

Royal Burgh of St Andrews Community Council

There will be a Monthly Meeting on Monday 2nd February, 1998, in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall at 7 p.m.

Prior to the meeting the presentation will be made to the Young Citizens of the Year, 1997.

AGENDA

1. Apologies

2. Submissions from members of the public.

3. Minutes of the Council Meeting of 5th January, 1998.

4. Matters arising

(a) Cycle Paths

A plan of proposed cycle routes in the centre of the town has been received, but it is noted that some of them have been rejected.

(b) Questions Programme

The B.B.C. has sent a statement of their requirements for a broadcast.

5. Correspondence:-

(a) Queen's Gardens and Queen's Terrace Residents' Association.

The Secretary of this newly formed association has written stating its concerns.

(b) Community Participation Seminar.

Notice has been received from Fife Council of this seminar, to be held at Madras College, Kilrymont, on 28th February from 10 to 1.30.

(c) James Wilson's Anniversary.

Mr. Keith McCartney has sent suggestions from commemorating the anniversary of the death of James Wilson, a St. Andrews graduate who signed the American Declaration of Independence.

(d) Sustainability indicators for Fife

A copy has been received.

(e) Fife Racial Equality Council

The council has sent a letter introducing its Rural Research and Development Officer, but from the letter it is not clear that St. Andrews is regarded as rural.

(f) St Andrews Street Fair Steering Group

The Council is invited to nominate a representative to this Group.

(g) Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland

The Association is holding a Study Weekend in St. Andrews on 21/22 February, It will include a session on Green Belt issues.

(h) Scottish Water & Sewerage Council

A copy of their Newsletter has been received.

The Society has sent publicity for its forthcoming production of "Oliver".

6. Matters raised by Committees, etc.,

(a) Youth Committee

Mr. Strachan wishes to put forward the motion that Mr. Owen Greene, Chairman of the Youth Committee, be co-opted to the Council.

7. Matters raised by Fife Councillors.

8. Other matters of public concern.

Report of the PLANNING COMMITTEE Meetings of 12.1.98, 19.1.98, 23.1.98 and 26.1.98 for the Community Council Meeting of 2 February 1998.

1. Planning Applications.

(i) **Olivers, 116 Market Street.** Mr Crichton placed an objection to the proposed internally illuminated hanging sign, and to the materials proposed for the fascia.

(ii) **Bus shelters, Largo Road.** Shelters with internally illuminated advertising panels are proposed for both sides of the Largo Road near its junction with Broomfaulds Avenue. Mrs Murray wrote accepting that this would be useful provided the pavement is not obstructed. We are happy for the interiors of the shelters to be lit and for advertising to be displayed, but placed an objection to the use of internal illumination.

(iii) **Royal Bank, South Street.** Mr Crichton wrote to object to the materials used for the fascia and hanging sign.

(iv) **Ardgowan Hotel.**

Mr Crichton submitted an objection to the number and size of the proposed signs, as well as to the materials.

2. Service Towers, Purdie Building, North Haugh

Our meeting of 12.1.98 was attended by two representatives of the University and two members of the architectural firm involved in the project. We reaffirmed that we did not object to the application in principle, and indicated the changes, in design and finish, that we thought would render the application more acceptable to the local community. The application has since been refused permission by the Area Development Committee.

3. Lawhead North

Bett Homes Limited has appealed to the Secretary of State against the refusal of their application for this site. Fife Council has indicated its preference is for the appeal to be determined by way of a public hearing.

4. St Andrews Transportation Study

A reply has been received to Mr Fraser's letter seeking clarification of the current situation. Mr Alan Bryan says that he hopes to be able to issue a small leaflet to explain the Transportation Plan to the public in the near future. The committee minute from 16 June 1997 and the indicative sketch enclosed with the letter confirm the decisions taken on the change to a one-way flow in Doubledykes Road, the extension of the area covered by parking charges, the proposed areas for the residents' parking scheme, the proposed park-and-ride route and the proposed areas for short-term environmental improvements. He indicates that, following the recent committee decision, further work is need to determine the Kingdom of Fife cycle route through the town.

