

MINUTES of the 318th BUSINESS MEETING
of the
STONEHAVEN and DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

HELD IN THE COWIE LOUNGE OF THE INVERCARRON RESOURCE CENTRE
at 7.30 p.m. ON TUESDAY 10th JULY, 2007

No	<u>Notes</u>	Action
1.	<p>Welcome, sederunt, apologies and declarations of interest</p> <p>Present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Karen Allen, Raymond Christie, Sarah Dickinson, David Fleming, Ian Hunter, Michael Innes, Lenny Lawrence, Alistair Lawrie, Isabel Parkes, David Wood (Chair);• Kincardine and Mearns Councillors:, Cllr. Wendy Agnew, Cllr. Graeme Clark, Cllr. Mike Sullivan;• Inspector Jim Gordon;• Two members of the Press, 3 members of the public. <p>Apologies were received from, Ian Balgowan, Lynda Digney, Lyn Jardine, Ditta Neumann, and Cllr. Peter Bellarby.</p> <p>The following members were absent: James Cleves, Jane Davidson, Steve Hurrell.</p> <p>David Wood (Vice Chairperson) was asked to take the chair, because David Fleming was just recovering from a migraine.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes of the meeting held on June 12th 2007</p> <p>The adoption was proposed by Alistair Lawrie, seconded by Michael Innes, and agreed unanimously.</p>	
3.	<p>Crime Prevention – Report by Police</p> <p>Inspector Gordon remarked that it was a coincidence that he was attending this particular meeting with its agenda item on Policing and Vandalism (item 8). He happened to be on duty and Constable Akers was on leave.</p> <p>He was glad to be able to report that the crime figures were improving, partly as a result of Constable Akers' work and with good support from the community, but the Force was not complacent. The vandalism detection rate was 21%, which was considered reasonable reflecting the difficulty in gaining evidence in these sorts of crimes. All crime detections stood at 39%, the highest for 3 years. He felt that initiatives such as the SAVED (Stonehaven Against Vandalism and Environmental Damage) scheme, the PubWatch scheme, and the street football (now planned for every Wednesday evening throughout the summer) would help to make a positive impact on these statistics.</p> <p>In answer to Michael Innes, he stated that all stewards at licensed premises had to be individually approved and licensed as from September, and that other liquor sales (e.g. at fetes) would continue to have their stewarding arrangements approved as part of their occasional licence.</p> <p>Sarah Dickinson asked about the new Local Licensing Forums. Inspector Gordon suggested that the Community Council contact Michelle Pittendreigh for further detail.</p>	David Fleming

No	<u>Notes</u>	Action
4.	Sewerage Upgrade	
	In Ian Downie's absence, David Fleming reported on a conversation he had had with Ian, and said that the whole project was well within schedule.	
	David Fleming also reported that he had set out the process for the Cowie Bridge design, and had circulated that by e-mail to members. He was hoping to set up a meeting in late July with the manufacturer to agree the main design, and all parties with an interest had been contacted.	
	<u>Committee activities</u>	
5.	Planning	
5.1	Discussion of the Planning Committee on planning applications	
	None of the new applications were controversial, and no objections were proposed.	
5.2	Ury Estate	
	There were two current applications.	
	APP/2007/2014 was a detailed application for the alterations to Ury House itself, and the provision of Golf Lodges, offices, and associated facilities.	
	APP/2007/2015 was for outline permission for the enabling development of some 230 houses in four hamlets on the southern edge of the estate, quite close to the A90. Being outline, there is little detail, but it has been stated that some of the housing will be of the affordable type.	
	David Fleming suggested that the Community Council should have a full debate and then make a decision on these two applications at their next meeting, and requested members to brief themselves before then. He reminded members that any planning gain considerations (i.e. for monies to be spent outside the estate) were not part of the consideration. On the other hand, all works inside the estate (e.g. internal roads, costs of refurbishing Ury House, water & sewage infrastructure) will be part of the application. The number of houses in the enabling development was calculated to offset these costs.	
5.3	Invercowie House	
	This application will come up for determination at the end of month. The Community Council has asked to speak to its objections. Despite the significant changes to the plan the Community Council maintains its objection and passed the following motion:	
	<i>Motion: This council has examined the revised proposals (dated 25/4/07 or later) and continues its objection to the application, on the grounds of:</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Overdevelopment</i> • <i>Damage to existing trees</i> • <i>Lack of clarity of access rights</i> • <i>Overdevelopment in a Conservation Area</i> 	
5.4	Field 52	Secretary
	There is to be an open exhibition on the 12 th /13 th July in the Town Hall to display the current plans. Members were encouraged to attend. The formal planning application for this site has yet to be submitted.	
5.5	Bervie Braes	Secretary
	An e-mail had been received recently asking for comments on a proposal for the posts down the middle of the Bervie Brae Road, which were currently in need of repair. The Roads Department proposed that wooden beams, 30 cm square should be laid between the posts. After some discussion, this was agreed as a reasonable solution, and the Roads Department should be so informed.	
5.6	New Process on Major Applications.	
	David Fleming informed the Community Council that a new process for handling Major	

