

Rhu & Shandon Community Council meeting 13th February 2019

Highlandman's Wood Timber Extraction

Introduction

My name is John McGall and I have been a resident of Pier Road for about 45 years. I wish to address the Highlandman's Wood timber extraction operation, both on a personal level but also on behalf of other residents in the community who have expressed great concern about the timber haulage route which utilises 'vulnerable' unclassified public roads and the safety of the community and other road users.

I am aware of a recent meeting between representatives of this Community Council and Argyll Timber Transport Group regarding these matters and I understand that you have been provided with copies of the minutes of that meeting, so thankfully you are aware of the broad issues at hand.

I apologise for my extensive use of notes and the length of my response. I am sure, as many of you are aware; this is a somewhat protracted set of circumstances with complex and technical issues - of which I am merely a novice.

May I make it clear from the outset, there is no issue or objections from residents to the extraction of timber *per se* nor is there any question regarding the competence of any of the drivers concerned in this haulage operation. Our goal is simply to have the Timber Traffic Management Plan (TTMP) fully reviewed by the Local Authority, taking community concerns into account to ensure, given the categorisation of the route and negative impact the haulage vehicles are having on the community, that road safety measures are properly considered.

This would include suitable and sufficient road warning signs and directional Give Way road markings being reinstated as they should be and where it is necessary e.g. at hazardous junctions which include a 90 degree blind bend, temporary advanced warning signs put in place to alert drivers, cyclists and other road users of the **heightened likelihood** (up to 16 times per day or 80 times per week) of an otherwise unexpected risk - that of a 44 ton juggernaut which may be coming round the corner, inevitably encroach onto your side of the road because of its size, and possibly collide with you.

It would also include a review of restrictions such as school run times however I am aware that progress on this issue has perhaps already been made, to amend and make the timings relevant and effective by actually covering the whole period school children use the route.

Indeed all pedestrians on lower Pier Road face the additional hazard of a roadway significantly diminished in width and having to use a pedestrian walkway because there is no proper footpath provision. Additionally because the walkway changes from one side of the road to another half way up its length, you cannot always face oncoming traffic – so it can be a very daunting and dangerous situations do happen where you cannot be sure

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drivers see you properly, especially in the dark, and not everybody is fit enough to jump up the grass embankment.

It is also essential for maintaining public confidence that the restrictions agreed are strictly adhered to by the parties unless there are exceptional or extreme circumstances – to flaunt these agreed restrictions is unacceptable and if they can be ignored what is the point of this agreement, the code of practice or other protocols.

Arrangements and Codes of Practice

As I understand it, it is the responsibility of Forestry Commission Scotland for implementation, regulation and monitoring of forestry activities - and businesses must comply with all relevant laws, codes of practice and industry guidelines. This authority may be delegated therefore timber haulage transported on our roads is done according to agreed principles and protocols and in accordance with an Agreed Plan and Route Map with the aim to have minimal impact on the public road network, local communities and the environment.

A Timber Traffic Management Plan (TTMP) and associated Maps form a voluntary agreement, developed by the timber transport groups at local authority level and categorise the roads leading to forests in terms of their capacity to sustain the likely level of timber haulage. Where there may be significant impact from timber haulage – either on the road itself, or to communities and other road users – there is a **requirement for liaison** between the forestry interests and the roads department to develop a solution that enables timber transport, addresses community concerns and protects the road.

The Highlandman's Wood TTMP includes Pier Road and Station Road and has been formally categorised as a **Consultation Route**, which therefore **requires** the parties in the agreement to liaise and develop a solution with the Local Authority. In this case it was deemed necessary to include several pre-conditions or restrictions such as limits of timing, allowable tonnage etc. before the route can be used and some of these restrictions undoubtedly have clear road safety elements to them such as school run times, driver awareness and speed limits.

The agreement should enable three things to happen - **timber transport, address community and other road users concerns**, and **protects the road**. It is our view only two of these goals have been met and it appears insufficient consideration or effort has been given to engagement with the community and other road users, therefore their concerns have never been properly taken into account.

