

THE GOVAN LETTER

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From Esme Clark, our cultural correspondent

The 4th Govan Music Festival took place on March 26 to 29th and torrential rain and howling winds failed to deter our concert goers as record crowds turned up to enjoy the music.

Govan School Choirs

Anyway, who could fail to be charmed by the Govan Schools choirs in concert when young Govanites old and new sang their little hearts out at the Fairfield Club on the opening Wednesday. Becci Wallace and Steg G filled the same venue later that evening, launching their new album "After the Fog".

On Thursday the Glasgow Barons Orchestra gave us Bach and Piazzolla and a new and challenging piece "Winter" from Aileen Sweeney. Guest artists that night were Matthew James Higham on flute and classical accordionist Neil Sutcliffe along with David Juritz on violin - a violin made by Guadagnini in Piacenza in 1748!

Freed Up Friday at Edmiston House on the Friday and then the Four Barons String Quartet in the Kinning Park Complex and the Festival concluded on the Saturday with World Music Night with Musicians in Exile in a glorious bout of flamenco. **Ant Thomaz had a new album Gaia and TuFlamenco featured. Ole!**

Caitlin Clark describes the resistance to exploitative rents at Water Row

The irony is unmistakable: rent increases are unfolding at Govan's Water Row development, a stone's throw from the tribute to the legendary campaigner, Mary Barbour, whose fight against exploitative landlords during the 1915 rent strikes remains a powerful reminder of the enduring importance of her cause.

For Govan-born Caitlin, and her girlfriend, both charity workers, these rent increases could see them forced out of their first home together.

"The Water Row development at Govan Cross features 92 mid-market rental properties, designed for tenants who meet strict affordability criteria and fall within a set income threshold.

My partner and I applied for a flat in October 2023, expecting to move in by February 2024 at a rent of £638 per month, a rate reflecting our flat's lack of premium amenities such as a river view, large, tiled balcony, or private parking. However, construction delays meant we couldn't move in until June 2024. By then, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) had increased, and our rent was raised sharply to £847 per month. When we questioned this, Water Row simply told us the flat would go to someone else if we couldn't pay. Feeling we had no choice, we accepted, reassured by promises that future increases would be modest and tied to inflation.

Despite these assurances, in January 2025, just seven months after moving in, we were notified of a further 10.6% rent hike, raising our rent to £937.70 per month, even though LHA rates were frozen. After appealing to Rent Service Scotland (RSS), the recommended rent



The Water Row flats under construction March 2024

was slightly lower at £925. We found the RSS process flawed, as they compared our flat only to more expensive private market properties, ignoring local mid-market rents, and failing to account for differences in each flat's amenities.

Originally, flats with all amenities were priced £209 higher than ours, but after RSS adjudication, the difference fell to just £4, undermining the logic of the pricing structure. Meanwhile, tenants in another block who moved in before April 2024 pay over £200 less for similar or better flats, highlighting inconsistency and unfairness.

Serious Problems: Rent Setting and adjudication

These events expose serious problems with both Water Row's rent-setting and RSS's adjudication. If tenants must meet strict affordability checks, rent increases should not force them out of eligibility. Tying rents to LHA benchmarks private sector rates, undermining the promise of truly affordable living, and negates the point of mid-market housing.

Despite Water Row Company's promise of affordable housing and community regeneration, recent steep rent hikes suggest profit is being prioritised over tenant welfare. Many residents now seek jobs in the new commercial units just to afford rising rents, undermining the original mission of accessible housing. Financial difficulties and scrutiny from the Scottish Housing Regulator reveal the rent increases are likely driven by WRC's fragile finances, not increased costs or LHA changes. **In response, over 70 tenants have united to oppose these hikes, demanding a fair, standardised rent structure and greater accountability to protect mid-market tenants from further exploitation."**

**Govan Community Council
public meeting
Wednesday 25 June**

THE HOUSING CRISIS

7 p.m. Pearce Institute

GOVAN AND THE IMPACT OF CUTS ON DISABILITY AND WELFARE PAYMENTS

Writes Ruby Rowan

Poverty in Govan has been increasing. Worse, over the coming years the level is likely to go still higher as a result of two recent decisions by the Westminster government. These are to cut disability payments and also to maintain the previous government's ban on Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit for households with more than two children (families that in fact need it most).

