



FORT, SEAFIELD & WALLACETOWN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8th February 2017 in Room RB3, Town Hall, at 7pm

Members Present

Norman McLean (NM) Chair, Forbes Watson (FW) Vice Chair, Michael Hitchon (MH) Treasurer, Olena Stewart (OS) Secretary, Sandy Crawford (SC), Peter McCall (PMcC), Phil Martin (PM), Liz Martin (LM), Frank Ward (FrW), Judith Hood (JH).

In Attendance

Cllr. Kirsty Darwent (KD), Cllr. Bill Grant (WG), Cllr. Alan Dorans (AD), Chris Campbell (CC) Link Officer,

Public

Jake Fremantle
Yolanda McCall, Minutes Secretary

1. **Apologies**

Dympna Gardiner (DG), Eileen Munro (EM).

Welcome

NM welcomed all and introduced Jake Fremantle who is work-shadowing KD. All present introduced themselves.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

January minutes accepted.

Changes to Previous Minutes

Frank Ward added to members present.

3. **Matters Arising**

None

4. **Public Business**

An independent candidate for South Ayrshire Council, Chic Brodie, may attend the March meeting.

5. **Police Business**

No police present.

6. **Ayr Town Centre Renaissance, Riverside Consultation and Belleisle**

KD advised there has been just one renaissance meeting since the Christmas recess. The ongoing issue is the riverside block. Planning permission is expected on 21st February for work to commence by the end of the month. Assuming no obstacles, there will follow a process for a demolition contract, removal of derelict material, archaeological work and rebuild. It is quite exciting to have actually reached this stage.

There is still scaffolding for basic works at the Clydesdale Bank building, with a tender now out for the actual renovation work. AD advised that with regard to the special regulatory meeting on 21st Feb, there is one comment on the website, from a letter by MH on behalf of Kyle and Carrick Civic Society, requesting selective facade retention while archaeology goes on behind. MH confirmed that his comment was an observation, not an objection.

AD stated that the planning application for the Riverside Block is recommended for approval with 36 standard conditions, however demolition should commence March 2017, will last 38 weeks, till December with major archaeological works undertaken as buildings come down in sequence. Summer 2018 will see commencement of phase 1, construction of council offices. Retail, hotel, leisure, student accommodation to follow in next development phases; negotiations will take place between potential developers and Ayr Renaissance, with buildings built to order. A significant marketing campaign by Ayr Renaissance is about to begin, to raise awareness of the work undertaken so far and publicise future plans. NM stated that the progress is very pleasing.

OS and NM attended the Belleisle steering group meeting last month. There are no new works undertaken to the stables area yet, documentation is being developed for HLF to comment. In the conservatory, tiling is well under way, using some original tiles and reconditioned tiles, due to open again in April. Fund-raising continues with a gin-tasting master class, 16th Feb. A report on landscape works shows a tender that is out for work to conservatory steps and the sundial surround; suggestions are requested for words to put around the sundial, a saying that best sums up Belleisle. Drawings for footpaths are expected at the end of the month and the work will again go out to tender. Decking will be installed for viewing deer, with an additional 6 young deer coming. Fencing has also been installed. Planting of wild flower species, new shrubs and bulbs is ongoing; volunteers are still requested to assist. PMcC enquired about a report expected from Jill Cronin at the end of Jan, regarding the hotel. NM advised that no knowledge has been forwarded and it is a concern. OS added that the lighting of paths is still being looked at to help access to functions on dark evenings. Options of low-level solar or mains power are being considered. Friends of Belleisle may fundraise for this. WG pressed for NM and OS to highlight the issue of toilet facilities, essential for all users and an oversight from the master plan. NM confirmed it is very much on the agenda. The next steering group meeting is 1st March. MH noted reading in the paper the disturbing news of £20K damage to the hotel and clubhouse. AD said that the police reported it as minimal damage and the owner did not want to press charges. Investigations are ongoing. CC is aware of recurrent damage to the perimeter fencing and suggests timer lights so that the property doesn't look empty. WG offered to phone the owner with this suggestion. JH wondered that with damage occurring during the Xmas holidays, would the upcoming long weekend, then Easter holidays be another target time. CC advised that people will be deployed to monitor the situation, but the lighter evenings by Easter should help.

