



A new hospital won, an entire hillside lost?

Judging by their past performance, the Fife councillors will wish to give detailed planning consent for the new St Andrews hospital and healthcare centre with as little delay as possible. Replacement of our overcrowded health centre and outdated hospital buildings is long overdue. So you might think that a long-awaited celebration is in order.

But, whilst we welcome the new hospital, our investigations have uncovered the clandestine deals that have achieved this, and the high price that the town may well have to pay – destruction of its environmental setting, overloading of its infrastructure, and the work of both business and education hampered by traffic chaos.

In 1993, the Muir Group, which owns most of the southern hillside of the town, caused a public uproar by announcing plans for an “urban village” there of 1000 houses. The NHS has agreed to buy around half the land for the new hospital from the Muir Group (a tiny fraction of Muir’s land). Last November the Fife councillors made it clear that they did not want the new hospital to open the way for Muir to destroy the Green Belt before it is even in place. It now emerges that, as part of the land deal, the NHS has to provide an access road (in a location and to a specification dictated by Muir) to facilitate Muir’s development. In fact, the proposed road is wider than most of the Largo Road.



The Muir the merrier? A poor prospect for affordable homes

You may think that 1000 more houses are exactly what the town needs, but the probable reality is that few would be affordable homes for local people. Developers here typically go for top-of-the range properties that will maximise their profit. Mechanisms for securing large numbers of affordable homes are not yet in place. And the loss would not just be the view. Losing the “green bowl” surrounding the town means attracting fewer tourists and students, hitting the local economy. We would also get other knock-on effects. 1000 luxury houses will probably mean at least 1500 more cars, resulting in ever more frequent gridlock. If the proposed Western Development (another 1000 houses) also goes ahead, the results could be disastrous.



Our track record From the start, the Community Council has tried to advance the new hospital project. In 1994, Frank Riddell & Ian Goudie made the first attempt to get a site secured for the hospital at the Public Inquiry on the Local Plan. They failed as the NHS was not ready to act. Throughout the late 1990s we shared in regular meetings with the then Health Trusts, who were genuinely interested in local views. Governmental changes to the structure and finance of the health service made progress slow. Around 2002, Joe Peterson, Frank Riddell & Ian Goudie assisted the present Trust in the preparation of the Outline Business Case for the Hospital. In 2003 our invitations were suddenly withdrawn. The reason for that withdrawal is now clear.

Our role now Warning the residents and students in the town of potential disasters is one of the Community Council’s duties. Fife councillors can no longer do this, and face increasing threats of legal problems if they speak ahead of meetings. In the present case, we’ve shown that Muir is using the hospital as a Trojan Horse to open the way for his development. The town can, of course, choose whether or not to heed the warning. Sit on your hands now, and you’ll still get the hospital. You may well also have to live with the consequences of rampant development.

Further details The Community Council’s submission on the hospital application includes our ideas on how to prevent further development on the southern hillside (such as using planning conditions, or barring further access by various means). The submission, and other supporting information, can be seen on our website <http://www.standrewscc.net/>

Wider problems

Other news

Who runs Fife Council? The Community Council has often stressed that we want the town to be run by our elected Fife councillors rather than unelected groups, such as St Andrews World Class. In the case of the hospital, there is evidence that Fife officials have reached understandings with the NHS and the Muir Group, but kept the elected Fife councillors in the dark until long after the event. These officials are known to have their own agenda, wishing, for example, to replace Bassaguard by a new industrial site on Muir's land on the southern hillside. Surely the town, through its representatives, should decide whether we get a Green Belt on the hillside or cover it in urban sprawl. It should not be left to officials whom we can't vote out of office.

Post Office Campaign On August 2, a well-attended meeting in the Town Hall, presided over by our Chair, Ken Fraser, was addressed by Dr Chris Carter, who has spearheaded the local campaign, and the Post Office's Peter Mylchreest. The meeting made abundantly clear the town's opposition to the transfer of our main post office to W.H. Smith. Revealing that the annual loss exceeded £154,000, the Post Office appeared determined to offload the operation and showed little interest in how it might be run more profitably - greater business acumen was evident on the floor of the meeting. It emerged that the Post Office lacks even basic data on queue lengths in the existing building, and so can make no sensible assessment of how well W.H. Smith might cope.

Who tells the truth? In recent years, NHS officials have poured scorn on suggestions that there is a connection between provision of the new hospital and any decision on development of the southern hillside. It now emerges that the Muir Group is dictating a major aspect of the site layout for the hospital - the size and location of their access road. Indeed, a key reason for last year's planning application to increase the size of the hospital site was that the NHS couldn't fit this road in! Unless words have lost their meaning, the two issues are intimately linked, and the NHS officials have been showing some considerable economy with the truth.

Speed Humps Fife Council is proposing a huge programme of traffic calming in the town, with 30 m.p.h. speed cushions along Lamond Drive and Bogward Road / Canongate. A 20 m.p.h. speed limit is to be introduced in many side-streets, ostensibly because they are close to schools. Dave Finlay has told Fife Council that the Community Council supports part-time 20 m.p.h. zones and anti-skid surfaces outside schools, but that introduction of speed humps elsewhere should be done in moderation, using them only where there are known speeding problems. There is a distinction between the gradual introduction of required safety measures and a sudden overkill approach that loses public support.

Channel 4's Dispatches On July 30, the TV programme Dispatches gave some interesting insights into what developers will do to get planning consent. In particular, they revealed that 11 days prior to the consideration of a major planning application in the Prime Minister's constituency, Muir Homes had donated £1350 to the local Labour party. There is no suggestion of impropriety about this donation - Muir Homes described it as part of a long-standing relationship with Fife Council. Councillors must only declare an interest if they benefit personally.

Structure Plan The Scottish Executive has agreed that, before the end of the year, Fife Council can conduct a reappraisal of its proposed Structure Plan. The Community Council believes that tinkering at the margins will do no good - the previous version was fundamentally flawed and major changes are required.

Bandstand Concerts, Bow Butts, The Scores, organised by Dave Finlay. The season ends with:-
Sun. 26 Aug. 2 p.m. **Clackmannan Brass Band**;
Sun. 2 Sept. 2 p.m. **City of Discovery Instrumental Band**.

Make your voice heard! If, like us, you support the hospital, but do not want 1000 houses for the well-to-do on the southern hillside, **before Aug. 29**, email or phone one of the St Andrews members of Fife Council to tell them what you think:-
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Looking Forward!

The Community Council's popular **Hogmanay Ceilidh** will be held in the Town Hall again this year. Tickets on sale later in the year. As the University semester is later than usual, the **Senior Citizens' Christmas Tea**, which Ken Crichton and other CC members organise with the help of the Students' Association, will be held in Jan. 2008.