City of Glasgow statistics show that our community has the second highest number of children in 'low income' families in the City: 52 percent of the total (Hyndland has only 8 percent). And Govan's poverty is getting worse. According to the UK government's Revenue and Customs/DWP, local figures for poverty are 12 percent higher than they were in 2014-15.

More generally Scottish statistics also show that nearly half of all those living in poverty are either disabled or care for someone who is. According to statistics presented to support the funding application for Govan's Bridge, a quarter of all our households care for someone with long-term health and disability issues. This is also indicated by the declining age of males at death. It is now just 65 years in Govan against 77 for Scotland.

All this is why our community should be particularly concerned about the recent cuts imposed by the Westminster government.

It is still uncertain how they will be met. In Scotland adult disability payments are now made through the Scottish government and it has announced it will not be imposing the cuts. However, as estimated by the Scottish Fiscal Committee, the shortfall in funding from Westminster will, by 2030, amount to something over £400m. This will either have to be raised through tax or cuts imposed.

Of all communities in Glasgow Govan cannot ignore the issue of disability payments – nor the general issue of worsening poverty.

Active Travel Plans - Think again !

A packed meeting in Govan's Pearce Institute on 15 April, with over a hundred present, heard the City's head of Sustainable Transport, Keith Argue, report that the City Council would be restarting discussions on the re-routeing of roads and cycle paths. The meeting, chaired by Carol Bell of Drumoyne Community Council, heard Pat Cassidy describe the problems likely to be produced for small businesses, shops and the tenants in Govan Workspace resulting from the existing proposals.

Keith Argue reported that the second round of consultation would start with the Community Councils and that there would be mail drops for each household to ensure a full disclosure of plans. Govan Community Council had submitted a response to the earlier consultation expressing significant concerns about the impact for shops and businesses as well as Govan's development as a venue for those coming from elsewhere to see the Govan 'Stones' and view our community's industrial history.



THE HOUSING CRISIS AND OUR MEETING WITH LOCAL HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

The Community Council devoted most of its March meeting to a discussion with staff from local housing associations (Elderpark and Wheatley) on housing issues in Govan.

Some concerned the environment – for which Jim Ellis for the City Council attended – but most was on housing provision, the upkeep of housing stock and difficulties experienced in securing housing that matched needs in terms of size and location.

Chris Gallacher and Jonathan Gittings-Reid for Elderpark discussed steps being made to maximise help with heating homes, ensure the feeding of children and transform environments such as the wild-life garden. Jonathan noted the need for Govan to learn lessons from London where Housing Associations in a given area would have a common application policy and also cooperate to find housing that would match changing household circumstances.

Kirsty Ward, manager of Wheatley Housing's Dava Street office, spoke of the challenging circumstances of insufficient stock to meet all needs – in particular the Council's legal requirement to meet obligations to house the growing number of homeless (up from 17,000 to 25,000 in recent years). Jonathan Gittings-Reid stressed the urgent need to build new houses with rents people could afford – NOT new 'social' housing constructed at 'mid-market rents'.

The meeting noted the wider crisis of housing provision – with the number of families in Scotland in temporary accommodation (16,000) at the highest level since records began and house building in Scotland dropping last year by 9,000. The meeting agreed to come back to the issue at subsequent meetings. The April meeting heard of the plight of tenants at the new 'mid-market' houses at Water Row facing massive rent increases. From Councillor Alam we also heard the way in which the Planning Committee approved developers' plans as including 'social housing' but with developers apparently free to disregard these conditions and eliminate social housing altogether at the building stage..

