



## Pipeland – a viable solution at last or yet another false dawn?

No organisation has campaigned longer or louder than the Community Council for a new Madras College. Yet, as you may be aware, at its meeting on October 7 the Community Council agreed by 9 votes

to 4 to object to Fife Council's planning application for a new school to be built at Pipeland. The Community Council has no power in this matter: our view is simply a recommendation to the Fife councillors who will take the decision.

The choice of site remains crucial for St Andrews. This choice will impact not only on pupils and their parents, but on almost everyone in the town. So, in determining our stance, we were conscious of our duty to reflect all interests in the town. We also have to consider not just the present generation of pupils but the next, and the next for at least the next 50 years.

Whilst this newsletter attempts to set out some of the considerations on both sides of the argument, its overall stance reflects the arguments that led us to our conclusion. At times this debate has become acrimonious. We believe that some of the issues we raise, such as those concerning traffic, merit serious consideration, even if you disagree with our conclusion.

**What are the next steps?** Fife's officials recognise that this application does not conform to the Local Plan, which envisages a school on the North Haugh. As a consequence, the first requirement is a public hearing – purely for information gathering. This is expected to be in December. We understand that the decision-taking meetings, by the Area Committee and Fife Council are likely to be in March and April 2014. (These dates simply reflect the standard time taken to process a major application of this sort.) If approved, one part of Fife Council will be giving planning consent to another part of the Council, and therefore the Scottish Government may call in the application to check the validity of that decision. As the current planning application seeks only permission in principle, a further application for detailed planning consent will also be required. Even if there are no legal challenges, the process is thus a lengthy one.

### Some factors motivating the supporters of the Pipeland site

**Speed** Many supporters believe that it will be quicker to develop the Pipeland site than any other site as the process has been started and preliminary plans are on the table. The Community Council is all too aware of the debacles of the past, and can understand the frustrations of those who say, "Enough of the talking, just get on and build the school!" Many people, both supporters and opponents of the Pipeland application, regard Fife Council's record over the last few years in attempting to find a site for the School as appalling. Years have been wasted with the protracted discussions over the Langlands site near the University Sports Centre, and then the aborted proposal to rebuild on the Kilrymont site. Actions have often appeared to be addressing corporate or political interests rather than the educational needs of the children. Whilst all this has been going on, the present buildings have been allowed to deteriorate further.

**Hobson's choice** Others regard the Pipeland site as the ONLY available option. This is indeed the position that Fife Council has enunciated. In particular, some Pipeland supporters do not believe that the Council could agree a price (or an exchange) with the University for a site at the North Haugh, or believe that the Council's hands are tied by the District Valuer's price for that site. Others believe there would be major drainage problems in developing this site (previously called "the pond site"), or problems due to the heronry, whilst they believe that putting the school on Station Park would provoke planning problems and objections from golfing interests.

**Cost** Many Pipeland supporters accept the figures that Fife Council issued last year indicating that the Pipeland site would be cheaper to develop than other possibilities. In particular, at that stage the Council said that developing the North Haugh site would incur costs of £8.5m on the first stage of the Western development distributor road and £2.3m for an underpass to Station Park.

**Have YOUR say, by post, email, or online! See over for details . . .**

## The Problems with Pipeland - Is it really the best option for the pupils?

**Road Safety** A school at Pipeland will greatly increase traffic on the Largo Rd, Scooniehill Rd, John Knox Rd, and Bogward Rd. The only way to avoid gridlock centred on the Morrisons/hospital roundabout will be to widen the approach roads. This will not be a problem for those arriving on buses, but for pupils from St Andrews arriving on foot or bike, it will make this roundabout more of a hazard. Risks are likely to be increased as congestion will make some motorists impatient, particularly those needing to get to hospital appointments. The number of pupils going across the Largo Rd to Morrisons each lunchtime is likely to double. No footbridge is included in the budget.

**Working environment** Built into a north facing slope, the school will lack natural light and heat, particularly in rooms to the rear. (This will also increase heating and lighting costs.)

**Sports** Most sports activity would take place at Pipeland. Sports pitch provision would be much less than Station Park and Kilrymont combined. The pitches will feel far more exposed in winter, and events are more likely to be cancelled when there is inclement weather.

**Co-location** with the University - paraded time and again as the key issue three years ago - is now virtually forgotten. The idea retains some merit. e.g. the University Library will be much less handy for Pipeland pupils.

**Speed of delivery** was meant to be an advantage of the Pipeland site, but as well as major planning issues (see below), problems include excavating the hillside to create a level site in a sloping hillside, dealing with severe drainage problems, diverting two gas mains and the right-of-way, resiting parts of the pumping station, and creating a new access for Pipeland Cottage.

**Cost** Rather than being spent on education, a substantial tranche of funds will be needed to cover the exceptional costs of developing the Pipeland site. As well as road construction and expanding the roundabout, and the costs of the works listed in the previous paragraph, these include the high purchase price (see below), and the need to use high quality materials in such a sensitive location.

