

Dear Sirs,

We take pleasure in herewith summarising the findings of a public meeting of Torphins Community Council (minutes attached) held on 2nd May in order to gather the views of our community regarding the bid submissions received by Aberdeenshire Council for possible inclusion of the 2021 Local Development Plan.

Summary

The following reflects the views expressed by members of the community including the Community Council:-

- Local interest is in sustaining a rural village community while making a proportionate contribution to the prosperity of the area as a whole. It must not be assumed that this means dramatic expansion.
- The role of housing builders must be to deliver the requirements of the community, not purely to build what they consider suitable and that will deliver themselves the greatest profit.
- Maintaining the variety of communities in the area, i.e. a balance of village, town and city environments to provide the options of choice for people living in the area. Do not eliminate the rural village option by turning it into a town. People living in village communities generally accept that services and accessibility will not be the same as in a town or city environment and this is the cost of the more rural lifestyle.
- The basic premise of the LDP is based on activity projections pre oil industry decline and is therefore outdated and erroneous. This is clearly demonstrated by reference to the UKCS Workforce Dynamics Review, (generated by OPITO in partnership with RGU's Oil and Gas Institute).
- The Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2017, which is predominantly based on data relating to pre oil industry decline, is actually showing a reducing trend in the local population and also shows a disproportionate increase in the 75+ age group.
- The builders attending the meeting were proposing a mix of housing types but did not include single story units. This omission was noted as there was expressed a requirement for this housing type by people wishing to downsize while remaining in their local community.
- Arguments for additional housing to support the school role are fundamentally flawed since the school has already been oversubscribed with the current housing inventory. The school role could also tolerate a degree of decline in order to eliminate the temporary accommodation that was installed during the period of over subscription.

Information Gathering

Attendees at the meeting were asked to complete a short questionnaire and this questionnaire was also posted on our website and accessible through our Facebook page. A total of 64 responses were received with the attached pie chart showing the level of support for each of the sites.

In addition to the questionnaire, we asked responders for additional comments and a selection of these are as follows:-

- In the current climate, there are enough housing developments in the area.
- Development along Beltie Road (ref MR034, 035 & 036) would spoil the views and character of the village.
- The village has a good community feel and the volume of houses that may be considered is preposterous and would increase traffic to an unacceptable level.
- There are new build houses along Deeside that are not selling with building projects being put on hold.
- People move to a small village to live in a small village, otherwise they would move to a more densely populated town.
- The village can't cope with what it has - burst pipes every winter and low water pressure. Children can't play in the park in the winter due to soggy ground.

- Development will add to the village's problems - village hall with limited use, school roll problems and not being big or modern enough, drainage problems and constant burst pipes, loss of fields along Beltie Road (ref MR034, 035 & 036), poor bus service.
- There are currently many houses for sale.
- There are plenty of large family homes in the village, several of which have been on the market for some time. Smaller properties for older people and first time buyers would be beneficial. This would also allow members of the community to downsize without having to leave the village.
- Infrastructure needs upgrading - drainage, services, no mains gas, poor roads and poor broadband.
- The only bid to bring long term benefit & employment to the village is Station Garage (MR060).
- MR034, 035 & 036 have already been rejected for inclusion in the current LDP.
- Priority should be given to development of brown field sites.
- Oil & gas experts warn of a leaner industry and major oil companies project further job losses. The statistics being used at the moment are out of date and inaccurate.
- Finish the housing sites that have been started and develop the ground that has been approved in the current LDP.
- Planners need to carry out more detailed research before approving anything.
- MR060 provides a mix of affordable, family, and housing for the elderly.
- MR060 would create a better entrance to the village than the existing garage.
- For the village to maintain its success some housing development is required.
- MR004 has poor access and will impact negatively on entry to the village due to being on a prominent hillside.
- MR060 would need to be landscaped with path access to the Beltie Burn.
- MR034 should only be considered after completion of MR060 & MR005 and would be a good location for retirement downsizers.
- Organic development is needed.
- Before permission is given for any of the bids, the impact on local amenities (school, health care, public transport) needs to be addressed.
- Many new residents may need to make a daily commute to Aberdeen. The impact of this needs to be considered.
- There are environmental concerns regarding the suitability of sites MR004 & MR005.
- Access to MR004 is along a single track road which already has a significant traffic flow. An additional 15 houses would generate at least 30 more cars and raise major safety issues due to the inadequate road.
- Concerns regarding MR004 due to septic tanks, access and badger sets.
- Visual destruction of the village to the west by MR034, 035 & 036.
- Little has changed since the last LDP except economic decline.
- Planners should be involved in the Torphins Paths Group projects which will benefit the health of the community.
- MR004, MR060 and MR069 should have path access to other parts of the village, including the old railway line paths.

Consideration should also be given to the notes and projections of recognised bodies such as OPITO (as mentioned above), which state that in excess of 70,000 jobs have been lost in the industry over the period 2014 to 2017, with a likely continued decline from 2017 forward. Should this indeed prove to be the case, a large scale expansion of homes in NE Scotland would not be required or financially viable..

Additionally, the capacity of the Torphins Health Centre satisfies the needs of the current population it serves. Construction of more homes would place an increased workload on the Health Centre staff - and facilities - resulting in a deterioration in the level of health care services provided. The level to which health care services would be compromised would be a function of the number of additional homes and construction time scales thereof. It is therefore imperative that maintenance of health service provision is factored into any expansion plans and implemented prior to any such expansion proceeding. This would also need to apply to other services such as sewerage treatment capacity, water supply, electricity provision capability, telecommunications expansion availability (including broadband and mobile 'phone), waste and recycling capability, road maintenance capability and policing. The list could go on.

We trust the above and attached will be of assistance in formulation of the 2021 LDP.

Yours faithfully,

John Lucas.
Chairman
Torphins Community Council
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