



TO ALL KCT MEMEBERS
6th May 2022
KILMACOLM CIVIC TRUST CHAIRMAN'S NEWSLETTER
COVERING THE YEARS 2020 and 2021

Greetings to you all ! Let us hope that 2022 is a better year than the two just gone that have presented so many problems for so many people up and down the country. I shall start this Newsletter with a brief explanation of why we did not hold an AGM last year; and why we have so far not held one this year. I shall then give you an update on what your Executive Committee have been doing during the course of 2020 and 2021. You will see that we have not been idle! Far from it. We have been **extremely** busy.

Why no AGM since the 5th of March 2020

The reason of course is COVID and the very strong professional advice from highly qualified medical advisers to the UK Government that the population should get itself inoculated against it (alas there are some who for reasons best known to themselves have not); that we should adopt all the very sensible hygiene precautions that were promulgated; and that we should avoid mixing in large numbers in confined spaces. At the start of the Pandemic, your Committee held a special Zoom meeting and concluded that it would be extremely unwise to hold an AGM, even if we could find a public place to do so. Despite the fact that restrictions are now being lifted, we still think that it would be extremely unwise to invite you all to an AGM: as it is very clear that COVID and OMICRON have not gone away and that a considerable number of people in Kilmacolm and Quarriers have contracted the illness very recently having attended gatherings locally or elsewhere.

What has your Committee been doing?

Despite Covid and Omicron your 16 member Executive Committee have given an astonishing amount of their time to work on your behalf and on behalf of the local communities and have achieved wonderful results as you will see shortly. When Covid first hit us and Government policy became clear, your committee concluded that it would be extremely unwise for us to hold our routine monthly 'Face to Face' meetings, or any form of ad-hoc 'Face to Face' meetings to react to proposed new Scottish Planning Policy guidance documents, new Inverclyde Council Local Development Plan documents, or submissions by Developers to Inverclyde Council for large-scale housing schemes, and Appeals by Developers to the Scottish Government if the Council refused their proposed developments.

PLANNING MATTERS

We very quickly realised that we could still function and be very effective by using Zoom Meetings on the internet for anything of a major nature that needed Committee discussion, or Zoom participation by us with the Inverclyde Council Planning Board to put across our views on major housing issues. Discussion within the Committee on 'normal' housing Applications submitted by individuals in the countryside, Kilmacolm and Quarriers (for new-build single houses; alterations to existing houses; landscaping work; or tree-work) has all continued very satisfactorily by using the medium of emails: – first, by sending out carefully thought through summaries of each proposal, with screen-saves of architect drawings included, for consideration by committee members, and a request for committee members' comments by a given date; and then, after assessment of

responses, sending our KCT Committee majority view to Inverclyde Council. Last year (2021) we considered a total of **88** x Planning Applications submitted by residents of Kilmacolm, Quarriers Village and the surrounding Countryside. We supported **85** of them. We objected to **3**.

PROJECTS

The KCT Audio-Visual Oral Reminiscences Project

I said at our AGM on Thursday 5th March 2020 that we had done 27 recording sessions up to that date, and that Jim Hood orchestrates and films the recording sessions supported by a small group of 3 or 4 committee members who attend as non-participating and non-speaking audience to provide a friendly atmosphere. Alas, because of Covid, work on the Oral History Project has been suspended because it is not safe to get up close to our subjects in confined spaces. That said, Jim Hood is still progressing with transcribing and editing work on the material that we had captured prior to lockdown. We now have 19 videos available to see in the KCT on-line library. You can view them at <https://www.kilmacolmcivictrust.org/about-kilmacolm/search-our-videos.html>

We have another 9 sessions in the edit process which we hope to release soon.

All the recording sessions capture the essence of the village as it was in times gone by. We were very taken by their value when one of our KCT members, Sandy Fyfe died in **March 22**. By very good fortune, shortly before Covid lock-down we filmed a wonderful audio-visual session with him and his brother Morton, in which they reflected on their Grandfather, the evolution of the churches in the village and their childhood. The good news is that we plan to re-start filming soon, and if you would like to participate in a recording session, or can recommend someone whom you think would have a good story to tell, whom we should contact, please get in touch with Jim. Rest assured, the recording sessions are a very simple and enjoyable experience.

Another video recording that we did, just in time as it transpired shortly afterwards, is a recording session that we did with **JIM LESTER** in October 2019 shortly before his 99th birthday, for which we had begun to plan a special celebration. The stories that he told were full of interest and many of them were very amusing. Alas, he died a couple of weeks after he had approved the transcribed version of the recording. To our astonishment, in early 2020 we received a letter from the firm of solicitors who were winding up Jim Lester's estate advising us that Jim had made an extremely generous legacy of £100,000 to the Kilmacolm Civic Trust in his will, stating that it was to be used by the Trust on projects that fall within the aims of the Kilmacolm Civic Trust Constitution. It also stated that he would like the KCT to make appropriate arrangements to ensure that the Lester Family grave in Kilmacolm Cemetery is maintained in good condition. The solicitors sent a cheque for the money to John Hunter, our Treasurer, in December 2020. You can imagine that your Executive Committee thought long and hard about how the bequest should be used, and how it should be invested. After much consultation with known financial experts, who gave their advice pro-bono, your Committee agreed to invest the bulk of the Trust's money in the Global Equities Fund and the Fixed Interest Fund managed by the Churches, Charities and Local Authorities Fund. The audited accounts of the Trust, as approved by your Committee for the year ended 31 December 2021 are attached in a separate file.

