

# Airth Parish Community Council

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Minutes of Meeting held in Airth Primary School on Wednesday 21st November 2018

**Members Present :**

**Jon Anslow (Convenor)**

**Aileen Amos (Secretary / Treasurer)**

**Robert Smith (Assistant Secretary)**

**James Toal (Vice Convenor)**

**Stephen Sloper, Murat Dilek (Comm Councillors)**

**Also Present :**

**Jacqueline Drew, Co-opted Member (Airth Parish Church)**

**Cllr. Joan Coombes; Cllr. Laura Murtagh; Cllr. Gary Bouse;**

**Ronnie Martin; Charley Turner; Fiona Turner; Graham Barron;**

**Ella Barron; Jean Tait; Jim Tait; Eddie Stewart; Davie Gilmour;**

**Margaret Penn; George Russell; David Jones; Robert McCormick;**

**Vivien Murchison & Mike Miller (Concerned Communities of Falkirk)**

**Jane Rae (Minute Taker)**

Before the meeting began, Aileen informed everyone that in relation to the Data Protection rules anyone who does not wish their name to appear in the minutes please let the minute secretary know.

**1. Apologies :     Rev Jim Todd; Cllr. Jim Flynn.**

**2. Police Report :**

Jon Anslow presented PC Morrison's report.

The period covered was 24th October to 21st November 2018 and identified 4 reported crimes / offences in the area (3 ongoing, 1 undetected). These included theft of cut timber from Dunmore Estate, theft of an iPad from Airth Primary and 2 hit and run RTCs. There were 45 calls to Police from Airth in this period. The majority of these related to road traffic matters and also to disorder at Airth Castle Hotel, suspect persons and neighbour disputes.

PC Morrison has received reports of graffiti on trees in Dunmore. Extra patrols have been carried out but no suspects have been identified.

There had been 1 incident of anti social behaviour involving a drunk youth in Main Street, Airth during October and November.

Ronnie Martin reported that there had been an incident of “lamping” at Bothkennar. This was reported to PC Morrison and the local wildlife officer. A vehicle had been caught on camera but they were not able to ascertain the registration.

Jon Anslow reported having seen a group of off-road vehicles near Dunmore this week.

Aileen Amos spoke of residents in Dunmore being awakened early a.m. by gunshots. Robert Smith said that PC Morrison had investigated and although residents were being disturbed, he concluded that relevant licences were held, therefore nothing illegal had taken place.

At this point, PC Morrison arrived late to the meeting and Aileen asked him about the above. He reiterated what Robert had already said.

Any intelligence relating to drug misuse in the area should be reported to Police.

### **3. Previous Minutes :**

Aileen mentioned a comment arising from the previous minute regarding an email that Cllr. Murtagh had sent to the community council with information of the flooding at Letham. Neither Aileen nor Robert could trace this. Cllr Murtagh undertook to re-send.

Apart from this, the previous minute of 24/10/18 was accepted as correct and approved by Aileen Amos, seconded by Jon Anslow.

### **4. Matters Arising**

- **Boundary Wall at Community Centre** : Ongoing.
- **Adele Deeley’s presentation at October’s meeting** : Robert had suggested to Adele that she contact Letham residents. Robert had spoken to Ian Penman of Letham who was keen for Adele to contact him but was about to go on holiday. To be followed up.
- **Road Markings** : Mostly completed - a bit still to be done at shops. Resident asked about the car-sized rectangle outside her property. Cllr Coombes and Murtagh said this would be left as it is because the surface was in reasonable condition.
- **Supply of dog bin at lay-by, Dunmore** : Cllr Murtagh will deal with this.
- **Headless Cross** : Robert Smith had done a bit of research on this and now has an information booklet. He will progress this once he is back to full fitness. Spoke again of how uninviting the sign is to visitors.
- **Provision of handrail on steps at War Memorial** : Cllr Coombes says she was approached by a resident suggesting that steps here would be a bonus. Aileen Amos agreed and suggested bringing this up with Community Enhancement Group.

