



**MINUTES OF STRATHBLANE COMMUNITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
5th July 2010 in the Kirkrooms.**

Members Present: - Margaret Vass, Willie Oswald, Fiona Murray, Elspeth Posnett, Alan Hutton, Patsy Fischbacher, John Gray, Dick Arnold.

In attendance: - Cllr Lambie, 53 members of public. .

(SC = Stirling Council. CC = Community Council.)

1. Welcome from Chair and apologies:

Margaret Vass (MV) warmly welcomed all present and remarked on the high attendance.

Apologies had been received from Marian Lever, Joan Hoggan, Philip Graves, (CC members); Pam Campbell (SC rural Development Worker); and PC McNally. MV apologised on behalf of Moira Drennan who had recently stepped down as minute taker, and thanked her for all her hard work. The CC would now be looking for a replacement.

MV announced that a) the CC hoped to have a representative from Scottish Water at the next meeting* to explain the background to the recent problems of loss of supply and low pressure to some areas of the community, and b) that public toilets were now open from Mondays to Fridays 10am to 5pm. The CC will continue to press for better hours. (*This has since been postponed to the October meeting)

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising:

The minutes were approved with no changes. Proposed: Elspeth Posnett. Seconded: Dick Arnold.

Cllr Lambie's newsletter had been circulated to CC members and would also be made available on the CC web site.

3. Any urgent planning matters. None. Carbeth huts matters are discussed below.

4. Discussion on Main Issues for SC's Local Development Plan (LDP)

Introduction from MV: - John Gray was the CC planning correspondent and would give a brief presentation on the SC Main Issues Report (MIR) for the LDP which sets the direction for the overall plan. This would be followed by discussion on local issues.

Power Point Presentation by John Gray (JG)

Timescales

- The LDP would address the overall vision and detail for 2012 – 2032.
- The MIR was issued in spring 2010 and responses were due by 30 July but the CC had a short extension to allow feedback to the public at the meeting on 2 August. A draft response would be prepared a week in advance of the meeting and made available for viewing.

- Detailed planning stage would take place in 2011.
- Consultation was also taking place on SC housing and Open Space Strategies.

General Issues for the SC area

- What kind of development is needed and where; providing sustainable locations; importance of Green Belt; preserving high amenity, natural and historic environments and biodiversity.
- How to support social inclusion and mixed communities; how to manage land and development to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Spatial Strategy - Issues of urban consolidation, regeneration, city expansion, new settlements and sustaining rural communities.

Strathblane and Blanefield Settlement Assessment. Do we agree with this?

- Character and identity considered by SC as follows: isolated from other settlements; highly desirable; relatively affluent; looks mainly to Glasgow for services and facilities; historic form largely obscured by subsequent phases of development; to the west the dispersed larger properties and farms retain their original pattern with distinct character.
- Most journeys made by private car; limited local job opportunities; large amount of out commuting; need for affordable housing; primary school has capacity but limited at Balfron High; limited capacity in sewage treatment works; perceived lack of open space for residents which would be exacerbated by any development on open spaces; surrounded to east, south and west by Green Belt and to the north by an Area of Great Landscape Value.
- Not most suitable for development because remote from places of employment and other main services and dependence on the car; constrained by Green Belt and low capacity at sewage treatment works. There may be scope to identify some land for housing mainly to provide better tenure mix and affordability.

Other issues identified by the CC for consideration.

- Public transport; footpaths in and around the village; provision of office/workspace; impacts of large house extensions and rebuilds, and building in garden grounds; cemetery expansion; landscape protection; Mugdock Country Park and status of Carbeth huts.
- Green Belt (GB) – SC recommend preserving GB except to north of B821 (Cuilt Road) & Auchineden where it would be constrained only by countryside policies which allows for some house building.

Sites considered for development in MIR. (Should the village expand?)

- JG identified these on a map and referred to SC's assessments: these would be discussed later.
- Mugdock has approx 40 dwellings which are all in GB where development is only considered if it is required for a countryside business. Should it become a settlement with a defined GB boundary; this would allow for some housing development?

The presentation ended with a reminder of the timescale for responses and details of how individuals could send their comments to SC.

Open Discussion

Margaret Vass thanked John for his presentation and opened up the meeting for discussion.

Green Belt

Q. Are some parts of GB more sensitive than others? Do we need to prevent small scale ribbon agricultural development between the village and Milngavie that could lead to house building? Is this area sacrosanct?

- Trevor Scott was concerned about the proposal to remove GB status for parts of Carbeth and the area of huts. It was agreed that the GB should be retained here.
- Mary Brailey felt we had a responsibility to provide for affordable housing and that consideration should also be given for provision of local food economy in the interests of sustainable development.
- Other public felt that the area between the village and Milngavie should be sacrosanct and that there was need to maintain the area in general as a place of natural beauty.
- Kathleen Taylor outlined the history to secure the GB and the battle to preserve the field on Campsie Rd and the Horses' Field from development, the latter had involved the whole community including children.
- Ross Burns acknowledged the importance of GB but felt that the field on Old Mugdock Rd should be considered as a gap site and not GB.
- There was discussion about need for housing particularly for young and elderly. Murray O'Donnell understood that any Rural Housing Association provision would be allocated on a points system which would most likely exclude local folk, but MV explained that RHA were better placed than the Council to influence provision for local people.
- Archie Roy expressed concern about piecemeal development and referred to the unsuitable planting of conifers in GB.
- Geoff Philips remembered the inception of the GB committee and the achievements it had achieved and urged the CC to consider seriously any development in GB.