Digitisation of the KCT Archive

The Kilmacolm Civic Trust hold an extensive archive of material relating to the villages of Kilmacolm, Quarriers and the surrounding countryside. The items have been donated to the Trust over many years by individuals and families past and present who have lived here. It includes postcards, photographs, personal written reflections, press cuttings, books and other publications as well as information relating to a wide range of Planning matters and peoples' stories. Much of

the material is from 1900 onwards, but there are some more historical documents. Despite the challenges of Covid we are well advanced with a project to digitise a significant proportion of the collection. This will allow Civic Trust members and others, in the UK and worldwide, to search for and access many items online. The aim is to open up the collection in a way that has not been possible before. The Archive is stored in 20 – 30 large boxes in temporary locations within the village, and we are actively seeking a permanent secure depository for this physical collection. If you have any suggestions we would love to hear from you. Unfortunately very little has been added to the Archive over the past 15 years, consequently there is very limited new information on village people and activities. Therefore if anyone has any items, historical or modern, that they think might be suitable for the Archive, please contact the KCT Executive Committee and we shall consider its inclusion in the collection.

THE MAJOR POLICY ISSUES THAT WE HAVE DEALT WITH

Scottish Government Housing Policy

Early last year the Scottish Government conducted a review of a document titled 'National Planning Framework 4 for Housing Development' (NPF 4) and revised it. They then circulated the Revised document to numerous interested parties for consultation. We received a copy of it, and your Executive Committee held a Zoom meeting on 30th June 2021 to discuss it. We concluded that we could live with it, particularly as it tightened up certain aspects of Planning policy that unscrupulous mass-housing development companies had been taking advantage of in order to try and achieve approval of large scale housing projects on designated Greenbelt land. A number of the major development companies Appealed to the Scottish Court of Session on the grounds that aspects of the Government consultation process had not been handled properly and that they had been disadvantaged. The Court of Session upheld the Appeal and ordered the Scottish Government to go through the whole process again. That renewed process is still on-going and will take some time yet. The effect of this is that all Local Councils in Scotland are still having to work to their existing (old) policies. This means that Inverclyde Council (IC) are still unable to produce the 5 year Local Development Plan that they had been expecting to publish in 2019. For various reasons IC now do not expect to be able to publish a new 5 year plan, approved by the Scottish Government, until 2023. We are keeping a close eye on the matter.

Kilmacolm and Quarriers Villages Demographics and Housing

Whilst poring through the Scottish Government Draft Revised NPF 4 document it became apparent to your Committee that the Scottish Government intends that Local Communities should play an active part in the formulation of Local Council (e.g Inverclyde Council) Local Development planning; that there may be financial assistance to enable them to do this; and that the local communities should take an active interest in analysing local housing needs by conducting what are called 'Health Checks' (The concept has nothing to do with physical/medical health). Of our own initiative, your Executive Committee has been investigating what this entails and have concluded that it is something that would be worth doing. It would mean setting up groups of people to study the demographics of Kilmacolm and Quarriers; whether there are houses available for elderly folk to downsize into if/when they wish to; whether there are houses coming onto the market for younger people in the villages to buy if they wish to remain in the local area, or for outsiders to buy if they wish to get away from city environments or if they move into this part of Scotland from elsewhere. There are other aspects of the local environment that also need study by the local community rather than cursory and probably shallow/incomplete study by Inverclyde Council departments.

We held a Zoom KCT Committee meeting and concluded that the concept is worth initiating - but that it must be led and set up by the elected Kilmacolm Community Council (KCC) who are the acknowledged and authorised body for such initiatives in the eyes of Inverclyde Council. After point-to-point telephone discussions by me with the respective 'Chairs' of the KCC and the

Kilmacolm Residents Association (KRA) about the idea we organised and held a Zoom meeting on 9th December 2021 with representatives of the KCC and the KRA. The outcome was agreement by each group that it was something that should be done; and that the KCC should set it up and run it – with the help of 2 nominated people from each of the KCT and KRA. The Chair of the KCC put the idea forward and recommended it at their next KCC monthly committee meeting. The outcome of that was that the KCC committee accepted the idea and agreed to discuss the way forward with Inverclyde Council. We shall let you know what transpires from their discussions when they have taken place.