**5. Presentation regarding Coal Bed Methane Extraction : Vivien Murchison and Mike Miller of Concerned Communities of Falkirk**

: Vivien spoke to those present regarding the origin and remit of this group. They were instrumental in producing a Bill of Charter to preserve a clean environment and the heritage of the area. Nearly 3 thousand local people signed it, which resulted in the Scottish Government granting a Public Inquiry. Through fund raising the group were represented at the PI by a top QC. The eventual outcome was that Scottish Government announced a moratorium against coal bed methane extraction / fracking in Scotland. Currently (perhaps due to an appeal against the moratorium by INEOS) another public consultation has been called. Much paperwork has been produced informing of this public consultation and Vivien attempted to give a run down of the main points and expectations. The time frame for returning feedback and comments is very tight - 18/12/18. Vivien and Mike were here tonight to ask Airth Community Council to give their support.

The three options offered by this public consultation were:-

- 1) Status quo
- 2) A Pilot, which could amount to up to 15 wells being placed over the next 10 years, which the Government have said they can monitor.
- 3) Lift the moratorium

There was some discussion about the difference between a moratorium and a ban. Jon Anslow said that previously our Community Council had supported the ban but had not joined the CCoF and would envisage this might be the case again, although discussion would have to take place with members and the community. The question of raising money to pay the QC again was asked and Vivien answered that £2000 is required and already £1000+ had been raised through crowd-funding.

Further questions were asked around possible pilot scheme (no info); the danger of having many existing underground mines, some of which are unreported; the danger of methane escaping if these are disturbed; the history of other different methane extraction plans being stopped by the group.

Cllr Murtagh said that the support of many different agencies and organisations against the issue had been taken into consideration before the decision to impose a moratorium was made. The moratorium has already been challenged, and will no doubt be challenged again, but has proven to be robust so far. Vivien agreed but added that the Government need to prove this is what the people want and why she was appealing to Airth CC for support. The Convenor and Asst Secretary both agreed that timescales were too tight to consult with community. A resident present said that CCoF were not asking for large sums of money from Airth. Previously we had offered our support, the

situation does not appear to have changed, therefore why can't we just say 'we support you'. It was agreed that the matter will be progressed, time permitting.

Jon thanked Vivien and Mike for coming and making a presentation to the meeting. Vivien and Mike left at this point.

## **6. Correspondence :**

- email from Cllr Coombes regarding flood alleviation work at Letham.
- email from FC Development Services to Cllr Coombes regarding Airth Cemetery. The number of burials per annum in Airth is low (5-10), therefore there is still capacity for another 9-10 years. There are no plans to enlarge, unless money becomes available.
- notice of invite to CC members to budget consultation and forum meeting being held on 29th November at 6pm at Falkirk Council. Aileen and Jon will attend.
- email from Maria Montinaro asking for Airth CC support as signatory to a submission by Sir Crispin Agnew QC to Scottish Government's Public Consultation on Fracking.
- invite from RSPB to gathering on 23rd November, 2 - 4pm. Stephen Sloper will attend.
- email from Vivien Murchison to CC asking to attend meeting on 21st November.
- update on plans for escarpment from Terry Walker.
- meeting at Ineos of Community Liaison Group on 26/11 at 6pm. Aileen will attend.
- Community Safety Team Reports for September and October 2018.
- notice of Statutory Review of Polling Stations from Falkirk Council
- email from new STV News reporter (Courtney Cameron) for the central Scotland area, asking for any newsworthy stories or features
- receipt for Small Lottery License annual fee of £20 paid by Airth CC to Falkirk Council
- Larbert Rotary Club poster for Santa's Sleigh route
- email from Cllr Coombes informing of provision of two additional community salt bins which have been situated in South Green Drive and Castle Avenue.
- copy of letter authored by Robert Smith as a result of a meeting in his home on 7/11 to discuss the pre-planning proposal submitted by George Russell; the letter was based on comments made by those present and was sent timeously on 14/11 so that any points raised could be answered by George at meeting tonight (21/11).
- an email trail beginning with Stephen Sloper's request of 15/11/18 for Robert's letter on behalf of CC to be retracted in the light of several points which Stephen disagreed

were a true representation of what the meeting had discussed or agreed. This collection of correspondence, which all related to this same issue, also included an email from Robert clarifying his responsibility for pest control and deer management on ground owned by G Russell and other farmers in the area and emphasising the fact that he does not run a shooting syndicate. He also tendered his wish to resign from his position as assistant secretary as he felt his integrity had been brought into question. He was later persuaded to withdraw his resignation.