5. Strategic Study

(interim Report - NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

The meetings of 19.1.98 and 23.1.98 focussed primarily on considering how we should react to the three options proposed by Fife Council. The meeting of 26.1.98 was attended by Mr Bill Lindsay of the Planning Department, and we discussed with him how the Study might best be brought to the attention of the residents of the town. Although he does not believe the staff resources would be sufficient to permit participation by officials in a public meeting, he agreed to give consideration to a range of possibilities in addition to the staffed exhibition already planned. These included a door-to-door leaflet produced by Fife Council and possible funding, printing and distribution of a Community Council newsletter on the matter, provided that its content was deemed appropriate.

Although the Planning Committee has still to finalise its own position on the three options, the Committee is broadly agreed that it cannot give full support to any of the three.

- Option 1 (No new land for development) is seen as unrealistic.
- Option 2 allows for expansion to the north-west of the town, but identifies considerably more housing land than we believe is necessary in the period to 2011.
- We are agreed that Option 3, which includes development of the southern hillside, would be an environmental disaster.

The Committee is moving towards an Option 1.5, possibly supporting the use of some of the land identified in Option 2 (close to Strathtyrum), but seeking to conserve the important view of the town from the Strathkinness High Road. Such an option would be made viable by the use of more land in the Kinness valley, where we see housing as less environmentally damaging. During the meeting on 26.1.98 Mr Lindsay indicated that Fife Council were prepared to entertain options other than the three broad scenarios that they had sketched out.

Response to the Issues Report of the Strategic Study

By the Planning Committee

1. We consider it appropriate to address first the demand for housing in St Andrews (i.e. Issue 2) before moving on to consider how that demand can be accommodated within the environmental constraints (Issue 1).

Issue 2. To what extent is the Regional Council able to identify land sufficient to meet housing needs of local people and to cope with demand from outwith the town?

2. Although the Community Council is determined to keep St Andrews as a desirable place to live and to avoid expansion that would destroy the character of the town, it has also been consistent over the years in wishing to see limited housing developments primarily aimed at satisfying the needs of the existing community. We have on previous occasions drawn attention to the very real hardships suffered by many on the District Council waiting list. Thus we recognise that there is a great need for new social housing in St Andrews and have consistently advocated that more such houses for rent should be built.

3. In the context of St Andrews it is clear that the concept of housing need requires a more detailed formulation. The Structure Plan comments that *'The assessment of housing need relates to all tenures since the household projections which form the basis of the need calculation do not differentiate households by tenure. This implies effectively a greater estimated "need" for private sector housing than would be the case if future new public sector households were excluded...'* It is not sufficient to dismiss this flaw in the calculation as *'one element of the flexibility to be considered in the total housing requirement'*. The housing need section of the calculation needs to be made as precise as possible: developers can argue for elements of flexibility under the heading of housing demand.

4. Disaggregation of the estimated housing need is arguably even more important. No informed answer can be given to some of the questions raised by the Issues Report unless one has first produced an approximate quantification of the need for the various types of housing. It is, for instance, necessary to know the extent of need for general rented accommodation, sheltered housing and University housing of various types, as well the need for owner-occupied housing. The category of rented accommodation would appear to be relatively robust classification. The extent to which this will be accommodated within the public or private sectors is much less so, and is liable to be affected by changes of government or of government policy. It is also necessary to know how the need for private sector housing breaks down into broad price bands, or, as a minimum requirement, the proportion of the need that falls into the affordable category. Over the last decade developments in St Andrews have had a strong tendency to concentrate on the upper end of the price range, and have thus been more targetted at demand from outwith the town rather than at local need.

5. In assessing the demand for housing in St Andrews we would urge continuity with the historic record. Developers may wish to argue that completion rates in recent years are a reflection of the infrastructural constraints that have prevailed. The impression is often given that new housing in St Andrews sells like hot cakes: those who have observed the phasing of the building work in recent years on the larger developments will know that this can only be true in relative terms. Comment is made in the Structure Plan that *"It is acknowledged that the market is currently depressed resulting in lower completion rates now and for the immediate future."* In the months since this was written it has become clearer that it is the unprecedentedly high demand of the late 1980s rather than lower rates of the 1990s that will come to be seen as the untypical 'blip'.

