

DRYMEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

AGM. 16th. MAY, 2007.

The last 12 months have been an interesting time for Drymen. Much of the Community Council's work has been the usual mundane routine of constantly scrutinising planning applications and responding to consultations. Notwithstanding, there has been some useful progress in ongoing matters.

A major event was the November Election Process organised by Stirling Council. Frank Bates, our long serving former Secretary, decided not to stand for re-election, as too did David Lander after many years of service.

During their time with the Council, both made much appreciated contribution to its work. Frank agreed to serve as Secretary at a time when the Council was in a very weak state and his efforts were germane to its survival. David led the formation and continuance of the *Drymen Reporter Community Newspaper* and played a leading role for several years in the Council's *Paths and Gardens Sub-Committee*.

The election process did not attract enough people to require an election *per se*, but it did manage to attract two candidates, Mike Newman and Fiona Strachan, who were subsequently appointed together with the continuing members. At its March, 2007, Meeting, the Council decided to co-opt Janice Johnstone who had previously expressed an interest. This brings the Council up to full strength which is always a good position to be in. Only one of our members lacks broadband for e-mailing so communications are also much improved.

As they become acquainted with the Council affairs, I expect the new members will make useful contributions. Fiona is already doing valuable work as our new Secretary - not the easiest of jobs, and an arduous one from time to time. It is also good that with Janice and Mike, the Council now has representatives from a wider area of the Village. Ardmore Gardens as it were, again has a representative, and Charles Crescent, Gartness Road and the Ways continue to be represented. This

improvement in coverage is good because it helps the council gain a broader understanding of residents needs in different parts of the Village.

On behalf of all, I would like to give special thanks to my predecessor, Lorna Young. Lorna took over as Chairperson at a particularly difficult time in the Council's affairs. Despite having a full time job, she carried out the Chairperson's duties with determination and much success. The whole Village and this Council owe her a great vote of thanks and appreciation for this work. Without here involvement, the Council itself could have fallen apart and the *RV:ARC Drymen Ahead Community Opinion Survey* could easily have been derailed.

It is a matter of great regret, that because of the difficulties created at that time, Drymen lost its position as SEERAD's preferred candidate to be a model for investment in rural community's economic development and sustainability. Sadly, the opportunity may never return and a chance to attract substantial public sector funding for key Drymen projects has probably been thrown away. Such are idiosyncrasies of local politics.

It is important to recognise that in Scotland, Community Councils are largely seen only as advisory and consultative bodies. They can tell the powers that be what the Community would like. They can respond to the numerous consultations that emanates from the realms of officialdom. They are supported and financed through their Local Authorities and in Drymen's case this means Stirling Council.

Non of this is plain sailing. Today, Stirling Council does its best to support its communities via its new *Community Planning Forums*. It also provides basic and supplementary administration grants and small project grants. The system is by no means the worst that pertains among the Scottish Local Authorities nor is it perhaps the most lavish.

There is a dichotomy. Stirling Council and its resources has to serve the City of Stirling, plus the Towns and Villages of Stirlingshire. Cities, towns and villages have a

few situations in common, but they also have many differences. This is particularly true where their local economies are concerned.

Drymen's internal economy is fragile and at present heavily dependent on tourism - accommodation, catering, and retailing. Visitor attendance and spend is important. Local people's jobs and livelihoods depend on it. To sustain this Drymen needs to maintain its image as an attractive and enjoyable place to visit and one which offers a good experience for the visitor. Its B&B Accommodation, Hotels, Pubs, Restaurants and Shops need to provide quality service and quality goods. Visitors need to be able to find out easily about what is on offer and where to go to see and do things.

Any shortfall in these services means that the local economy suffers, jobs are put at risk and in the ultimate it could implode. Villages in Ayrshire, Fife and Lanark have experienced effect. You only need to tour some of them to see the businesses closed down, shops boarded up, examples of dereliction and poverty.

Part of Drymen's attraction for visitors is the charm of its rural setting. Day visitors from Glasgow and elsewhere come to escape the City and its suburbs and enjoy a day in the country. Visitors from the south and overseas come to stay in an area of attractive natural beauty: mountains, lochs and forests, historic sites and interesting places. I doubt they come to see clusters of wind farms, the scars of abandoned quarrying, industrial dereliction or acres of speculative housing.

It behoves everyone to keep Drymen attractive: safeguard its pleasant aspects - mature trees, open spaces, vistas and views. If these disappear or are smothered by car parks and housing development then Drymen will lose its appeal and visitors will go somewhere else.