At this point in the meeting, Steven made his points again. He said that it had been his understanding that a draft copy of the letter was to be circulated to members for comment. Stephen went on to say that all community council meetings should be in public and a minute should be produced for every meeting held. The letter had subsequently been amended to reflect Stephen's comments and the Convenor again stated that the letter would not be withdrawn. He had, previous to the meeting, sent an email to Stephen outlining how the community council deals with issues such as these and unless the issue was particularly contentious (which in his opinion this was not) then the opinions of all community council members are not sought on the final version of such a letter. He had also consulted with Brian Pirie of Falkirk Council, who agreed that no breach of protocol had occurred.

Stephen went on to say that if the Convenor could not agree to his request to withdraw the letter, he had no option but to raise a formal complaint against the CC. He proceeded to outline the issues which in his opinion were his reasons for such an action. He pointed out that his complaint refers to matters which have significant public interest and not to the normal day-to-day operation of the CC.

He believes that the manner in which the community council conducts itself is in breach of requirements as set out by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973; is not in accordance with Falkirk Council's good practice guidance for Local Authorities and Community Councils; nor does it presently adequately meet the requirements of Scottish Government's Code of Conduct for Community Councils.

His points were:-

- 1) The Community Council is carrying out in secret, meetings on issues which have significant local interest. Such meetings require to be held in public.
- 2) The Community Council have failed to advertise these meetings or made publicly available the minutes from these meetings.
- 3) By conducting meetings of this type, the CC cannot demonstrate that it has adequately ensured that any decisions made during these meetings reflect the wider community's views.

- 4) Any member of the CC who may have a private or personal interest in an issue to be considered has a duty to declare this and, if deemed necessary by other members, withdraw from the discussions and decision making process regarding these issues.
- 5) The Chair has taken it upon itself to decide in isolation whether any councillor who may have an interest in matters should take part in any debate / discussion and has done so in a manner which removes the requirement for discussion with the rest of the CC.
- 6) The CC has made decisions and issued letters without ensuring it can demonstrate that it is a true reflection of either the wider community's views following a meeting or without the full CC being in agreement. The Chair has advised that any letters to be sent following meetings of this type will only be reviewed by office bearers before being issued.

## **7. Treasurer's Report :**

Aileen said that Ginny Sutherland has generously offered to pay £41 for the poppy wreath. £875.45 is in the admin account and £2963.36 in the Xmas Lights account.

## **8. Round the Parish :**

**Airth** : Robert suggested that slabs are needed beside the two seats within the cemetery. Both are sitting on the grass, which is muddy during winter months. Quite a few people stop by and have their lunch there. There are two waste bins inside the cemetery gates, and we request that one of those should be relocated outside the gates in the car parking area. A local resident also mentioned that one of the graves is sinking.

**Letham** : construction work ongoing at Linksfield Farm. Steven Sloper will take some photos. Aileen had made an enquiry to Falkirk Council but no answer so far.

Regarding any flooding at Letham, there has been no problems so far although we've still not had the worst conditions yet. Nothing from Scottish Water - their priority would appear to be to sort out an emergency discharge system.

**Bothkennar** : Due to time shortage tonight this will be carried forward to next meeting.

Fiona Turner asked about facilities for glass recycling. Previously her family had used the bins which had been sited at the old Pine'n'Oak but when these filled up they were taken away and not replaced. Cllrs. Coombes and Murtagh answered that since kerbside collections were provided there was no need for communal collections and urged Fiona to ask the Council to supply a black box for her household's use.