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	<p>Planning Applications was announced by Aberdeenshire Council on the previous Monday. Details are available of the Aberdeenshire Council website. The process involved a pre-application meeting between the developers and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a large number of Aberdeenshire Council officers, who would be consulted, and b) representatives of any of the external statutory consultees. <p>No mention was made of Community Councils being informed of this, or being consulted prior to the formal application process. He said that he felt that the Community Council should object to this because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) they had not been consulted on something which affected them b) although the introduction talked of community involvement, there was no mention of it later on in the pamphlet, when the detailed process was described. <p>He said that he felt the Community Council has always campaigned for developers to consult communities at a very early stage, but this new process specifically excluded them prior to formal applications being made. He had raised the issue at an unscheduled meeting with Raymond Reid (Head of Planning Services), but had not received any assurances. He had therefore drafted a Press Release to express the Community Council's view, and asked members for their comments.</p> <p>Cllr. Clark said that he had received an e-mail from Christine Gore (Director of Planning and Environmental Services) refuting the statements in Mr. Fleming's draft Press Release. A copy of the e-mail is attached to thee minutes. He thought that the discussion at the pre-application would only be on technical issues, not policy issues.</p> <p>There was considerable discussion, the conclusion of which was that Mr Fleming agreed not to issue the Press Release, and to defer the item for consideration at the next meeting.</p>	Secretary
6.	<p>Transport Committee</p> <p>No meeting had taken place.</p>	
7.	<p>The Adopt-a-street Scheme</p> <p>Sarah Dickinson reported a continuing increase in the number of volunteers, but there was still room for more. The Committee was working closely with the Aberdeen Litter Initiative (ALi), but details were still to be clarified. She asked that the Community Council website be updated, to include information about the Adopt-a-Street Scheme, and information and a link to Ali. Aberdeenshire Council were also to be approached to include link information to the S&DCC page on the Adopt-a-Street Scheme on their website.</p>	Ian Hunter
8.	<p>Major items from the Future of Stonehaven work programme</p> <p>Police & Vandalism</p> <p>Sarah Dickinson commended the recommendations in her overview report to the Community Council. These were approved and she agreed to take the necessary follow-up action.</p> <p>Michael Innes asked whether the training of call centre operators in local knowledge had been done, and Inspector Gordon was asked to find out whether this was the case.</p> <p>Ian Hunter suggested that, since the measures on vandalism had appeared to be successful, whether more were planned. Alistair Lawrie felt that it was not appropriate to equate the current drop with particular initiatives; rather a long term drive was needed.</p> <p>Lenny Lawrence asked that links with the Community Safety Group be strengthened.</p> <p>David Fleming reminded him that Steve Hurrell was the link person, who should action this.</p> <p>The reluctance of members of public to report incidents was discussed. Cllr. Clark</p>	<p>Sarah Dickinson</p> <p>Inspector Gordon</p> <p>Steve Hurrell</p>

reminded the Council that people could always use the Crimestoppers number (0800 555 111) anonymously. Cllr. Agnew reported that, whilst accompanying the police on patrol recently, many calls came via the 0845 660 5 700 number rather than from 999 calls, showing that the police were able to react to many incoming calls quickly.

Business Matters

9. Closure of Community Centre in July and August of 2007

It was reported that the Community Centre was now to be closed over the July and August School Holiday period. This was deplored by the Community Council. It was also noticed that it was increasingly difficult to use the Centre, whereas in the past the users ran the Centre, and it was operated on a very open basis.

Ian Hunter felt that the management was now very bureaucratic, and wondered why there was no Aberdeenshire Councillor on the Management Committee. It was agreed that the Chairman should write to Willie Munro to ask that this situation be reviewed.

**David
Fleming**

Note: Michael Innes apologised that he had to leave the meeting at this point.