Recent Major Housing Applications

In 2019/2020 major housing developer Mactaggart and Mickel (M & M) submitted an application to Inverclyde Council for a housing development of 78 houses on 'Land West of Quarry Drive' lying between the Kilmacolm Cemetery and the small roundabout on Wateryetts Road; and major housing developer Taylor Wimpey (TW) submitted an application for a housing development of 100 houses on 'Land at Planetreeyetts to the West of Finlaystone Road'. We submitted letters of objection to the Inverclyde Council Planning Department regarding each of these Applications, principally on the grounds that the sites were on designated Greenbelt Land and there was no irrefutable proven need for housing developments of this scale. Time went by whilst the Planning Department thought about them, and then Covid struck! However on 28th April 2021 the Inverclyde Council Planning Board held 2 major Zoom meetings inviting all interested parties to participate and make 15 minute Oral Representations to the Planning Board if they wished to. The KCT participated in both, expressing our views strongly in separate 15 minutes Oral depositions. The Board spent some 3 hours hearing and considering the TW Application in the morning; and then 3 hours in the afternoon hearing and considering the M & M Application. The outcome was that Inverclyde Council **REFUSED** the **TW** Application for 100 houses at Planetreeyetts; but the Council **APPROVED** the **M&M** Application for 78 houses on 'Land West of Quarry Drive'.

That did not put and end to the matter. On their own initiative the Kilmacolm Residents' Association, many of whom live in the West of Quarry Drive area, submitted an Appeal to the Scottish Government requesting that the Inverclyde Council decision to Approve the M&M 78 houses development be overturned and that the Scottish Government should REFUSE it. A Reporter was appointed by the Scottish Government in May last year to consider the case. He did a 'Site Visit' in the latter part of last year. He also wrote to interested parties requesting comments on the Scottish Court of Session Opinion on the Appeal by West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) against Scottish Ministers who had overturned a REFUSAL by the WDC for a large housing development proposed by Barratt Homes West of Scotland on land on the north side of the Clyde. The Reporter considering 'West of Quarry Drive' asked whether in our view that Court of Session decision had relevance to the KRA Appeal against the Inverclyde Council decision to Approve the M&M Application for 78 houses. We wrote to the Scottish Government Planning and Environmental Appeals Division on 12th November 2021 stating that in our opinion it has no relevance and that we continue to object to the M&M proposed development at 'Land West of Quarry Drive'. The Appeals Division acknowledged receipt of our letter. I telephoned the Appeals Division again on 5th May 2022 to ask for an update. The Official that I spoke to said that the Reporter had completed his investigations; and that he had sent his written Report and recommendation to Scottish Ministers in December 2021 for action and their Formal Decision. I asked when we can expect a Formal Decision from them. The answer was that they (the DPEA) do not know.

The Latest on Planetreeyetts

Taylor Wimpey Appealed to the Scottish Government requesting that Scottish Ministers overturn the Inverclyde Council decision to refuse their Application for 100 houses at Planetreeyetts. A Reporter was duly appointed to consider the Appeal and conducted a site visit on 27 October 2021. The Reporter dismissed the Taylor Wimpey Appeal and REFUSED Planning Permission in Principle on 10th March 2022. That is good news! However, it is not necessarily the end of the matter. There

is still an opportunity for Taylor Wimpey to submit an Appeal to the Scottish Court of Session – but they can only do so on a ‘Point of Law’ i.e. if they feel that their case has not been handled correctly.

Carsemeadow (Quarriers Village)

Quarriers / Gladman Developments Ltd have made several attempts since 2018 to gain Planning Permission for a major housing development of 45 houses, on land in Quarriers Village known as ‘Carsemeadow’ (the land to the West of Craigbet Road between the old Fire Station by the bridge over the Gotter Water and the entrance to the former TB Hospital). On each occasion the KCT objected vigorously at Oral hearings by the Inverclyde Planning Board, and on each occasion Inverclyde Council have REFUSED the Gladman applications. Characteristically, Gladman Developments then submitted Appeals to the Scottish Government asking that the Refusals be overturned. On each occasion, Scottish Ministers dismissed the Appeals and REFUSED the proposed development. The final attempt by Quarriers / Gladman Developments Ltd was to submit an Appeal to the Scottish Court of Session on points of law. The Scottish Court of session quashed the Appeal on 3 June 2020 but directed that Scottish Ministers should look at the case again. This was duly done, with a new Reporter being appointed. The new Reporter came to the same conclusion as previous Reporters who had examined the case, and REFUSED the proposed housing development on 25 May 2021. In addition to our own KCT efforts to fight Gladman the residents of Quarriers village formed a group (Protect Quarriers Village) to fight the battle. They employed a QC to help them. Your Executive Committee decided that we should assist them financially and gave them a Grant of £1440 (50% of their Legal Bill).

FINALLY, A RECRUITING PLEA

Very sadly, the Committee have noticed that we have a gradually reducing membership as a consequence of many of us being Senior Citizens. It would be wonderful if all KCT members would talk to younger friends and acquaintances, tell them about what we do and encourage them to join the Killmacolm Civic Trust. Membership is only £10 per annum. Application should be submitted to Brian Lang, our Membership Secretary (**Tel:** 01505- 873295. **Email:** brian-lang@btconnect.com)

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