6. The Issues Report seeks advice on *"how the Regional Council should deal with the situation where large numbers of people from outside the St Andrews area want to buy a house in the town but there are insufficient houses to meet the demand."* As we have argued above, we see this currently as a speculative question rather than as a current reality. Nonetheless, one question worthy of consideration is how far the type of housing which is built can be targetted at meeting the local need while proving less attractive to those for whom a house in St Andrews is a more casual preference. One part of the answer is clearly to build at the first-time buyer end of the range, but there may be other planning approaches that could be deployed here. For instance, Lothian Region's recent idea of non-car-owning properties

may be worth investigating.

7. It is also appropriate for the Strategic Study to address the question of whether demand for housing in St Andrews' is being kept artificially high by the shortage of facilities elsewhere in the area. Specifically we would propose the following 'new issue'.

Issue 2A. To what extent can the Regional Council alleviate the demand for housing in St Andrews by the provision of facilities elsewhere in North East life?

8. The current review of planning policy for St Andrews' has arisen from a Structure Plan requirement. It is, however, arguable that a much more fundamental review of planning policy for N.E. Fife is appropriate at this time, particularly if Fife Region is to take on board some of the forward-looking ideas in the Eighteenth Report '*Transport and the Environment*' of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which was published last autumn. Objective 1) (paragraph 14.6 of the Report) advocated by the Commission was "*to increase the proportions of personal travel and freight transport by environmentally less damaging modes and to make the best use of existing infrastructure.*" If the philosophy of the Commission is to be adopted, we should be looking at how we can initiate a slow reduction in our dependence on the motor car. Paragraph 9.17 of the Report noted that "*there is a broad consensus that land use planning policies should seek to minimise the need for travel and encourage the use of less polluting forms of transport.*" This strongly suggests that the transportation implications of the planning policies adopted by the Strategic Study should be given serious consideration.

9. Although leisure travel is a right most would wish to safeguard, many people would be only too glad to reduce their travel distances to work if attractive housing, at prices they could afford, were available closer to their place of employment and in settlements with an adequate range of educational and recreational facilities. In North East Fife the rail links from Kirkcaldy to Dundee and Perth represent a more environmentally friendly form of transport, and are at present a rather under-used resource. This suggests that a forward looking planning policy should be asking whether, if more housing were available close to these lines, we would be making better use of the existing infrastructure as proposed by the Royal Commission. Presumably not all of the relevant settlements would welcome expansion of this type, but it is certainly well worth exploring whether such a policy would be attractive to some, on the basis that expansion would not only be accompanied by the construction of new facilities, but might also serve to improve the viability of existing shops and facilities.

10. The Newport/Wormit/Tayport area is one which could be offered such a package. The south bank of the Tay offers a pleasant environment, beautiful views and proximity to the facilities of Dundee. As such it might prove attractive to some of those from outwith N.E. Fife who seek housing in this area. It is also an area which has been particularly conscious of its lack of facilities. There has been a long-standing demand from those in the Tay Bridgehead area for a rail-halt at Wormit. The site of this proposed halt is zoned for housing and urgent action is needed to ensure that this opportunity is not lost. Clearly the provision of this facility would further increase the desirability of the area, particularly if a shuttle rail service were run from this halt to Dundee.

11. It is also clear that the Region could achieve much by responding to the long-standing demand for a secondary school in North Fife. As well as satisfying local opinion in the Newport/Tayport area this would produce several benefits for St Andrews. By further increasing the attractiveness of the Tay Bridgehead, it would reduce the use of St Andrews as a dormitory town by those who commute to work in Dundee everyday. It would solve the overcrowding problems at Madras College which have received recent publicity. It would reduce the need for the bussing of school pupils, which is a source of parental worry, a cost to the Region, and a source of traffic problems both in South Street and in the vicinity of the Kilrymont Building. The provision of a rail-halt, a secondary school and new housing may well stimulate commercial initiatives in the Tay Bridgehead area. Other facilities for which there may be demand in Newport Tayport include better library and healthcare provision.