10. K&M Community Planning Group

Election of representative

The Community Council agreed to cast its vote in favour of Sarah Dickinson as Community Council representative on the Planning Group.

Secretary

Discussion on Structure

Ian Hunter queried whether the Community Planning structure, as outlined by Jacqui Christie last month, was likely to achieve its objective. He used the criterion that we ought to be able to explain it to anybody "in the street". He thought he would be unable to explain it to anyone. Sarah Dickinson said that the Planning Group was mainly Aberdeenshire Council officials and representatives of Service providers, and they were expected to work together to gain greater efficiencies and to take account of local priorities. It was, however, very difficult to see how the views of the community could be adequately represented with only one community representative on the K&M Community Planning Group and no formal process whereby locals views were canvassed.

Two motions were proposed by Ian Hunter, seconded by Raymond Christie, that:

Stonehaven and District Community Council views the Community Planning Structure as an unsuitable model for the proper representation and engagement of the communities of South Aberdeenshire.

The Structure is unnecessarily complex, lacks satisfactory "report back" procedures, and has only limited mechanisms to utilise the knowledge and energy of the population.

In line with its Strategy, Document Stonehaven and District Community Council will co-operate with Aberdeenshire Council, and other Community Councils and agencies, to create open developmental consultative forums. The Forums will seek to provide more opportunities for the population to influence, and participate in, the development of their community.

Both motions were agreed unanimously.

11. Updates

11.1 Former Stonehaven Radio Station Site

BT had now arranged to make the site secure. An e-mail from Arthur Ingram

No	<u>Notes</u>	Action
	<p>(Environmental Health Officer) was read out, detailing the actions taken by Aberdeenshire Council and BT. A copy of the e-mail is attached to these minutes</p> <p>No request had been received from Mr Alistair MacLean to have a Community Council sponsored meeting to discuss the future of the site. The general view was that the best option was for Dunecht Estates to consider making it a Visitor Centre for Dunnottar Castle, together with a marine observatory and a museum for Stonehaven Radio.</p>	
11.2	<p>Use of QE Caravan Park</p> <p>A number of incidents had been reported, but it was unclear whether the police or Aberdeenshire Council had been involved. Graham Wall was looking into amending the rules to ban the current abuse of the rules, but this may take some time. None present knew whether improvements were planned in the near future. It was felt that stronger action by Aberdeenshire Council (in support of the warden) was needed.</p>	
11.3	<p>Recycling point at the Leisure Centre</p> <p>David Fleming reported that a meeting was due, once various Aberdeenshire Council officials had returned from leave, to establish an action plan to deal with the complaints about the Recycling point.</p>	David Fleming
11.4	<p>“Consultation” by NHS Grampian on Kincardine Community Hospital</p> <p>The documentation from the April consultation meeting had been received and would be circulated. Raymond Christie agreed to follow up the issues.</p>	Raymond Christie
11.5	<p>Stonehaven Medical Centre</p> <p>David Fleming said he was awaiting a meeting with the practice Manager and Senior Partner to resolve the issues raised. A number of members were unhappy that the Practice had closed on the Monday (9th July) with little or no prior notice being given to the public.</p>	David Fleming
11.6	<p>Climbing Wall</p> <p>In Michael Innes’ absence, David Fleming was very pleased to report that Awards for All had confirmed that morning that our application for an award was successful. He paid tribute to Michael’s effort and, quoting from Michael’s own report, read out that “I would just like to say thank you to all who made me believe that I could do it”.</p> <p>The first appearance of the Wall would be on the coming Sunday (15th July) from 10:00 to 18:00 and all members were asked to come and help Michael in stewarding.</p> <p>Further appearances were on Sunday August 12th at the MRI Open Day, and Sept 2nd at the “Oil weekend”. Again, help with stewarding was asked of all members.</p>	All
11.7	<p>Oil Weekend</p> <p>This appears to be going ahead, but details were as yet very sketchy.</p>	All
11.8	<p>Training for Councillors</p> <p>David Fleming felt that Aberdeenshire Council were not going to progress this, and suggested that we organise this within ourselves. To that end, he would circulate a request for members to identify what subjects they would like covered.</p>	David Fleming
11.9	<p>Beach Toilets</p> <p>A meeting to discuss how these could be operated in future had been planned but was postponed and had still to be re-arranged. They would be open for July and August under Aberdeenshire Council management as in previous years.</p>	David Fleming
11.10	<p>General Follow-up of issues with Aberdeenshire Council</p> <p>David Fleming reported that he had a preliminary discussion with Willie Munro about a number of outstanding matters that appeared not to be progressing within Aberdeenshire Council. David Fleming suggested that he draw up a list and, once Willie Munro had seen it and agreed the content that it should be tabled regularly at the Community Council meeting, probably every 2 or 3 months. Isabel Parkes supported this idea, and</p>	