Green space. How important is our 'green heart' and our gardens?

Q. MV referred to the Greenheart campaign and asked if people valued the green space in the heart of the village. The answer was YES.

Q. MV asked how people felt about building in garden grounds especially as recent builds had been fairly large.

- Mary Brailey thought it was a matter of proportion but there should be a presumption against.
- Some felt that recent builds were disproportionately large.
- David Anderson referred to the limit of 50% of the original footprint.
- One opinion was that housing within the village boundary should be dense. Others expressed concern about character and design.
- Patsy Fischbacher (PF) mentioned the need for space for children to play; that SC encourages home grown fruit and veg; loss of garden ground would exacerbate flooding problems which are liable to increase due to climate change. Campsie Dene Rd had a distinctive character that would be adversely affected by further development in garden grounds. It would be a shame to lose many houses with large gardens. MV suggested it was a matter of balance.

- JG said that planners intend to tighten up on issues of design but whether they manage this remains to be seen. Willie Oswald noted that it was straightforward for SC to oppose bad design but difficult to comment when just mediocre.

What do we want our village to be like?

Q. MV noted that 1/3 of people who responded to the community questionnaire did not want any change at all and that everyone was pretty happy with the village as it is. However there may be room for some small scale development to sustain local businesses, shops and other amenities. SC was suggesting a maximum of 40 houses mostly limited to small, low cost rented/shared equity properties.

- There were other comments about the absence of low cost housing.
- Carol Craig spoke of her involvement with the battle to save the Horses' Field from development. The bottom of the field had been zoned for local housing needs but CALA had come in with a plan to build some local needs housing along with about 70 other houses, including 2 roundabouts. She was sceptical about allocating small spaces for Housing Association houses in the current financial climate as it could make a way in for developers. Park Place would be more suitable although she would prefer it to be for allotments. She also noted that the reporter to the public inquiry had said that the Horses' Field did not represent a 'sustainable' site because it was a north facing.
- David Anderson felt that the Horses' Field was sacrosanct and there was general agreement with this view.
- Ross Burns thought the field on Old Mugdock Road was suitable for development as it was bounded on three sides by houses.

Individual Sites – JG and MV referred to SC's assessments of the sites labelled STRA01 - STRA07 and asked the meeting for their views.

Horses' Field (STRA01)

SC - Considered unsuitable as it is highly visible and rural in feel and character and would be difficult to integrate with the village. Significant planting would be needed to create a new permanent village boundary. – Agreed.

Field on Old Mugdock Road (STRA02)

SC - The site was in the GB, remote, not safe to walk to school, it would continue the pattern of undesirable development that did not fit well into the landscape.

- Eric Strachan noted that this site was discussed at the public inquiry at the same time as the Horses' Field and the Reporter had agreed that it should not be developed. SC supports this view and considers there are better sites close to the settlement.
- As mentioned above, Ross Burns (who has an interest in this site) spoke in favour of it as a suitable site.
- JG recalled that the CC and SC had long expressed concern about the state and safety of the road.

The public agreed with SC's assessment of the site.

Campsie Dene Road (STRA03)

SC - The countryside policy should be altered to include the new house currently under construction.

- JG indicated that the CC was opposed because the house was for a farm worker and was tied to the agricultural business. – This view was supported by the public.

Campsie Road (Singh field)(STRA04)

SC - Seen as one of the best opportunities for new housing in close proximity to local amenities and meeting some affordable needs. GB strong here and development would appear as intrusion into the countryside. Any development would need to be low density and additional tree planting would be required to create a permanent new boundary.

Comments from members of the public:

- The site had been considered by numerous Reporters and rejected as too visible.
- There is poor access to amenities.
- The field was needed for an extension to the cemetery.
- How can we define what type of housing we want to prevent pressure from developers?
- If we don't want CALA to build then we need to be very careful what we allow.
- Low density housing does not fit with Housing Association homes.
- The site provides a beautiful/perfect aspect when coming into the village from Lennoxton and should be left as it is.
- There is currently a natural boundary here. If an artificial one can easily be created then there is nothing to stop it being moved repeatedly.

The public did not want to see any development at this site; it considered that the current GB boundary was strong and appropriate and should be retained.

Triangle behind public toilets. (STRA05)

SC – Difficult to develop because of steep gradients and building would have an overbearing effect. Good site for woodland planting.

PF thought trees unsuitable as they would restrict views from this central part of the village. Willie Oswald had written on behalf of the CC to ask SC to consider provision for car parking here.