7. **Councillors' Business and Matters Arising**

WG reported on visits he made with the new planning manager, observing lots of good investment in the area: new Ayr Academy on target to open in August; new facilities at Annbank; the golf clubhouse refurbishment in Troon; stunning investment at Marr College; phenomenal new campus in Tarbolton; tarring of cycle route 7 near Greenan Castle (compliments to Ayrshire Roads Alliance and Sustrans). The development of the existing Ayr Academy to become the new Ayr Grammar has support of teaching staff and the parent council. It will also provide community space, a nursery and a facility for art rooms. There has also been investment in other South Ayrshire schools. NM enquired where the money has come from. WG advised up to two thirds is grants from government, supplementing investment from the council and Scottish Futures Trust. The council's borrowing ratio is relatively low, so they have been able to borrow for investment in education. However, there will be challenges with a budget to square and cuts of approx £7.6 million to be found by 2nd March. NM asked if the Maybole bypass will go ahead. AD/KD said that the money is now ring-fenced so it will go ahead. WG added that the by-pass should trigger replacements for Carrick Academy and Queen Margaret Academy, schools fit for the future. Also, in Elba Street there will be 24 apartments for less able people, plus affordable homes in Belmont, Kincaidston, Whitletts and at the old Prestwick police station. NM asked about the Fort Street flats. WG confirmed 8 units are through planning, 7 for less able people, plus one for a supervisor, and 5 bungalows. NM/AD briefly discussed possible issues in the Fort Street area in relation to the original citadel rubbish dump.

KD reiterated the stunning workmanship visible at Marr College, high quality, high spec, and old architecture merged with new, designed for 21st century needs. It is open now and will be fully occupied by August. MH suggested having it viewable on Doors Open Day. All agreed that would be a good idea. FW queried a new 'For Sale' sign in Fort Street. WG/NM will confirm, but there is possibly just some misleading wording on the sign; they believe the site has been secured by the council.

OS reported seeing dining room chairs dumped at the old putting green, near the Horizon Hotel. WG will check and get them removed. MH advised that the Ayr number 2 Conservation Area has been extended, now includes the Low Green and the Place-de-St. Germain-en-Laye.

WG and FW discussed full bins in Newmarket Street and the Sandgate. WG acknowledges that the emptying schedule is not perfect yet. The process for clearing waste is shared between the Council and

private contractors and could be better managed, but he offered assurance that the bins would be emptied tonight [and actually the bin trucks arrived during the meeting].

AD reiterated the good news of investment in schools and also reported £2.5 million from government being distributed directly to head teachers to spend: £60K to the Grammar, £120K to St. John's and £65K to Ayr Academy. There will be an increase to the council tax. The council will set all the bands by 2nd March.

Holland & Barratt have applied to move from the High Street to Ayr Central. McCabe's pub in Fullerton Street is due to be opening soon. Unity Grill, a social enterprise community restaurant, will be opening at the old Pillar Box site. Angela McNay, a mature student, is the leader and she is driving huge support for this venture, including a fund-raiser film being shown in the town hall.

AD reported that the flower Show will no longer run and that the council has received unfair blame in the press. AD/KD/WG explained that the flower show has been independent since 2000. Four years ago, the council agreed a 3 year plan to underwrite any losses, on the understanding that it was financially struggling and needed to reorganise. After 3 years of £20K per year plus significant sums from the Common Good Fund (£50K), some bequests (including one from Gibson T McDonald) and no charge for use of the park and subsequent tidy up, sadly no change was made to the business model despite various suggestions being made. The council offered a short-term lifeline, but it is not financially viable to continue. It is not getting public or tourist support and is not generating economic regeneration. Council has provided a statement to this effect, but that has not been reported in the press. The Air Show has been granted £200K, but it puts Ayr on the map and does bring money into the area.

FrW commented on the difference of how papers report local news abroad compared to here. All agreed Ayr local press tends to target sensational bad news stories, despite circulation dropping.

KD offered more information on the council tax changes. There has been no rise for 10 years. Bands E and above will have a specific rise, plus there will be a % rise across all bands, possibly 3%, but no decision has been made yet. JH asked about re-banding of properties. WG/KD stated that no formal review is planned; it is up to individuals if they wish to challenge their assigned band.