No	<u>Notes</u>	Action
	agreed that many issues seemed just to “disappear”. Willie Munro supported this idea, and said some other Community Councils were starting up such an idea. It was agreed to adopt the idea.	David Fleming
12.	<p>Reports from Councillors representing the Community Council elsewhere</p> <p>The Agenda meeting had discussed how the Community Council should keep itself informed about other linked bodies. This item would be a standing item to allow any member to report back from relevant meetings they had attended.</p> <p>Ian Hunter took the opportunity to report that he had attended a meeting of the Community Development Group. It was poorly attended, and had prompted his earlier agenda item on the status of the Community Centre.</p>	
13.	<p>Allocation of Secretarial Tasks</p> <p>David Fleming announced that the secretarial structure was now complete as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence Secretary – Lyn Jardine • Planning Secretary – Ditta Neumann • Meetings Secretary – Ditta Neumann • Web Secretary – Ian Hunter 	
	A meeting of all these members and the Chairpersons to co-ordinate our efforts would be held once Ditta had returned from holiday	Secretaries
14	<p>Chairman’s activities</p> <p>All covered elsewhere</p>	
15 & 16	<p>Correspondence</p> <p>No comments made</p>	
17	<p>AOCB</p> <p>None</p> <p>The meeting concluded at 9:45 pm.</p>	
18	<p>Dates and times of next agenda meeting and next business meeting</p> <p>The next Agenda Meeting will be held at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 7th August.</p> <p>The next Business Meeting will be held at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 14th August.</p>	

STONEHAVEN AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

AGENDA FOR BUSINESS MEETING TO BE HELD AT 7.30 pm on 10th July 2007 IN COWIE LOUNGE - INVERCARRON RESOURCE CENTRE

All S&DCC Members are asked to attend to consider the under noted items of business.

- 1 Welcome, sederunt, apologies and declarations of interest
- 2 Minutes of the meeting held on June 12th (previously circulated)
 - approval
 - matters arising from minutes (not dealt with elsewhere)
- 3 Crime Prevention – Report by Police**
- 4 Sewerage Upgrade Scheme
 - Ian Downie (Balfour Beattie) may be in attendance
 - Cowie Bridge

Committee activities

- 5 Planning
 - 5.1 Actions of Planning Committee on planning applications (verbal report)
 - 5.2 Ury Estate
 - 5.3 Invercowie House (APP/20006/4087)

Motion: This council has examined the revised proposals (dated 25/4/07 or later) and continues its objection to the application, on the grounds of:

 - *Overdevelopment*
 - *Damage to existing tress*
 - *Lack of clarity of access rights*
 - *Overdevelopment in a Conservation Area*
 - 5.4 Field 52
 - Exhibition
 - 5.5 Bervie Braes

- 6 Transport Committee
- 7 The Adopt-a-Street Scheme
- 8 Major Items from the Future of Stonehaven work programme
 - This month's topic – Policing and Vandalism**

Business matters

- 9 Closure of Community Centre in July and August of 2007
- 10 K&M Community Planning Group
 - 10.1 Election of representative
 - 10.2 Discussion on Structure - Ian Hunter
- 11 Updates on:
 - 11.1 Former Stonehaven Radio Station Site
 - 11.2 Use of QE Caravan Park
 - 11.3 Recycling point at the Leisure Centre
 - 11.4 "Consultation" by NHS on Kincardine Community Hospital
 - 11.5 Stonehaven Medical Centre

- 11.6 Climbing Wall
 - 11.7 Formation of Stonehaven Town Partnership
 - 11.8 Wind Farm public meeting
 - 11.9 Oil Weekend
 - 11.10 Training for Councillors
 - 11.11 Beach Toilets
 - 12 Reports from Councillors representing the Community Council elsewhere
 - 13 Allocation of Secretarial Tasks
 - Correspondence Secretary – Lyn Jardine
 - Planning Secretary – Ditta Neumann
 - Meetings Secretary –Ditta Neumann
 - Web Secretary – Ian Hunter
 - Archive /Storage space
 - 14 Chairman’s activities (not covered elsewhere)
- Correspondence – full register shown attached ****
- 15 Items required Business meeting attention (not covered elsewhere)
 - 16 Items delegated
 - 17 A O C B
 - 18 Dates and times of next agenda meeting and next business meeting.