12. We have discussed the Tay Bridgehead in some detail as we see it as the most obvious area for new housing if one were to adopt a transport-driven planning policy, but some of the above considerations apply with almost equal force to other settlements along these lines, such as Dairsie or Newburgh.

13. We would stress, however, that we do not see hamlets such as Brownhills or Mount Melville as suitable areas for expansion. Although technically outwith St Andrews, these hamlets lack infrastructure and facilities, and clearly their residents have to make as much use of the crowded town centre of St Andrews as those actually living in the town. The transport-based approach we are proposing would also exclude the development of these hamlets.

Issue 1. How can the conflict, between maintaining the high environmental quality and

landscape setting of the town and allowing new development, be resolved?

14. The compactness of St Andrews is a major element in its attractiveness, and large-scale expansion would obviously destroy this. There is thus no realistic hope of conserving the environment of the town unless strenuous efforts are made to channel elsewhere those parts of the housing demand which, given suitably attractive provision, would prefer locations elsewhere in N.E. Fife or which have only a marginal preference for St Andrews. We have suggested in paragraphs 9-12 some ways in which this relocation might be achieved. Despite this, unless many on the housing list are to remain unhoused or in seriously inappropriate accommodation, and our sons and daughters are going to be compelled to live elsewhere, some limited expansion of the town must be contemplated.

15. To choose a direction for expansion is not a pleasant task. The whole of the country side surrounding St Andrews is designated as an area of great landscape value. To decide in which direction developments should be permitted is, therefore, to determine which direction would be the least detrimental to the environment of the town.

16. Although all directions have some disadvantages, it is nonetheless clear that a crucial consideration is to avoid development on the higher ground. Such development would clearly destroy views from the town, and often would intrude on views of the medieval skyline from outwith the town. Our approach to planning housing expansion can therefore be broadly described as contour-based. Above all it is vital to conserve the green hillside to the south of the town. In saying that "*there are particular concerns about expansion to the south and east*", paragraph 19 of the Issues Report is guilty only of gross understatement. We have stressed at the recent Public Inquiry how much the residents of St Andrews appreciate the views out of the town. We value particularly the gently rolling contours of the rising land to the south which can be seen from many places in the town.

17. Some discussion has occurred concerning the mechanisms by which one determines whether a development does cause environmental damage. We believe that such assessments should be impartial, not commissioned by developers, and as open to public scrutiny as is possible. Bearing in mind that the accuracy of any computer output is not something that should be taken for granted, we hope not to see an excessive reliance on computer-based methods. Provided it is well-executed, the erection of mockups of buildings, as recently seen on the St Nicholas site, has much to commend it, since any interested member of the public can readily formulate an informed view.

18. We heartily endorse the Finding 25 of Mr Hutton, the Reporter at the Local Plan inquiry of August 1989 in which he says "*...I am convinced that extreme care must be taken to avoid - (a) unlimited growth up the southern hill slopes without regard to the pleasing topography of that area, and (b) destroying the green wedge of land flanking the southern approaches to the town which complements a fine prospect of St Andrews and beyond.*"

19. Screening with trees is sometimes advanced as a means of rendering acceptable developments which would otherwise be deemed inappropriate. Such an approach appears notably ill-advised in the context of the southern hillside. The steepness of the gradient makes screening almost impossible, and nearer the coast it becomes particularly difficult to grow trees. The largely abortive attempts to improve the appearance of the Kinkell Braes caravan site serve as all ever-present reminder of past failures in this regard.

20. We are conscious that the southern hillside of the town currently only enjoys very weak protection against development. It is part of the Area of Great Landscape Value which surrounds St Andrews, but planning permission is frequently granted for developments within AGLVs. It is also clearly unsatisfactory for the same label to apply to both the southern hillside which the local community wishes to protect and to those areas in which we would reluctantly accept development. We would therefore endorse the suggestion that moves should be initiated to gain green belt status for the southern hillside of the town. Such status might also be appropriate for the green wedge at the Crail/Anstruther roads and the environs of the A91 as the main approach road to the town. This would add to the protection afforded to the unbuilt coast and the strategic road network by existing Structure Plan policies E13 and E31.