8. **Planning Control**

This morning NM received a letter stating that the application for 3 or 4 houses in Auchendoon Crescent has been withdrawn. PM has received no emails from Planning. NM advised that Robin Ghosh will be speaking about the vision for the Station Hotel at the Civic Society AGM, Monday 6th March, 7.30pm, Loudoun Hall.

9. **Reports**

PM and LM presented a report on Wallacetown, following their visit to the area on 5th and 6th Feb. They found that the residents were happy to speak and all were very pleasant and welcoming to LM and PM as they sought their views of living in the area. While drug abuse is an issue, it didn't appear to be the main concern. Bigger issues are dog fouling, litter on the streets and in the squares, broken glass on grass areas and accommodation issues. With regard to litter, residents felt that if groups of volunteers met to litter pick, others may be supportive, but they didn't realise it was down to them to organise such community action. Damp in their housing appears to be the main concern, particularly among families with young children, some with asthma. Many of the blocks of flats appear to need work to address damp penetrating from the outside of the building into living spaces. Some buildings are in need of exterior painting/decoration and some tenants in privately rented flats say landlords are waiting for the council to rectify the outside of the buildings before they repair holes in the ceilings and walls of the interior. Some residents requested a community centre or meeting space for young mums or older residents to meet and possibly organise early evening activities. Heating is generally old electric storage radiators that are very expensive to run. Condensation is an issue, possibly due to a lack of vents. Some residents were aware of building repair work in progress in the area, but did not know how far the work would extend.

Two residents expressed an interest in seeing the Community Council meeting in action. PM and LM will attempt to engage with them again.

PMcC enquired about the major building works that are in progress in Wallacetown. WG advised that new cladding is being provided to all the blocks in Kings Court and Philip Square, including the privately owned flats. The work is funded by the Scottish government and the Big 6 energy companies and should make a big improvement.

KD and WG responded to the report provided by PM and LM. There are big problems with multi-tenured blocks that have no factors. There are issues with landlords not understanding or accepting their responsibilities and not appreciating that they are liable for a proportion of the costs for repairs to the exterior of the building. Letters do get sent out regarding works commencing, however frequently they are discarded as flyers or do not get passed to the landlords. With regard to litter, in the past several volunteer litter picks were organised, but no assistance was provided by the residents and some volunteers received abuse. There are various social issues affecting the area that are not easily solved. The councillors tried to keep the South Wallacetown residents group running, but it petered out. There are however some good

community opportunities available, such as those provided by Wallacetown Nursery, the Salvation Army and the Evangelical Church.

NM summarised, thanking PM and LM for their work in highlighting the concerns of Wallacetown residents. The councillors see that lots of help has been offered to the community and it is hoped that the residents will feel enabled to make some improvements themselves.

10. **Financial Report**

Treasurer reported £285 available for administration.

11. **Correspondence**

OS advised that the community council by-election forms are available and posters will be put up to advertise. There are 3 spaces for Wallacetown. 23rd February is the closing date, but members could be co-opted later if that date is missed. Brochures and flyers from Ayr Arts Guild, publicising various local activities and events, were distributed. OS reported that 'Streetlife' is moving to www.nextdoor.com, a free, private, social network to get neighbours together.

12. **AOCB**

LM asked what the community council funds can be used for. MH/NM advised that a donation of £50 is usually given to 3 local charity groups, such as the ARK and the Befriending Project. LM enquired whether it could pay for signage for bird watchers. MH thinks that South Ayrshire Sustainability Partnership may be a more appropriate contributor and offered to take this suggestion to the group.

PM enquired whether lighting will be provided along the river path, near Victoria Bridge for the new Ayr Academy school children. KD/MH/NM wonder if funding may be available from Ayr Renaissance. CC advised that the children are supposed to route along the main road where there is adequate lighting. UWS would need to make a pitch for lighting along the river path, if they want it. No residents will benefit so the University needs to take the lead. KD offered to email the education department to raise a concern.

PMcC reported that two classes from Newton Primary will be visiting St. John's Tower on 9th February as part of their local history project, with the Friends of St. John's Tower (FROST) facilitating the visit. Tom Burns has been advised.

CC reported on a meeting with the management of the Station Hotel, regarding negotiations with an agent for the owner, who is happy to sell, open to negotiation. Scotrail are trying to obtain space out front for car parking. The new Cycle Hub is now active.

13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

Wednesday 8th March at 7.00pm
Room RB3 Ayr Town Hall