Green space at Park Place (STRA06)

SC – Suitable for infill but constrained by road access and on-street parking.

- There were no local residents present to express their views.
- PF said that the green area was much valued by neighbouring residents and used by children for recreation. The open aspect provided views onto the Horses' Field and also onto the play park which was valuable for security for children playing as well as acting as a deterrent to vandals.
- It was suggested that the site might accommodate 10 units and that it would be a good site for family homes being close to the school, play park and other amenities.
- Being close to the surgery and other amenities it might be a good site for sheltered/particular needs housing.

Field next to Ballewan Crescent (STRA07))

SC – Well contained site but distant from amenities and constrained by road access.

Comments from members of the public:

- Development here would further stretch the village and amount to undesirable ribbon development.
- The site is prone to serious flooding. The steep field on the opposite side of the A81 has a high standard of drainage and the water feeds down into this site.
- It could put pressure to build on the opposite field.
- Murray O'Donnell asked how sure we could be that houses would be for local needs. MV said the Rural Stirling Housing Association claimed to have a good record, if they were the developers.
- Traffic is very fast at this point. JG said that Traffic calming measures and alternative pedestrian routes could be envisaged if there was development.
- The field site is large and there is a danger of development spreading into the grounds of the nursing home. MV reported that permission had been given for 10 semi-detached houses in the grounds of nursing home; SC consider it safe for frail elderly people to drive out of this access!

The public did not consider this a suitable site for development.

Other sites?

MV asked if there were any other sites within the village that could be used for a few affordable houses or homes for elderly.

- Dai Hutchinson suggested the area below Glenarden between the A81 and Old Mugdock Road, where trees were currently being thinned.
- Alan Morris thought that smaller sites with a modest number of houses was more suitable and presented fewer risks of developments being forced upon us.
- Murray O'Donnell suggested the site of the old bowling green in Station Road but this may have flooding problems.
- Elspeth Posnett referred to a letter sent to the CC from a local resident suggesting that more quality houses would free up homes for others.

General conclusion

MV noted that the meeting was not in favour of any major development but preferred small infill sites if they could be identified. One possibility was that suggested by Dai Hutchinson (see above) and perhaps Park Place might also allow for a few homes. There may be other small sites. (It was noted again that no residents of the Park Place area were present) - Agreed.

Other comments

- Archie Roy asked if any proper demographic work had been done for the next 20 years. He considered that 60 -70% of homes in his neighbourhood would be owned by families by then. Reference was made to statistics from the General Register of Scotland, but comment was made that these had proved unreliable in the past. JG noted that SC expects the population of the SC area to age dramatically over the next 20 years; a main reason for wanting a degree of development was to allow folk of working age to move in to redress the balance.
- Elizabeth Normand asked that consideration be given for the creation of a woodland burial ground. The woodland could also be exploited as a sustainable source of fuel for villagers.

Other areas for consideration

Mugdock Country Park

MV pointed out that this was part of our area and it was the 2nd or 3rd top visitor attraction in Scotland. No real concerns were raised other than comments on a need to improve Mugdock and Old Mugdock Roads for access for motorists, walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Carbeth huts

The CC had not been much involved in the past but it recognised that the rate of replacement and new huts had recently accelerated, some without planning permission, and there was the prospect of numbers increasing to approx 300. This raises concerns about the impact on local residents and visitors (the West Highland Way runs through the estate) as well as issues of sewage etc. Huts were supposed to be for holiday use only but this did not appear to always be the case.

Trevor Scott pointed out that the huts had originally been a quasi social experiment but were now becoming a commercial venture and the quality of many huts was at odds with the conservation area status. Huts had no power, no drainage and the water supply came from stand pipes.

It was agreed that the CC should raise these issues with SC.

Regional Park status for the Campsies?

The main comments were that Regional Park status would safeguard the environment; that areas of the Campsies were seriously eroded and required management; there was a lack of car parking space to accommodate any substantial increase in visitor numbers. It was noted that SC would remain as the planning authority unlike LLT Nat Park which had its own planners. - Agreed to raise the issue with SC and explore the implications.

Mugdock

SC – Is asking if Mugdock should become a small settlement with a defined Green Belt (GB) boundary that would allow for some new building.

- CC – Mugdock currently consists of approx. 40 dwellings within the GB. The CC is awaiting the result of an appeal for 5 new houses which SC and CC opposed. Mugdock residents voted in the past not to have a boundary but some residents would like to develop their grounds. The CC inclined to the view that the GB status should remain. No contrary views raised.
- No Mugdock residents seemed to be present. The CC will advise the Mugdock Association to send in its own response.

Closing remarks

MV thanked the members of the public for their valuable contribution and invited them to attend regular CC meetings. The CC draft response to SC would be available on the web site and in the library by Fri 23 July. Meantime JG would endeavour to put the presentation materials and consultation links on the website. The public showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

5. Date of next meeting. Monday 2 August in the Village Club/ Kirkrooms (to be confirmed).