MINUTES OF STRATHBLANE COMMUNITY COUNCIL
2nd Draft  Monday 5th December 2011 in the school

In attendance: - Cllr Alistair Berrill, Pam Campbell SC, PC David McNally with colleague Sgt Barr & Gordon Ash, Dai Hutchinson and Anne Balfour SCDT.
+ 47 members of the community.

(SC = Stirling Council. CC = Community Council. CDT= Community Development Trust *
Denotes an action)

1. Welcome from Chair and apologies:
Margaret welcomed all to the meeting and apologized for expected late arrival of some attendees.

2.-Declaration of interests:- It was noted that an interest existed in connection with the Allotments proposals in the case of Willie Oswald and Mike McNulty of the CC. It was agreed that they would move into the community audience when this item was being discussed.

3. Minutes of August meeting:
Patsy Fischbacher indicated that on Page 3, item 6, regarding house extensions to existing homes, she wanted clarification in respect of large and multiple extensions to houses in the green belt and countryside, such as those at Mugdock. She asked that the minute be amended to reflect this. This was agreed.

4. Matters Arising :
a) Marian Lever had queried the logistics of access to Larbert Hospital from South West Stirling. A reply from Fiona McKenzie, Chief Executive of Forth Valley Health Board had stated that a number of hub points had been established from which to embark upon a journey to the hospital, with a max journey time of 28 minutes. The hub point for Strathblane would be Stirling. This timing would be further increased by 90 minutes to travel to Stirling via Balfron. There would be flexibility of appointments timings to assist bus time co-ordination and other domestic issues, but it was later pointed out that the time window at the hospital was limited if a return to Strathblane was to be achieved that day! Ambulances would be provided for patients with defined medical criteria, but this was not clarified. ML will try to elicit a definition of this. A comment from the floor suggested that it was now health boards’ policy to try to carry out multiple investigations/treatments during the one visit to mitigate travelling.
b) Elspeth Posnett advised, in respect of the Emergency Plan, that she held the key to the pavilion in which snow clearing equipment was to be stored. MV said that
during today’s snowfall situation more pavement clearing had been apparent, but people parking on pavements had inhibited this. RA indicated that salt had been provided at his cul de sac for local use and wondered if the same applied elsewhere. The grit bins had not, however, been replenished.

c) John Gray queried whether the Tesco presentation next year was still on. He had heard that they had let others down. MV said it was still on as far as she knew.

d) Alan Hutton said that a feasibility study was under way re a news sheet in support of the Communications Strategy. Hopes to report in January.

c) WO reported that the street light problem had been resolved at Park Place on 14th Nov, but John Cushley said that the affected lights are now permanently on. Likewise it was reported that lights at Ballewan Cresc (and later a report of a main road light on the A81) were permanently on. All wasting electricity.

5. Police Report – from PC David McNally,
The past month had been relatively quiet. Three or four issues of note had arisen, mainly car thefts or attempts. The case of the bogus workmen raised last month had progressed to the stage where a report had been sent to the Procurator Fiscal. The community was again warned about bank/credit card fraud. Never part with these on request. Banks never uplift cards.
All present were reminded that a seasonal purge on motorists was under way to catch drivers under the influence of drink or drugs.

The report is in appendix I on the website www.strathblanefield.org.uk

Eight members present from the community indicated that they had looked at the Plan on the web site.
JG did a quick resume of the issues affecting us and which had been presented at the special meeting on 23rd Nov. The CC had had a meeting following this to try to come up with its recommendations and comments based on the views expressed at that meeting.
The following was thought to summarize the views of the meeting and the CC as best possible:

a. No-one is happy about a breach of the Green belt at either end of the village;

b. The majority accept that the community needs a number of affordable and particular needs houses [esp. for older residents];

c. Therefore all options must be carefully considered before any breach of the Green belt [at NEW5 or Singh Field] esp the site on the devil’s elbow;

d. Only on the failure to find adequate alternatives would there be support for housing in the Singh Field and that only on strict conditions;
e. The impact of traffic through the village is an issue which is not given enough consideration. Even with some increase in self-sufficiency in shopping and employment in Strathblane & Blanefield, the likely increase in population and in car ownership in the Balfron/Killearn, Strathblane corridor can only make the traffic issue worse. The village cannot be bypassed and, therefore, serious and effective measures must be taken to enforce a maximum speed of 30mph. If this population growth is thought necessary then it must be equally necessary that its knock-on effects are addressed. For us this is a priority.

