items, Ardrishaig Community Council ("ACC") would like to see some follow up from this item from the 1 May 2024 Minutes.

"Discussion took place around the struggles that community councils faced with attracting new community councillors; ways in which community councils could work together to form caucus arrangements; engagement with the Democracy Matters consultation; high workload of community councillors; difficulties with the level of complex process and regulation around community councils; support available for community councils; and the potential requirement for additional visits to community councils to discuss their concerns."

As you will know, the planned community council forum was postponed due to the general election and so there has been no opportunity to discuss it at that forum. However, ACC notes the resignation of the Garelochhead CC and the comments made by former councillors about the perceived lack of support from A&B Council and share the concern that more is being asked of community councils with no corresponding increase in financial or human resources. For example, ACC has been invited to submit a Community Place Plan by June 2025 which we are keen to do, but no offer of assistance in achieving this was made. At the same time ACC needs to update its Resilience/Emergency response plan. ACC also spent a lot of time this past winter dealing with a response to the scoping report for the proposed High Brenfield Wind Farm and understands that Low Carbon, the developer, is proposing to apply for planning permission later in the year. At the same time, they have commenced discussions with interested parties around possible community benefit if their application is successful which we need to actively engage in. ACC has also been responding to the SEPA Flooding consultation and the Scottish government Flood Resilience consultation, all of which link into the Place Plan initiative. The volume of work involved for councillors, the majority of whom have day jobs and whose community council work is carried out in their spare time, is very significant.

On top of this, through the Ardrishaig Gala Committee has been organising the Ardrishaig Gala week, which is the largest community event of the year. As was the case last year, whilst we've found individual council staff helpful, the lack of joined up approach at Council level, the fact that event planning seems to be fragmented across different departments, and the fact that it hasn't felt like a supported and collaborative process, has led to much frustration, which we understand to have been shared by the organisers of the Lochgilphead Celtic and Pictish festival.

If the aim of decision makers is to empower local communities and community organisations, and not be a mere "tick the box" exercise, there has to be more thought given to how to support community organisations with meaningful resource allocation. It can't be enough to direct them to webinars or printed materials, as the time taken to wade through these cuts significantly into the time available to them to actually do what's asked of them. And perhaps one often overlooked major headache is that, when external or expert resource is required, CCs don't have the funds to engage professionals without first having to apply for and be successful at obtaining grants. The timelines for submission of applications for grants and decisions as to grant allocations are generally completely different from the deadlines for replying to consultations or, for example submitting plans. So, where funding applications have to be made before a large scale community engagement

exercise can be undertaken so that work can commence on preparing plans or responses to planning applications etc, the mismatch in timing can cut the time available to pull responses or draft plans etc together significantly. We would suggest that the Council needs to be much more pro-active in offering concrete resource and advice, rather than merely acting as a signpost to printed materials, webinars etc. This might require a rethinking of working patterns for some staff who are in a community support capacity to recognise that meetings may need to be held outside normal working hours and that going out into communities and delivering assistance/providing expertise may best be performed within those communities and not from behind the council website.

ACC wants to engage collaboratively on finding a way to work with council staff, other local community councils and organisations on these issues and we think that we are not alone in hoping that an approach can be developed that delivers more support to community councils in helping them serve their communities.