**Proximity to phone masts** (including TETRA) on Largo Rd. A Scottish neurophysiologist called last year for a one mile gap between masts and schools. Last month the French Health Agency (ANSES) advised tighter controls on the exposure from masts, and reduced exposure to radiofrequencies, especially for children and intensive users of mobile phones. Many other experts advise caution, particularly as regards children.

### Pipeland – Some of the planning problems

**Development Plan** The proposed development contravenes 12 policy, guideline and action plan items in the TayPlan and the St Andrews and East Fife Local Plan, both of which have been adopted by Fife Council.

**Landscape Assessment** Fife Council is also preparing to ignore the recommendations in the most recent landscape study of St Andrews, commissioned by Fife Council and published by it in 2003, where the Pipeland site was identified as falling within one of the areas where any development would be inappropriate.

**Green Belt** The proposed development lies within the St Andrews Green Belt, adopted as recently as October 2012, after almost 20 yrs of campaigning by the town. Yet the body charged with defending it, Fife Council, is the very same body now proposing to develop within it. The southern hillside is already under threat. The Muir Group insisted that the hospital provide an access road at the western end and Fife officials added another into plans for the eastern end. If the Pipeland site goes ahead, the rest of the southern hillside looks indefensible and the key feature of the Green Belt is dead in the water. Only those ignorant of the history of the town can believe that the town will not fight to save its Green Belt.

**Alternative sites** Planning consent for a Green Belt site is only possible if there is no viable alternative outwith the Belt. The Community Council believes such sites do exist. (See over.) The Pipeland site is part of the Muir Group's proposed housing area for the next Local Plan. In January 2013, Fife's own officials (Main Issues report) noted that the Reporter for the 2012 Plan considered this area, concluding that "it should not be allocated for development and that the site should instead be part of the St Andrews Green Belt."

### The relationship between Fife Council and Muir Homes

When the current Fife administration came to power, the Muir Group's Pipeland site (7<sup>th</sup> choice in 2011) leapt into 1<sup>st</sup> place. In 2007, Muir Homes had candidly acknowledged its "long-standing relationship with Fife Council". The Pipeland site was valued at £160,000 by an independent property specialist in August 2012. The hope of planning consent has raised its value enormously. Fife Council intends to purchase the land for £1.8 million.

## Pipeland - Further implications for the town



**Buses** The twice daily stream of school buses will still need to come up City Road through the busiest part of town to the West Port, and out on the Largo Road, and return the same way. At peak periods the loadings on the junctions at the West Port, Hope Park and the foot of City Rd are, even without the buses, all predicted to be over capacity by 2016, causing inevitable delays.

**Impact on town centre** South St will benefit from the removal of the buses, but town centre shops will face loss of trade from staff and pupils.

**Emergency Services** Congestion on the Largo Road could impede ambulances (for pupils or residents) and also fire engines. Promoting developments liable to cause congestion is never wise.

**Community Hospital** With its associated noise and traffic congestion, the school will not be a good neighbour to the hospital. In particular, the hospice will become less tranquil, and its open outlook destroyed. Without re-design of the hospital roundabout, in the a.m. peak (0815-0915), the transport assessment predicts maximum queues of 20 and 25 vehicles coming from town and from the hospital/school respectively, with the queue from the hospital/school predicted to reach 90 vehicles in a 15 min period during the afternoon peak!

The “concerns and objections” of NHS Fife include the implications for hospital parking and pedestrian safety. They write “The combined volume of traffic at peak periods and the mix of clients from both premises – young pedestrians and elderly drivers – must be recognised as greatly increasing the risk to all parties.”

**Excavation** The excavation works necessary for levelling the site will cause major disruption to everyone in the immediate vicinity, not least the hospital, and will cause as yet unknown alterations to the natural drainage which already causes flooding from time to time.

**Visual and Local impact** The Pipeland site is higher up the hillside than the hospital, raising the impact on the landscape setting. Pitch floodlighting at night will be visible over a wide area. Experience suggests that neighbouring residents may also suffer from litter and noise problems.

## Advantages of sites on the north-west side of the town

- (i) **Co-location** Sites to the north-west are within easy walking distance of much of the University.
- (ii) **Station Park** would be used for sports. For pupils this gives quick-draining pitches, maximising the opportunities for sports, especially in the winter. For the town, it secures the future of Station Park.
- (iii) **Bussing** 60% of Madras pupils stay outwith St Andrews: most of these arrive on buses along the A91. Such pupils would waste less of each day sitting on buses, and the buses would not need to enter the town.
- (iv) **Environment** Shorter bus journeys mean lower carbon emissions, causing less damage to the planet.
- (v) **Planning** As these sites are not in the Green Belt, there are fewer planning difficulties than at Pipeland.