Items marked ** have briefing papers attached

David Fleming
Chairman

Crimes Reported & Detected in Stonehaven & Portlethen - June 2007

(Detected figures are in brackets and only include detections of crimes/offences reported in period requested)

Main Type	Sub Type	Crime Description	S5A	S5D	Total	Detection Rates
			Portlethen	Stonehaven		
006	000	Assault & Robbery or Assault w i Rob	1 (1)		1 (1)	100.0%
019	004	Theft by HB, (domestic prop, dwelling)		1	1	100.0%
019	008	HB w.i. to steal, (domestic property, non- dwelling)	1 (1)	1	2 (1)	50.0%
019	009	HB w.i. to steal (other property)		1	1	
021	003	In building with intent to steal	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)	100.0%
033	001	Vandalism malicious damage and mal mischief	9 (2)	12	21 (2)	9.5%
043	001	Possession of an offensive weapon		1 (1)	1 (1)	100.0%
047	001	Assault, petty	7 (3)	4 (4)	11 (7)	63.6%
047	002	Breach of the peace	8 (4)	5 (5)	13 (9)	69.2%
047	003	Urinating etc, Disorderly Conduct		1 (1)	1 (1)	100.0%

Community Council Meeting Stats from STORM & Crimefile

Friday 1st June to Saturday 30 June 2007

STORM Incidents

	S5A	S5D	Total
	Portlethen	Stonehaven	
MOTORCYCLE	1	2	3
ANNOYANCE	0	2	2
UNDERAGE DRINKING	0	2	2
YOUTH DISORDER	8	8	16
Total	9	14	23

CRIMEFILE Charges

	S5A	S5D	Total
	Portlethen	Stonehaven	
Assault, petty	7	4	11
Assault & Robbery or Assault w i Rob	1	0	1
Breach of the peace	8	5	13
Theft by HB, (domestic prop, dwelling)	0	1	1
Vandalism malicious damage and mal mischief	9	13	22
Total	25	23	48

Future of Stonehaven Consultation 2007

Discussion Document : Next Steps

POLICING & VANDALISM

Number 3 Weakness
linked to
Number 5 Weakness

Lack of police on the beat
Vandalism

During the course of the consultation, vandalism became increasingly a priority issue as the number of high profile incidences reported through the media brought the issue to greater public attention.

At the public meeting last November, during the final stages of the consultation, there was further small group discussion about this issue and the possible influencing factors. The most commonly held view was that alcohol was a key factor. The police were present at the public meeting and identified Friday and Saturday evenings as the main problem periods. However, vandalism, they advised, was not always influenced by alcohol and whereas between eight and midnight it was often 14 – 16 year old causing the problem, in the early hours it tended to be an older group in their twenties.

All crime statistics including youth disturbance are regularly reported to the Community Council and there is an opportunity at Community Council meetings to ask questions about current matters of public concern relating to vandalism and other matters of community safety.

Community Council representatives met with senior police officials in January 2007 to discuss the level of policing in Stonehaven and to advise them of public concern about the lack of police visible on the beat. It was noted at that meeting that policing levels in Stonehaven were set according to the **town's crime profile**. The need for this to be reviewed and updated was articulated at the time and whether any action is being taken in this regard should perhaps be clarified.

The local police do undertake targeted operations at different times to address particular problems. Increasing their profile prior to school holidays has been one such approach in the past. The benefits of a visible police presence on the streets are acknowledged by the police. The limited police resource available in Stonehaven makes this inevitably difficult to achieve on a *regular* basis.

The town now has a **Community Beat Officer** based in Stonehaven who is working within the community to address issues of local concern. The anti-vandalism bus has been at the Mackie Academy in recent months and the Police Schools Liaison Officer recently launched **SAVED** (Stonehaven against Vandalism and Environmental Damage).

Other community safety schemes in place in Stonehaven include Neighbourhood Watch and, the fairly new development of the Pub Watch, which involves landlords sharing information about problem customers on any given night.

Community Council action:

The Community Council could

- clarify whether any action is being taken to update Stonehaven's crime profile to ensure policing levels and resources are currently set at the right level.
- continue to play its part to encourage local residents to report appropriate issues to the police as all incidents are logged and will inevitably affect the crime profile held and the police resource assigned to the town
- should look to review in due course the benefits accruing from having a Community Beat Officer and initiatives such as SAVED in place
- encourage the Kincardine & Mearns Area Community Safety Group/Police to raise awareness of and participation in the Neighbourhood Watch schemes in Stonehaven
- continue to encourage those projects which offer more choice of casual activity to youth and suitable facilities for them
- continue to support those initiatives such as the Adopt-a-Street litter scheme which help to raise civic pride and build positive respect for the living environment of Stonehaven.