## **9. Planning Issues :**

**(a) Plan for 27/28 Graham Terrace** : this has been withdrawn.

**(b) Pre-planning application for site north of Airth** : the proposal is for a Visitors Centre, Coffee Shop, Retail Units and 22 dwellings. George Russell and his architect David Jones were present tonight to outline the plan and to answer any questions asked. Before this went ahead those present with any declared conflict of interest left the meeting, i.e. Cllr Laura Murtagh, Cllr Gary Bouse and Cllr Joan Coombes. Robert Smith also added that he had permission to shoot vermin on George Russell's grounds but had no financial interest whatsoever - this was not deemed to be a conflict of interest. Steven Sloper added that he did not question Robert's integrity.

George Russell proceeded to present his reasons for the planned development. He has owned the land for over 10 years and is aware that there are lots of visiting tourists but sadly no facilities for them. He feels that the Pineapple is largely unpromoted, particularly in the light of the huge amount of publicity given to the Kelpies and the Falkirk Wheel. The plan for the buildings on this site will be self-funding and there will be no third party finance. He will bring jobs and apprenticeships to the area and the intended housing will fund the visitor centre. He envisages the whole development will take 3 - 4 years to complete, as he thinks additions to the village should be gradual. He is here tonight to take on board comments, concerns and ideas from everyone and emphasised that his plans were still at an early planning stage. There had been a good positive return of responses to the public consultation, 40 in all. George added that he has spoken to the National Trust for Scotland who have responsibility for the Pineapple and dialogue with them was positive too. Steven Sloper said that there is a presumption against development in the historic designed landscape of Dunmore Park which could mean a restriction of design but development can still be considered.

A local resident asked George to point out on the map where the Pineapple was in relation to planned visitor centre, he felt it would be sited a bit away from the landmark. George reiterated that plans were still in the early stages, Falkirk Council still to come back with comments regarding the road system. The owners of the Parsonage are also making positive comments. A resident of Bothkennar asked about the impact on the infrastructure and was surprised to hear that a further 108 houses have been planned for the escarpment. The proposed 22 bungalows were in addition to what had been agreed for the local development plan, although George Russell said that when the LDP was signed off the plan for houses at the escarpment was for 135 houses, which have now been reduced to 108 so the extra 22 bungalows proposed are still within the limit of planned additional housing for the area. George was asked how many houses would require to be built before the visitor centre could begin, he answered 2 - 4 houses. Although the visitor centre is intended to promote the Pineapple, the Pineapple will continue to be the

responsibility of National Trust for Scotland. George was asked about the proposed shops and what the merchandise would be. He said there would be 3 shops and he is currently researching local Falkirk brands, e.g. a local butcher etc. Another Airth resident supported the venture and said it could only be a benefit for the village - he cited Rosslyn Chapel and what the promotion of this landmark had done for the village of Rosslyn.

There were no further questions and Jon thanked George for his input. George and David left the meeting.

**10. Christmas Lights :** A local resident mentioned that the light outside her home seems to switch on very early. Aileen said she would investigate this with the lighting company. Aileen added that with the purchase of the three new lights we have now completed the whole of the main road through Airth to the Castle Gates. Raffle tickets are being sold in aid of the upkeep of the lights ahead of the big switch on. Robert mentioned that he was still short of collectors for Paul Drive, Carse View and Banks View - asking for volunteers.

**11. Update on Situation at Bothkennar :** As we had some time in hand, Bothkennar resident Ronnie Martin, was asked for an update. He referred to previous information given at last meeting regarding the differing views of Falkirk Council and Scottish National Heritage on what was reported about a rare plant in a local field. It seems that the farmer who had been asked to vacate this field has now been offered it back again.

He mentioned again about the conditions of the license granted to RSPB by Marine Scotland and how RSPB had not carried out all works to the letter. It seems that Marine Scotland have said that in connection with the planned removal of the big pipes in the banking, RSPB can leave what's there but can't add anything. Two of the Bothkennar residents were of the opinion that again this was another example of RSPB doing as they pleased and getting away with it.

Jon asked Ronnie and neighbours from Bothkennar to keep the community council updated on any further developments.

**12. AOCB :**

- Before Cllr Murtagh left the meeting she reminded people of her attempt to set up an Airth village choir and her hope to have something functioning by the time of the Xmas Light Switch on. She urged people to come along and support the venture.

**Jon Anslow concluded that there was no further business and therefore closed the meeting.**