Further public discussion followed JG’s summary, some of which reflected comments and concerns expressed at the public meeting. The CC, on behalf of this community will be asking Stirling Council to allow us to become very involved in preparation of the Development Brief. We are still unable to see a suitable place for special needs housing for which there is already funding available (for 6 bungalows).

Worries were again raised about the increased traffic resulting from additional housing in all the villages feeding into Glasgow. There were concerns that SC had taken unilateral action on a number of recent occasions without consulting the villages (eg most recently the attempt to demolish church bothy).

It is imperative that in a Local Development Plan, Local involvement is permitted. WO raised the possibility of an addition to the open spaces with the addition of the triangle of land behind the war memorial (New 4 on map). He said the site is owned by Scottish Water and had the potential to be an open access area for the community once the hedges had been modified. He wanted to investigate having the lease transferred to either SC or the CDT. M. McCrossan said WO’s information was erroneous and that she held the lease for the area.

A query was made by Patsy Fischbacher regarding protection of open spaces. JG said that while we fully support protection of open spaces, we did not want to do so in such a rigid way that future desirable developments at, say, the school grounds, when, sometime (a long time) in the future, the school was rebuilt. Public response has indicated that residents are happy with this caveat.

A further query was raised re the inclusion of woodland (at the devil’s elbow) within the village ie green belt status removed. Council policy is to retain woodland so they would want to retain the status quo. If, however, a specific project for community benefit, such as special needs housing, then they may move on this position and if trees were felled, equivalent planting elsewhere would be required. It was also pointed out that the trees are poor quality, some have already been felled and that this was a field 40 years ago!

A further observation from the floor was that an unidentified photographer was seen taking photos of the Broadgate field. NEW28. He would not divulge who he was. Concerned community action was needed to protect the field from developers.

JG reminded all that the final comments had to be presented to SC by 16th December. MV thanked JG for the large amount of work he had expended on this issue and this was reflected by applause from the floor.

a) Allotments and Community Garden.

Speakers for and against the current Planning application were invited to give presentations. Two speakers for and one against would address us.

For – Linda Wardle from the Allotments Group. She has been a resident in the village for 13 yrs and enthusiastically signed up for a plot to grow fruit and veg. She is surprised to find a year later that she still has to defend the proposal. She considered that there was approval in general for the principle of allotments in the village.

It is the location that is causing problems. This site is, however, ideal for allotment user’s needs in that it is reasonably central to each end of the village and as vehicular access was to be very strictly controlled by the Group’s constitution walk-in access was important.

All residents have a right to use the access - dogwalkers, horse riders and footballers; why not allotment users? She could not understand all the alarmist talk about “policing” access; they would be self policing.

Allotments would reduce food miles. They would also reduce chemical fertilizer use and packaging, all of which would reduce CO2 production. It is also important to preserve the green belt and to encourage young people to connect with the land. Scouts, Guides and all uniformed groups would become involved. Contrary to fears expressed this will discourage vandalism when young people take ownership of the scheme.

Allotments are a good social centre, get people outside to grow things and to share their experiences.

Against- Margaret McCrossan. She did not expect to be going over old ground regarding land adjacent to the railway track. Opposition to the allotments is site-specific; not the principle of allotments. Concerns still prevail and while she accepts that access control has been addressed, this cannot guarantee control of access. 50% of allotment holders may give up after the first year. Parking on nearby streets is also a hazard. Allotments would detract from the rural appearance of the area, will detract from the view and spoil the enjoyment of walkers. It may also impinge on the local stables business.

Surely a solution could be found which did not affect so many people?

A recent petition received 200 signatures. Sir Archie Edmonstone had been given this and he said he was going to withdraw his consent for the land lease. She also expressed surprise that the planning application was still going ahead. She asked whether the CC would take into account the views of the community by not supporting this site, but still supporting the principle of allotments.

For- Robbie Thomson, Chairperson of the Allotments group and a chartered town planner in rural W. Stirlingshire.

He indicated that a number of other sites were investigated and found to be unsuitable or inaccessible. This site was below the sightline of Netherblane. It is a small site of 6 hectares and what is proposed is agricultural use of agricultural land with a few 2m x2m x2m huts; much smaller than field shelters.
The planners will first of all consider planning issues only. Allotments are an approved usage of land in the countryside and within a green belt area. There is national Government approval on this. He pointed out that there had been much activity and consultation with the community over the past year, including three surgeries and a public meeting, to hear concerns from the village and allotment rules were adjusted to allay fears expressed.
Vehicle access rules have been drawn up to deter vehicular use of the track and it is planned to upgrade the track for the works to progress.
Regarding worries about appearance, the Planning Department can control activities and developments on the site.
The local police will monitor the site to deter vandalism.
He completed his presentation by pointing out that the Allotments group had consulted democratically and had general approval from the community and referred to the activity on the SC website.