Drymen has many problems, not least of which is parking and traffic management. The Community Council's intention to seek grant support for a *Parking and Traffic Management Study* and its moves in that direction was gazumped by the Community Trust. Without prior consultation, it commissioned the ATKINS *Drymen Parking Feasibility Study* with money provided by Stirling Council and the Park Authority.

Nonetheless, the Community Council did achieve some input via two observer members on the Steering Group. ATKINS Report is valuable because it recommends expanding the Stirling Road Car Park as its first preference for providing more parking capacity. The problems of traffic management, parking around the Square and outwith the Centre of the Village still need to be addressed.

On 8th. May, 2006, the Community Council delivered to the Park Authority a strong, very well subscribed Petition requesting a major expansion of the Stirling Road Car Park. The Authority arranged a meeting with the Drymen Trust and the Community Council on 17th. August, 2006, but this offered no immediate prospect of action on the part of the Authority. To date, its response has, in real terms, been non-existent.

Rather than use its powers to amend an unsatisfactory 1999 Local Plan or as its Director of Planning suggested at the Meeting, use a compulsory Purchase Order to obtain the necessary land for parking, it has done nothing. Its hope at the Meeting, that matters might improve when its new Local Plan arrives some time in 2008, seems fanciful to say the least. I seriously doubt that this timescale will work to Drymen's advantage so far as this is concerned.

At a Council Meeting in November, 2005, well before the Owner's bankruptcy, I recommend that via the Community Development Trust, a registration of the Community Interest in the Gartness Road Site be entered in accordance with the provisions of the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003*. Last year a Joint Working Group between the Trust and the Council was set up to pursue this matter. The Group met a barrage of bureaucracy, obfuscation and delay by SEERAD in Edinburgh, and even now the outcome is far from clear.

Inevitably, the Liquidator (Price Waterhouse) appointed to deal with the Gartness Road Site Owner's Bankruptcy seems intent on an early sale to a development company. Acquisition or the securing of compatible and desirable development on this site is still an important ongoing priority from both the Council and the Trust. Stronger interest and support on the part firstly of the Park Authority and secondly, Stirling Council, would be helpful. As already remarked, should they

choose to use them, both have access to, and can use, Statutory Instruments which could readily resolve the matter. I suspect that despite the Government's record tax take, both authorities are short funded so far as these things are concerned.

Petty crime is still a problem. Graffiti, litter, vandalism with occasional housebreaking and car theft occur. The former happens to a greater extent that is acceptable. Policing these matter are the penalties awarded against offenders. Drymen's appearance is important. A higher standard of social responsibility from both young and old, visitor and resident, would be a great help.

The Bus Shelter at the Square still attracts attention from vandals and graffiti artists. It has undergone a series of repaintings, and I am quite unclear as to who contributed what and when. I do know that our Vice Chair, Joy Kirkland, and Community Councillor David Wyles were both involved, that Stirling Council have provided help and that David Warnes, Winnock Hotel, contributed. Thanks to all concerned.

Last year's Christmas Tree was a triumph over adversity, or rather high gale force winds and soft ground. It started as the best tree ever, large and well proportioned. It ended truncated and re-erected after falling down and breaking. Many thanks to David Wyles, Struan Robb and everyone else who worked to set it up and keep it in place. Now the Square is in the ownership of the Trust, future trees should perhaps become its responsibility and this council looks forward to the Trust continuing a well established tradition.

The construction of a substantial part of an illegal dwelling at 19 Muirpark Way, continues to be an ongoing saga. I am uncertain how the Community Council managed to become so deeply embroiled in the matter. I do recall that in January, 2005, as Vice Chairman, I advised that the most affected party to retain the services of a good litigation lawyer. Instead, both the affected parties chose to put their faith in the Planning Process. Frank Bracewell has made strenuous efforts to resolve matters via this route. The Community Council too has expended an enormous amount of time and energy on the matter. The position today, some two years on, is

still far from satisfactory. The Planning Committee's last decision is the subject of yet another appeal and the appointed Reporter made his site visit this Monday. His eventual decision is awaited.

The Council has been successful in obtaining a useful grant from Stirling Council to fund a design for the improvement of the landscape at the Stirling Road Junction with the A811 Bypass. Regrettably, when approached, the Park Authority declined to assist and two landscape designers were invited to tender. One has confirmed an interest and it is intended, failing a response from the other, to engage in a dialogue and develop matters with the Firm in question. When the Council is comfortable with the design a copy will be displayed in the Library for comment. Given a consensus, the Design will be refined and further grants sought to pay for implementation.

As I close this Report, I would like to thank the Officers and David Wyles as Planning Secretary, for all their good work and support throughout the year. Without their efforts, progress of any sort would be impossible.

John Gleave, Chairman,
16.05.2007