Welfare not warfare

At its April meeting the Community Council took the decision to support the Welfare Not Warfare demonstration on Saturday 10th May in Glasgow. It did so in support of the all-Britain movement organised by a range of peace organisations, trade unions and churches to protest against the ramping up of military expenditure at the same time that key areas of welfare provision are being cut.

Chair Danny O'Neill said that it was important to make clear to governments that their cuts agenda was not supported – and certainly not if the money was being used for bombing innocent people in the Middle East or making preparations for war on the other side of the world in conjunction with Donald Trump.

THE SHOP IN HARMONY ROW – ACTION FOR PENSIONERS



Gordon Brown is one of the two volunteers who keep the Govan-based charity, Glasgow Action for Pensioners, active and developing - enabling it to meet the growing challenges faced by pensioners across Glasgow and primarily in Govan (although requests also come in from as far away as Falkirk, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire).

A paralegal by qualifications and training, Gordon brought vital skills when he joined the team in August 2024, ones that have been important in meeting the challenges that have faced pensioners over the past winter. These are, in particular, the ability to claim for the Winter Fuel Payment and also, linked, for Pension Credit. The winter fuel allowance itself amounts to £200 and £300 for a couple. He notes that currently around 200,000 people across Scotland who are qualified to claim have not done so. He also stresses the increasing challenges facing pensions in terms of the 7.5 percent jump in Council Tax and the still high levels of inflation.

Glasgow Action for Pensioners itself survives on a shoestring. Although the rent for its premises in Harmony Row is subsidised, it has to pay all other costs: for electricity, phones and on-line computing. It gets no funding from local or Scottish government and relies on donations from the public and from private charities. The charity has been also badly hit by the sad illness of its Treasurer, Richard Wilkins, although I am happy to report great improvements recently in Richard's health.

Hazards of growing old: isolation

Nonetheless, its work continues and is expanding. It processes up to fifty claims a month with its two current volunteers as well as assisting with Power of Attorney and Wills.

Gordon underlines the importance of a place where pensioners can come and discuss issues face to face. One of the principal hazards of growing old is isolation and the mental health problems that result – after families have dispersed (often because they cannot secure housing locally). So, Gordon and the team remain keen to secure further volunteers as well as donations to sustain their work.

MORE CLEANSING WORKERS AT LAST

This spring should see a new generation of cleansing workers taking on the mammoth job of keeping Glasgow clean and tidy.

Around 80 new jobs have been created and another 20 to 40 former agency workers will be taken directly into Council employ.



Much of the credit should go to Chris Mitchell, GMB cleansing convenor, who has campaigned on this for years – with some recent support from our local councillor, the City Treasurer.

Some of the new employees will go into Parks and a few others to Roads to tackle the issue of potholes. But most will work in Cleansing - particularly to ensure that the new arrangements, especially the big street bins, do result in cleaner streets and back courts and more effective recycling.

PUBLICLY OWNED BUSES FOR STRATHLYDE ?

Govan has one of the lowest levels of car ownership in Scotland and publicly-owned buses, as in the Lothians, has long been a campaigning issue for the Community Council. Our Chair represents us on the campaign group Get Glasgow Moving.

However, despite recent legislation making it now legally possible for Councils to take ownership, neither the Council nor the Scottish government have the funds to buy out the private operators who make millions. A report by the STUC shows the government subsidy increasing by 19 percent over the last five years to £439M

At a meeting at this year's STUC Congress it was noted that one way ahead might be to use the new round of City Deals, now being negotiated, to secure to secure the funds.

FRIENDS OF ELDER PARK BRINGING OUR PARK BACK TO LIFE

Over the past months the Friends of Elder Park have been transforming the park and bringing it back towards its former glory. The Lady Elder Rose Garden has been replanted, the pond has been cleared and the Portico cleaned. The 'Friends' are a voluntary organisation of local people committed to ensuring that the Park provides a green amenity for our community. They welcome new members. They have been encouraged by the reopening of the Elder Park Library (and especially by the promised Sunday opening) but remain disappointed that the building is not fully available to serve the groups previously housed in the now demolished community centre and that its facilities are limited in terms of community use. They are particularly concerned at the apparent withdrawal of the grant by the Social Care partnership that supported staffing for Urban Roots and the Moogety Community. Between them these two groups provided a lifeline of contact and support for many elderly and isolated residents.