21. Consideration of the approach roads to St Andrews suggests that some strengthening of these Structure Plan policies is required. Views of the sea are valued by tourists and local residents alike, particularly those views in which the sea frames the view of the medieval skyline. Some explicit reference to visual amenity would not be out of place in a strengthened form of policy E13 on the unknit coastline. Policy E31, on the other hand, is concerned with visual amenity but is restricted to the strategic road network. In the context of the coastline such a policy could beneficially be extended to the many non-strategic roads frequented by tourists and locals alike.

Issue 3. How can the Regional Council manage the development and environmental implications of the tourism role of the town and pressure of visitors particularly regarding impacts on the historic heritage of the town and the need to maintain the attractiveness of the town centre?

22. St Andrews is a tourist centre of national importance and it is like that the town will need to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of tourists. It is not, however, physically possible for the town to cope with ever-increasing numbers of tourists' cars. Even at the present time the worst traffic congestion in St Andrews is that due to influxes of tourists in the summer. In our submission on the transportation strategy we have argued that a key principle must be to avoid bringing unnecessary vehicles into the town. So steps must be taken to promote alternative modes of transport. (See our response to Issue 6 below).

23. Good liaison between the responsible bodies and all interested parties is particularly crucial in the area of developments aimed at the tourist market. We welcome the steps taken in this regard by the Tourism Manager when implementing the Tourism Management Plan. This will be a continuing need if such schemes are to enhance the environment of the town while respecting its ongoing life, and if we are to avoid wastage of resources on schemes which local residents would see as at best marginal and sometimes damaging.

Issue 4. In what ways should the role of the University as a landowner and employer influence the future development of St Andrews?

24. The University currently provides accommodation for an unusually high proportion of its undergraduate students. Clearly the University is subject to severe constraints on its finances, but if it should be in a position to consider further provision of student accommodation at any point in the period considered by the Strategic Study, this should be given every encouragement as a means of reducing the pressure on the housing market. Similarly any moves to provide accommodation for postgraduates or for visiting academics should be welcomed.

25. Some sections of the University staff, such as technical and secretarial staff and those on short-term contracts, experience particular difficulty in breaking into the housing market in St Andrews. Their work is vital to the University and these groups certainly come within the category of local need for whom limited expansion of the town is required.

26. In the last decade the general public in St Andrews has sometimes perceived the University as working to a very different agenda from its own as regards the release of land for housing. It is essential to ensure that the University is well-briefed on where the local community does and does not wish to see development. The University has as much to lose as anyone else if degradation of the environment of the town is allowed to happen. The University, by virtue of its land holdings, may be in a position to frustrate any development proposed by the Strategic Study. In the next consultative exercise the public should only be offered development possibilities which the University has agreed not to block.

Issue 5. What potential does St Andrews have to be an economic growth point in life?

27. In our view the potential of St Andrews as an economic growth point is limited. We believe most types of industrial expansion would be not only undesirable but also unattainable. Paragraph 30 of the Issues Report seems to us to be over-optimistic in tone. Looking at the historical record, we doubt whether it is possible to attract substantial investment of a nature compatible with the environment of the town. We envisage that the major economic activities of the town will continue to revolve around golf, tourism and the University, but we do see some limited scope for high technology industry, perhaps working in partnership with the University.

28. We would stress that we do wish to see developments which offer few benefits to the existing population, but which would attract substantially more traffic to the town. A case in point is the current application by Safeway for a major expansion of their supermarket, accompanied by a garage and car wash. Superstores with catchment areas extending for miles around are evidently not in tune with the transportation policies appropriate to a more environmentally-conscious age.

Issue 6. Whether or not infrastructure constraints need to be overcome to serve future development and what the implications of this would be.

