

## **Chairperson's Report to the Annual General Meeting of Glenfarg Community Council 9<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this, my 6<sup>th</sup> and final, Annual Report as Chairperson of the Community Council.

I think one of the most important things about being involved in any body, particularly a voluntary body and, more especially when you are its Chairperson, is knowing when to get out and not overstay your welcome.

I've been a member of the Community Council since 2007 and its' Chairperson since 2011. I'm not sure I can claim to have been a very good judge of knowing when to get out, but I hope I haven't overstayed my welcome by too long!

I first of all want to extend a thanks to all those who have served on the Community Council during my time of involvement. It's very easy to moan about things happening in the community and to say that the ever-anonymous 'they' need to do something about it. It's another thing to act and get involved in trying to make a difference. If everyone who had a moan about nothing happening or the wrong things happening was willing to get themselves involved in local, community-based democratic processes, then we'd have a very large and, likely, very effective community voice.

As it is, I think this Community Council has always been an effective voice for the community. It has acted sensibly, proportionately and in an informed way to offer reasoned arguments for or against matters and its debates and discussions have always been conducted in an appropriate manner.

There are still many who consider Community Councils to be a bit of an irrelevance in the democratic processes of our country. And indeed they will be unless the local authorities who manage their existence and with whom the Community Councils have the closest relationship, not only say that they welcome, support and respect the role of Community Councils, but demonstrate that through the strength of the consultations held with Community Councils and the extent to which the views of Community Councils and local communities more generally, inform and direct policy and decision-making. It is a regrettable fact that the felt experience of this Community Council and others within the Perth & Kinross local authority area, is that our local authority sees us as little more than an irritable sore on its skin.

The manifesto of our newly elected government in Holyrood is replete with the word 'community'. If our local authority, which is controlled by the same party as is in national government, albeit as a minority administration, is serious about implementing the government's wishes for community engagement, then it needs to give very careful thought as to how it presents itself to the Community Councils in its area and how it changes to show that the views of those Community Councils matter.

That being said, we have been fortunate in recent years by the commitment shown to the Community Council by our locally elected members. Their attendance at our meetings has, I think, been very high and each of them has always been very willing to take on appropriate issues and seek to find desired solutions. I am grateful for their involvement.

The fact that the Electoral Commission then involved itself and started playing about with local boundaries in a way that would put us into a totally artificial and inappropriate grouping, despite our well-argued protestation to the contrary, was yet further evidence of the drive to push responsibility and decision-making down to communities, being nothing more than empty rhetoric.

But despite all of this, I remain strongly of the view that this Community Council has been a worthwhile and valuable contributor to the well-being and development of our community. Seeking the views of all members of the community is a challenge, but one we have endeavoured to meet. Meeting all the aspirations of the community, pursuing goals that meet everyone's wishes is never going to happen. All we can strive for is that Community Council seeks the views of the community and acts in a way that serves the best interest of that community. Some people will be left angry or frustrated. But to borrow the words of another, "You can't please all of the people all of the time."

Whilst the Community Council can and should be a strong voice for its community, it is also a sign of community strength that others are ready, willing and able to organise when our community is under threat. A past example of that was when our village shop was under threat of closure. But for the still unexplained and mysterious decision of the Big Lottery to refuse what was hailed as one of the strongest applications made to it in Scotland, it would now be a community-owned shop. We must be forever grateful that the guys who do now own the shop did come in and take it over. Otherwise we would have no shop.

It is not the job of the Community Council to be an advertising agency for any commercial enterprise, but what it can do is promote the businesses that operate within and out of the community. Our local shop is a core part of our community. We can't ask people to operate it if they can't make a living from it. To do that, we have to use it. It's very simple. And that's what people in this community need to do. Use our shop, or it may well be under threat again in the future.

Personally, it is a huge pity to me that my tenure as Chairperson of the Community Council comes at another low point with our community again under threat. This time from the closure of our remaining hotel.

To know that people who have no care for or commitment to, the community can come in and, at a whim, destroy over 100 years of local history and rip out the heart of a thriving, vibrant community, is nothing short of disgraceful. But when you have people who have no understanding or sympathy for the concept of 'community', then striking such a blow to that community means nothing to them.

That is bad enough. But when your local authority, which you think has the promotion of its local communities as one of its key reasons for existence, ignores the decision of its officers and joins the unprincipled speculators in seeking to destroy the community, then that really sticks in the craw.

And in stepping down from this role I have a bit of advice for Perth & Kinross Council. In seeking to save money as part of the destructive cuts imposed by the Westminster government, I suggest you get rid of those pretty-well-paid staff who you employ to draft policies and those whom you employ to implement them. Because if you're going to ignore the policies anyway, you might as well not have them.

I regret that my time as Chairperson of this Community Council ends on such a bitter note. But some of us love this community and we care about it. Not just here and now, but into the future. We want to see it healthy and vibrant. We want to see it as a place where people want to live and want to come to live. We want resources and facilities whereby we can meet together to socialise. We want somewhere where we can entertain family and friends. We want somewhere that will work hard to attract visitors to our community.

What we don't want or need are inept hoteliers destroying our community without any compunction and a Local Authority that seems happy to stand up and support them in doing that.

But despite that, I will remain positive about this community. It is a great place to be. I am grateful to the community for having given me the chance to serve it for the last 9 years through the Community Council. It is a wonderful place made up of wonderful people. And I look forward to being part of it for many years to come.

Thank you.

Donald J MacKenzie