From: prvs=Arthur.Ingram=69854f50b@aberdeenshire.gov.uk on behalf of
Arthur.Ingram@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Sent: 04 July 2007 13:24
To: david.w.fleming@surescribe.com
Subject: Stonehaven Radio Station.

David,

I refer to a recent visit by Michael Innes and he asked me to write to you regarding the travellers at the former Radio Station. I can confirm that our service received a complaint on Monday 25th June concerning the presence of travellers on the site. A visit was made to the travellers on the 25th June and the owners of the site B.T. were contacted and they stated they were in the process of taking legal steps to remove the travellers from the site. It would appear that B.T. have taken steps to remove the travellers and they moved off the site on Sunday 1st July and are now parked at the lay-by at Roadside of Catterline. An inspection of the radio station was carried out on Monday 2nd July knowing that the travellers had moved, it was found that the site had bags of domestic waste and garden waste dumped on various parts of the site. B.T was contacted that the site would need to be cleaned up and this they agreed to undertake. In addition B.T. are to investigate the possibility of blocking off access to the site once it is cleaned up.

I trust this information is of assistance to you and the community council for your meeting on Tuesday night but if you require any further information regarding the travellers and the radio station please do not hesitate to contact me

Arthur Ingram
Principal Environmental Health Officer
Viewmount ,Stonehaven
01569 768213

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www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

From: Wendy.Thain@aberdeenshire.gov.uk on behalf of
Christine.Gore@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Sent: 10 July 2007 17:18
To: MrGraemeclark@aol.com
Cc: Cllr.M.Sullivan@aberdeenshire.gov.uk;
Cllr.W.Agnew@aberdeenshire.gov.uk; Cllr.P.Bellarby@aberdeenshire.gov.uk;
maf.cairnie@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Fwd: FW: Press Release - Major Planning Applications

Attachments: Press Release re Major Planning Applications
PreApplication.doc

Dear Councillor Clark

Many thanks for sharing this with me. I know that Raymond Reid has spoken to you but thought it would be helpful to confirm the position in writing and copy this to the other Stonehaven and Lower Deeside Ward Councillors.

The newly launched major applications process has been designed to assist developers in ensuring that all the necessary detail is provided with their applications at the time of submission, and to avoid any obvious pitfalls. One of the persistent concerns that has been expressed to ourselves by developers, consultees and the wider community is lack of information when applications are submitted and thereafter a piecemeal approach to providing such information. The 'new' process will enable prospective developers to sit down with planning officers and technical consultees to ensure this situation is avoided, as far as possible, in the future.

The situation as far as Community Councils are concerned is that whilst they are statutory consultees they do not have any technical input to the process and so do not have a role to play in the pre-application discussions described above - nor have they ever done so.

Whilst officers can encourage prospective developers to engage with the local community there is no statutory basis for this at the present time although in the future it will be a requirement under the terms of the Planning (etc.) Scotland Act 2006. The Scottish Executive has published Planning Advice Note 81 - Community Engagement and is keen to hear comments about how public involvement in planning can be developed. As a result of the Councillors' briefing sessions on the new Major Applications process, council officers have already spoken to Executive Officials about various issues including the possibility of pre-application discussions being more transparent and will be putting these suggestions in writing in the near future. Mr Fleming could perhaps be directed to PAN81 and the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Executive's inclusion measures (see www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2007/03/14132346/1).

Pre-application discussions have long been the practice of all planning authorities and are generally treated as confidential, because to do otherwise may damage commercial sensitivities where land deals, etc. remain to be concluded. The principal difference between previous practice and the 'new' approach is that it is more structured and there is a real commitment from technical consultees to participate in the process.

To suggest that these are 'back door pre-application meetings to stitch up unwelcome developments' is completely wrong and, in my opinion, offensive. All pre-application discussions have always been and will continue to be held on a 'without prejudice' basis and developers are well aware that no planning officer can guarantee the outcome of their application prior to formal consultations with all statutory consultees and local residents, and consideration by the appropriate group of elected councillors.

I hope this is helpful and that Mr Fleming can be persuaded to withdraw his press release.