29. We believe that improvements to the roads leading to St Andrews should be only of a limited nature. Some improvement to the A91, for instance, is necessary on safety grounds. We are, however, conscious of the fact that upgrading roads usually generates more traffic and we do not wish to see more vehicles encouraged to enter the town. This position need not serve as a brake on the tourist industry provided attention is paid to other modes of transport. (See Issue 3 above) As the Cycle Path Subcommittee of this Community Council has argued,

a cycle path to Leuchars would attract usage by some visiting tourists. The major part of the answer has nonetheless to lie with much improved public transport. In the short term this means attempting to improve bus links with the railhead at Leuchars, which in turn may only be possible with more rail investment to ensure a more reliable and punctual service. With an eye to the medium term it would also be appropriate for Fife Region to fund the feasibility study into the restoration of the rail link to St Andrews, as this could offer a much more efficient solution.

30. We see no need for any major spending on schools in St Andrews. If our recommendation of limited development to the west of the town is adopted, we envisage that there is sufficient spare capacity at Lawhead School for the foreseeable future to cover the requirements of primary schooling. Furthermore the proposal that the North Fife secondary school should be built will release sufficient secondary school places at Madras College to cover the scale of expansion that we envisage.

31. It is widely recognised by the medical profession and the population at large that a range of further health care facilities is required in St Andrews. These include a health care centre for the elderly, a day surgery unit and, as a result of the phasing out of Stratheden Hospital, a psychiatric in-patient unit. We have argued at the Public Inquiry that the question of suitable locations for these new facilities is one which needs to be urgently addressed. The Community Council believes that it would be highly desirable to locate an in-patient unit for the elderly on the St Leonard's Field site adjacent to the Memorial Hospital. This site is within walking distance for a non-trivial proportion of the population of the town, and is close to the bus route along the Crail/Anstruther road, as well as to the town bus services. The size of the site is such that it could accommodate other healthcare facilities, and it is obviously advantageous to avoid splitting healthcare provision in the town any more than is presently the case with sites at the Health Centre in Pipeland Road and at the Memorial Hospital. St Leonard's School have indicated their intention to sell this land, and there is a clear danger that housing will proceed on the site and the opportunity for health facilities will be permanently lost. If life Healthcare are forced to resort to another site it is likely to be situated on the periphery of the town, and to be less easily accessible for most of the residents of the town. There is keen competition for building land in St Andrews, and it is our assumption that any site that Fife Healthcare acquire will need to be bought at housing land prices. This is a real problem for a public organisation which is forbidden to bid for land at a higher price than is indicated by the District Valuer, and which thus faces the likely prospect of being outbid by a housing developer. It is therefore essential that the planning process is used to identify and protect sites that are required for the general good of the community.

32. The provision of open space in the town merits serious consideration. At present in the vest of St Andrews there are small pockets of open space provided by, or left by, the developments of the last twenty years, but there is no area of sufficient dimension for football or other sporting activities.

33. The strategy proposed under Issue 2A above suggests that new infrastructure near to the rail lines and in North Fife may have as important a role to play for the future of St Andrews as infrastructure more directly related to the town. In particular we would ask that consideration be given to amending the Structure Plan to include the construction of a new secondary school in North Fife and a rail-halt at Wormit as Key Strategic Projects.

Where do we go from here?

34. We understand that once the responses to the Issues Report have been considered, a set of options for the future development of St Andrews will be drawn up, and that these will then be put out for further public consultation. It is essential that the options offered are all realistic and that the implications and viability of each is succinctly explained in nontechnical language.

35. In particular we are concerned that many people in the town, on the spur of the moment, will find the no-growth option particularly alluring. While this is very understandable on environmental grounds, many may not immediately appreciate the implications both for those on the housing list and for the young people of the town. Equally important is a basic understanding of which options are likely to be sufficiently robust to withstand the rigours of the planning process. The public at large needs to be reminded that the conclusions of the Strategic Study – be the supportive of no development, substantial expansion or anywhere in between – will be picked apart by the best legal brains that money can buy. Any amendments to the Structure Plan resulting from the Strategic Study must be sufficiently watertight to withstand appeals to the Secretary of State by developers who wish to see more extensive development than whatever level is deemed appropriate by the Study.