**North Haugh site** Owned by the University, this is the site identified in the Local Plan for the school. Thus the process of gaining planning consent is likely to be relatively swift. Although the North Haugh site enjoys much public support, Fife Council has discarded it, ostensibly due to its projected costs, but it was clearly not comparing like with like. A school could be built here without the need to spend £8.5m on the first stage of the Western development distributor road. In reality, as the Council may yet come to appreciate, the additional costs at Pipeland, which have risen steadily as more factors have emerged, would be much steeper. (The detailed analysis on the website <http://newmadras.org/> suggests they now exceed £13m.) The ground at the North Haugh is suitable for building on without any major excavations or other exceptional site preparation works, as evidenced by the University buildings elsewhere on the North Haugh. The University has indicated a willingness to sell the site, and the financial gap to be closed is much less than the additional costs at Pipeland.

**Station Park site** A new school at the eastern end would not be visually intrusive, and would cover only a small part of the site, leaving the rest for onsite sports provision – much more than at Pipeland. It is owned by the Council, is the best site for co-location with the University, and town centre shops would continue to gain some trade. It should be possible to take on board any valid planning concerns from the golfing community.

## The education consultation

The education consultation held earlier this year showed a substantial majority of participants in favour of the proposal. The use of a single question, however, meant that respondents could not distinguish between their obvious strong desire for a new school and their views on the particular Pipeland site proposed. The manner in which it was conducted also meant that the some parts of the local community were much more likely to participate than others. The conclusions of that consultation should be treated with caution.

## The medium and longer term

**Existing school sites** at Kilrymont and South St will be sold. Despite current promises a future cash-strapped Council may well wish to sell a lightly-used Station Park. If the Green Belt can be built on, so too can Station Park.

**Think of your grandchildren!** The interests of the children have often been noted in this debate: those of our grandchildren also merit some thought. Carbon reduction is not an optional extra. The planet cannot afford the ongoing cost of bussing to Madras. Nor can we. It is currently around £1m annually and is rising: in the lifetime of the school more will be spent on bussing than on the building.

**A Bridgehead School** It is not too late to think again about a school at the Tay Bridgehead. It would give a better life to the bussed pupils, cutting dramatically the carbon footprint, bussing times and costs. Two smaller schools cost more than one large, but not twice as much as has often been pretended. The Scottish Government, which is seeking a massive 42% cut in carbon emissions by 2020, should consider contributing: this is precisely the situation in which action is needed if carbon targets are to be met. The idea that smaller schools cannot provide a wide curriculum is misinformation. Other Scottish authorities take a different line: Fife has 4 of the largest 11 secondary schools in Scotland.

## HAVE YOUR SAY!

**Write** to Mr D. O'Hare, Enterprise, Planning & Protective Services, Fife Council, Kingdom House, Glenrothes, KY7 5LY (Quote ref **13/02583/EIA** and head your letter either "**OBJECTION**" or "**SUPPORT**").

**OR email** [development.central@fife.gov.uk](mailto:development.central@fife.gov.uk) quoting reference: **13/02583/EIA**,

**OR comment online** at <http://planning.fife.gov.uk/online/> (First click on **Register**, fill the form, await confirmation, then go back to the search page, and enter **13/02583/EIA** in the box. Click the **Login** button before commenting.),

**ALSO email** one of your local Fife councillors:- [cllr.keith.mccartney@fife.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.keith.mccartney@fife.gov.uk),  
[cllr.frances.melville@fife.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.frances.melville@fife.gov.uk), [cllr.dorothea.morrison@fife.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.dorothea.morrison@fife.gov.uk), [cllr.brian.thomson@fife.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.brian.thomson@fife.gov.uk)

## Other Community Council News

**Craigton getting back on the rails** Craigton Park has taken huge strides forward this summer to re-establish itself as a major tourist attraction. Three years ago the park was very run down and there were threats of closure. The Community Council took the initiative in establishing a Friends of Craigton Group. They are now an independent entity, and their splendid efforts are beginning to bear fruit. Recent changes have led Visit Scotland, who had downgraded the Park to a two-star attraction, to now give it four stars! If you're interested in becoming a friend, go to <http://www.friendsofcraigton.org.uk/index.htm>



**StAndEN (St Andrews Environmental Network)**, formally a committee of this Community Council, is now an independent organisation. It continues to offer advice on how to keep energy bills down and how to adopt a greener, healthier lifestyle. For further information, visit their website <http://standrewsenergy.org/>

**St Andrews Community Trust** has so far this year made awards totalling over £36,000 to 16 local organisations. Recipients include Holy Trinity Church towards its GiG youth programme, the Scouts towards a training camp and equipment, and the Sailing Club towards repairing their Clubhouse. The Trust was created in 2010 by an agreement between the Links Trust and the Community Council. See their website:- <http://www.standrewscommunitytrust.co.uk/>

**Botanic Garden** Community Councillors have continued to express support for the Friends of the Botanic Garden in their fight to keep the Garden open. The University has extended the current lease until the end of March 2014, but is only offering a short-term 5 year lease thereafter on the cultivated parts of the site. (The University would retain control of the non-cultivated areas, and could dispose of them if it so chose.) A short lease would make it virtually impossible to raise the capital needed for proposed developments that aim to make the Garden more financially viable. These include a cafeteria and a larger retail operation. If a new lease is not signed by the end of March, the University has said it will close the Garden. For more information, or to contribute to the online forum, visit <http://www.st-andrews-botanic.org/>