Elder Park Volunteers

What's the origin of Govan Community Council ?

Gordon MacKay recalls local history



Govan Community Council was set up under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 initiated by the government of Edward Heath.

The Act set up a three-tiered system of regional councils (Strathclyde), district councils (Glasgow City) and community councils. The third tier was intended to provide a basis for local consultation and a form of grass-roots democracy.

A black notebook

Govan Community Council was set up in 1975. At that stage it covered an area twice as big as at present. It covered all the housing from Govan Cross to the KGV dock (and there was much more housing then). Three people were the prime movers: Mrs Christine Brotherston, a former Glasgow Councillor, Willie McShane from Balbeg Street who became Chair and, from Ardshiel Road, John McInnes, Secretary. John, Gordon says, had a black 'police issue' notebook and did all the work. All three had previously been members of the Fairfield Ward Committee.

Soon they were joined by others: Gordon himself from Linthouse, Barbara McDougall from Central Govan, Tommy Stewart from Shieldhall Tenants Association, Anna Young from Elderspark, Helen McGregor, Central Govan and Dick McGlave from Greenloan Tenants Association. All were formally elected.

The next issue of the Govan Letter will examine the achievements of the Community Council in more detail. However, Gordon stressed two.

What it achieved: saved the Hospital for Govan – and killed the Waste Dump

The first was to ensure that the new hospital was built in Govan and not in Pollok. The second was to see off plans for a giant waste dump on land now occupied by Workspace, Glasgow University and Thales. At minimum this ensured the permanence of over four thousand jobs – even though it may have contributed to current traffic problems.

THE MARY BARBOUR BRIDGE



Govan Community Council has made formal application to Glasgow City Council that the new bridge be named the Mary Barbour Bridge. The application will be heard by a Committee of Council. Supporting evidence will be given by the historian Elaine McFarlane, emeritus professor of Glasgow Caledonian University, plus a representative of the WASPI women, still campaigning for their pension rights, who often meet beside Mary's statue at Govan Cross.

Our Secretary Esme Clark, who was previously also Secretary of the Committee that commissioned the statue, comments: 'When our group was fundraising for the Mary Barbour statue we wanted to have something that reached out to the people of Govan, of Glasgow and beyond. I think we managed it. You see it every day - tourists taking photos, local mums with their toddlers cuddling up to the children in the statue, politicians of all parties might come to BAE Systems but for their interview they cosy up to Mary Barbour. Recently groups like the WASPI women and groups remembering the Suffragettes have been gathering there too. I think it's because the statue represents not some severe Victorian gentleman high up on a plinth but Mrs Barbour who we meet every day at Govan Cross when we are out doing our shopping. We would love to see her name on the bridge - nobody deserves it more.'

GOVAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL ORGANISATION

Govan Community Council meets on the first Monday of the month in the Pearce Institute Café at 7 p.m. (except on public holidays when it is usually the second Monday). Our next three meetings will be Monday 2 June, Monday 7 July and Monday 1 September. All meetings are open to the public. Members, who need to live in the Govan CC area, are elected once every five years. The next elections will take place on Monday, 6 October this year – with application papers available in August. Contact the Chair or Secretary (phone numbers below) if you are interested. New members are needed and welcome.

Our website is <http://govancommunitycouncil.org>.

Our Facebook is: <https://www.facebook.com/p/Govan-Community-Council-61571151939954/>

Govan Community Council

Community Councils represent the third layer of government. They exist to represent the needs of local communities – on planning and the provision of services. Their success depends on how far they represent all sections of the local community. If you want to be involved, contact either the Secretary Esme Clark (014 425 1318) or the Chair Danny O'Neill (07752 126953). This newsletter is produced with financial assistance from Glasgow City Council.