Public discussion

Isobel Robertson opened by pointing out that an e-mail petition on the website, which had links to the SC site, aired comments from many people not living in Strathblane.
Alistair Smith requested a comment from Mr Thomson regarding withdrawal of consent by Sir Archie Edmonstone. Mr T was reluctant to elaborate on this at this time.
Concerns were expressed that people were against this site because false fears had been generated. How could allotments possibly impinge on the equestrian interests?
Patsy Fischbacher was concerned about access to fresh water for children’s’ handwashing. A quip from the floor suggested that youngsters on Duke of Edinburgh expeditions did not take taps with them! Linda advised that alcohol wipes would be provided for hand cleaning. She also said that the school would have to carry out a risk assessment on allotment expeditions.
Rosemary Morris was concerned about car access and as control of the Allotments Group changed over the years, rigidity of compliance with car access rules may change. This must be considered now.
Another resident dog walker commented that car access is already a problem.
Robert Gibson spoke as an impartial observer and said that he did not think the allotments would blight the countryside, but queried the wetness of the site and possible lack of sunlight.

Community Council discussion.

PG said that his parents lived in a similar village to our own in Buckinghamshire and the problem there was that demand was so great it was difficult to get a plot. There were no problems with noise or vandalism.

JG said a robust agreement must be in place for control by SC. It was generous and far sighted of Duntreath Estates to provide a site; the proposed field is a man-made field for grazing and the proposals comply with council policies.
With regards car access, there is a lack of trust/confidence concerning control of this with possible future changes of membership of the management committee. Planners can impose a “good neighbour agreement” which is legally binding between a group and the Community Council. This may not be fair when allotment users only are so bound and other users, such as horse riders, are not.

AH said that as it was topical, when he was recently down south, he was aware of allotments there. There are large waiting lists for them. He suggested that the sample picture he displayed showing a seaside allotment in Devon could hardly be said to spoil the view in this rural village. If it did then you must be against allotments. Marring the view is the least problem. Access by cars is the biggest issue and is a problem already which should equally concern us with current equestrian and football player access.

The CC then discussed the application, Both AH and PG spoke about allotments in the south of England and how they integrated well in communities. ML said that the Community did not want the CC member’s personal opinions; they wanted to know which way the CC was going to act. She proposed that the CC should neither support nor oppose the application. Elspeth Posnett agreed with this.

MV said she agreed and that we would put forward the issues raised by both sides of the discussion.

Edward Pickard from the floor, interrupted by saying that as the elected representatives of the community, the CC should not sit on the fence, but take a clear position.

Pam Campbell read an extract from the CC code of practice saying that “the general purpose of a community council shall be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents”. 

AH said that we must reflect the issues raised, but, in doing so, the CC could itself vote on the matter.

JG said that before voting, he would like to know whether, since the main objection was the policing of access over time, would a "good neighbour agreement" not resolve the issue?

M. McCrossan from the floor replied that she was only an individual and could not answer that on behalf of all the objectors and suggested that if we cannot decide, we would have to sit on the fence.

MV said that there was a proposal to neither support nor oppose the application proposed by ML and seconded by EP.

JG proposed a vote to support the planning application based on community views expressed to him, but to communicate also that the issue is contentious and to report the counter-issues raised by those in the community who were against the application, Fiona Murray seconded this amendment. A vote for the amendment was taken. 8 CC members were eligible to vote resulting in 5 votes for the amendment with 3 against. The motion to neither support nor oppose the application was therefore defeated.

b) Co-op/ Post Office planning application.

A query to SC has reviewed the drawings and confirmed that the sorting office has been omitted. Nothing can be done about this just now.
c) Holiday cottages at Boards Farm
The CC was not consulted initially on this application. JG had circulated an email received from the planning officer and asked if the CC wanted to make any comment. No comments had been received from the public. Agreed: no comments need to be made by the CC.