It appears self-evident the only means this can be achieved is through prior publication and dissemination of the Plan and subsequent engagement, listening and seeking to identify areas of negative impact and address any legitimate concerns. Again I believe there is some movement on the communication issue in agreement with the Timber Transport Group. However it is still of considerable public concern to learn when Rhu & Shandon Community Council, acting on behalf of the community in an attempt to engage with TTG some 18 months ago, were basically ignored.

We also believe the Local Authority have repeatedly failed to respond positively or maintain meaningful dialogue with the Community Council which would have produced better results

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in terms of planning, due diligence and safety which ought to be in the mutual interests of all concerned.

A very limited period of public monitoring was carried out by a group of local residents during late November 2018 through to 31st January 2019, using the current published TTMP restrictions time tables. This exercise discovered that the TTMP restrictions were being breached on a regular and significant basis.

There were a total of **19 breaches of the Frequency and Timing restriction**, 10 of which were **vehicles on the route during school run times** and 9 **lorry movements less than one hour apart**. You can't help wondering how many more there were - that went on undetected.

There were also a further 4 instances of haulage vehicles being on the route while school children were walking home, logged between 3.48 and 3.55pm but they have not been included because technically the exclusion time period finished at 3.30 pm, a failure in the plan to identify and take into account the time Academy pupils return home from school.

The survey also showed that Pier Road was far busier than you might have thought, with a total of 435 vehicles movements over a 4 hour period, that's an average of 108 vehicles per hour. This did not include 24 pedestrians and 3 cyclists that also used the road during this period.

The response by a representative from the Argyll Timber Transport Group was to describe these incidents as quote "**minor breaches**" and the inclusion of "**school run times**" as "**a courtesy therefore not legally enforceable as it is a public road**". I am no expert in what contracts, codes of practice and felling licencing provisions amount to in law, that may be a matter for Forestry Commission Scotland, but what we, and I would imagine all residents will find extremely alarming and difficult to understand, is how any responsible party can take this sort of view when talking about children's safety being put at unnecessary risk – contrary to what appears to be their own code of practice standards. This attitude undoubtedly damages public confidence and should not go unchallenged by those in authority.

This is the same individual who tries to conflate Large Goods Vehicles in normal traffic whose business activity is making one-off deliveries on sensitive roads, sporadic in nature with a very low level of likelihood meeting pedestrians on a road and, timber transport Large Goods Vehicles whose business activity demands repeated journeys on sensitive roads of 80 or possibly more journeys a week, going on for months or sometimes a year or more at a time and is therefore a completely different situation.

That is why separate provisions and restrictions have been made by government for timber traffic haulage on minor roads - not only to protect the public purse on wear and tear of the roads, important though that is, but also to protect the community and other road users and address their concerns.

I could go on but I know it has been a long night for you all. But can I say finally, having had a go at the apparent bias and lack of responsibility shown by the ATTG, who at least turned up to a recent Community Council meeting on 23 January, I must comment on the

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dismal performance of certain staff within our Local Authority's roads department - who once again failed to engage and didn't turn up. The Timber Traffic Management Plan they prepared was poor with inattention to important details giving the impression that some of it had merely been cut and pasted from previous or similar plans.

Engagement with the Community Council was so poor it bordered on disrespect; not only for the Community Council members but also to the community they are meant to serve and protect. Of course this strategy negated any semblance of finding solutions to any negative impact that may exist within the Plan and appears to have been done on the basis - if we don't inquire or engage there will be nothing to find.

I think as tax payers we are entitled to expect better and more professional standards from council management who on this occasion have badly failed our community. It seems apparent to us that someone, for whatever reason, took their eye completely off the ball and failed to deliver the competence and due diligence we expect. The knock on effect of this has undoubtedly added to public concern and diminished confidence in the stewardship at the top of our Councils Roads Department.

I know it's not always easy for Councillor Freeman to make public comment at times, and there is no personal criticism implied or otherwise intended here, but could I ask him please, to bring as much pressure to bear on the top council officials within the roads department or above their heads, to ensure this TTMP is properly reviewed by someone who is willing to take the time and make the effort to listen and take into account the legitimate community concerns expressed here tonight.

Can I personally thank Fiona and Peter for their hard work behind the scenes, attempting to act as honest brokers and to thank you all for taking the time to listen.