8. Environmental Issues:
WO referred to letters received by residents in Blane Cresc. regarding possible contaminated land relating to the old printworks, there have been no answers yet from Environmental Services to enquiries raised. They say they have no perceived concerns, but are carrying out the exercise to comply with legislation.
A comment from the floor raised the question of the football field which had, apparently, in days past, had been a waste tip - was this also contaminated?

Muirhouse Quarry – re mud on road and speed of exiting. Their planning consent governs the quality of materials permitted to be dumped and is monitored by SEPA. Recent inspections by them had revealed significant non-compliances. On 18th Nov a suspension Notice was placed on further operations by Muirhouse Landfill who operates the site. SEPA was monitoring compliance steps. A copy letter is appended in Appendix II on the web site at www.strathblanefield.org.uk
A further complaint re mud on the road was made from the floor.

The financial situation had changed since the last meeting. A cheque for £450 had been received from the CDT for flower planting from donations from the community. A further cheque was received from CDT to cover distribution costs incurred in respect of the Community Action Plan. £20 was received from a Gentleman from the village, also to purchase plants.
Expenditure had been incurred in travel expenses (£18.00) and the cost of the armistice day wreath (£27.00).
Bank accounts stood at: current a/c £1103.67 and gold a/c £2720.17; total £3823.84.
-It was agreed that the plant donations could be lodged with Oakwood Garden Centre, to draw on each season for plants.
The notice board for Blanefield had been ordered but we cannot arrange erection until we receive funds from the Community Pride fund. We should hear this on 14th Dec.

10. Roads Issues – from Willie Oswald
Enforcement action regarding the pruning of trees on the A81 at the Kirkhouse Inn is about to be taken.

11. Issues from the community – None.

Nothing to report. Were there any questions from the community? None.

13. Correspondence. – from Marian Lever
ML advised that there had been concerns regarding the viability of Blanefield Care home.
This had been resolved as the home had been taken over just prior to administration of the previous owners by Blanefield Care Ltd. A letter regarding this is shown in Appendix III on the web site at www.strathblanefield.org.uk

14. Date of next meeting - Monday 9th January 2012 at 7.30 in the school.

Appendix I - Police Report from PC McNally
"In the month since the last meeting there have been three separate complaints regarding motorists failing to stop for pedestrians on the zebra crossing at Glasgow Road, Blanefield. Of these three complaints, two drivers have been charged whilst the third complaint is still under investigation. There has since mid May been the sudden emergence of a crime trend whereby larger isolated houses are being targeted by housebreakers. The typical modus operandi is to force entry to garages and outhouses associated with these properties and to steal power tools and gardening equipment. On one occasion a Jaguar motor vehicle was stolen after the keys were discovered by the thieves. Affected areas include Ballewan, Campsie Dene Road, Carbeth, Mugdock and latterly the Auchengillan area. A property under construction was broken into in Moor Road and the thieves removed all the wiring from the building considerably setting back the completion date. Residents are advised to take all measures necessary to secure their properties at all times. By way of tackling this crime trend, Central Scotland Police Officers are patrolling the wider Blanefield area every night conducting road checks. Anyone with any information on this crime trend is encouraged to contact Central Scotland Police immediately on 01786 456000. Anyone who sees anything suspicious should contact police immediately."

Appendix II – Letter re Muirhouse Quarry.
Further to the update provided below, I wish to take this opportunity to update you on SEPA’s regulation of Muirhouse Quarry.

Recent inspections by SEPA officers of the inert landfill site, operated by Muirhouse Landfill Ltd (formerly Dow on site Ltd) at Muirhouse Quarry in Strathblane have revealed significant non compliances with permit conditions. These non compliances, which include insufficient control over waste accepted at
the site, resulted in SEPA carrying out sampling and environmental monitoring to ascertain whether these non compliances presented a risk of pollution of the surrounding environment.

Having considered all the available information, SEPA served an Enforcement notice on the company on 10 October 2011 requiring steps to be undertaken to remedy a number of the identified non compliances within specified timescales. In addition to this, and due to the imminent risk of serious pollution to the surrounding environment through the production and inadequate control of Landfill gas and leachate, SEPA served a suspension notice on the company on 18 November 2011 requiring the cessation of receipt, handling and storage of waste at the site with immediate effect.

SEPA continues to regulate the operations at the site using the full range of enforcement options at its disposal, and continues to work with Muirhouse Landfill Ltd to ensure that the required steps are taken by the company to achieve compliance with the conditions within the permit, and the protection of the surrounding environment.

Should you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards

Colin

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Appendix III – Blanefield Care Home letter.