

Plockton – The Road Ahead

A Community Consultation

Plockton & District Community Council

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www.plockton.org

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Consultation Event

This Plockton Community Consultation exercise was carried out by the Plockton & District Community Council. There were a variety of factors that motivated the decision to undertake this community consultation. These included:

- A request to the Plockton & District Community Council from the National Trust Balmacara Estate for input into their Strategic plan for the estate.
- A suggestion from the Plockton Crofting Grazing Committee for community consultation.
- Discussions between the Community Council and the Kyle & Lochalsh Development Trust over project priorities in the area.
- An awareness of community-led projects taking place in other Highland Villages and wondering what appetite there is locally to explore wider community initiatives.

Above all, the event was designed as an opportunity for the Community Council to learn about the concerns and interests of the community.

1.2 Consultation Methodology

The consultation methodology was based on an informal questionnaire with relatively open questions. This was deliberate as the priority was to obtain a general understanding of views of the community about the community, rather than to answer any specific questions. The questionnaire was handed out at the community consultation event, held by the Plockton & District Community Council, in the Plockton village hall on Monday 12th July 2107. Survey responses were collected at the same event and subsequently collated and summarised in this report.

1.3 Participation

To encourage participation in the Community Consultation event, the Community Council did a door to door leaflet notification of the event and placed notices up on community noticeboards. The consultation event ran from 4pm – 7 pm to enable those with work commitments to also be able to attend.

In total, 56 people attended the community consultation event and 36 questionnaires were completed and handed in.

1.4 Interpretation of Results

As this was not designed as a quantitative survey exercise, results have not been interpreted quantitatively. Additionally, the relatively open nature of the questions elicited a wide range of responses: some long, some succinct; some specific, some more general. As no specific questions were asked, the survey cannot be analysed to determine specific answers. The summary of responses is therefore in no way scientific but has been done in such a way as to produce an unbiased flavour of the responses, highlighting key themes.

2 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

In the following section the responses to the consultation questionnaire questions are presented.

2.1 Question 1 – What Makes Plockton a Great Place to Live?

This was a deliberately leading question, intended to identify the positives of living in the Plockton & District CC area, before going on to address potential for improvement.

A wide range of positive reasons for living in the Plockton & District CC area were identified. The most often-repeated answer related to the community and community spirit. Others referred to cultural elements, such as the important crofting culture, the highland culture, the hospitality – including local Inns and Hotels. Many referred to the setting of the village, the scenery and the surrounding environment. Some also highlighted some of the facilities that the community benefits from – in particular the schools and access to the trains. Finally, it was also noted that the lack of vandalism helps make Plockton a great place to live.

2.2 Question 2 – Is the village well managed?

This question produced a mixed response. Some even questioned whether it is managed, or if it needs to be managed? A large number of respondents felt the village was well-managed but a significant number also felt that it either was not well-managed, or that there was potential for improvement.

Respondents who stated that the village was not well managed indicated that the Highland Council could do more and in particular could improve upon following-up on actions raised by the Community Council. Some also pointed to insufficient or unsatisfactory grass cutting or untidiness as evidence of poor management. It was also noted that communication between the various groups within the village could be improved.

2.3. Question 3 – What are the top 3 things that Plockton needs to be better?

This question produced a wide and varied range of responses. Some suggestions were notably repeated by many respondents but many others were only mentioned by a single respondent. Responses have been collated under general themes. For example, where one respondent has mentioned road congestion and another has mentioned the need for parking, these have been grouped together. These are presented in approximate numerical order with the suggestions most often appearing in the questionnaire, being presented first.

Traffic & parking

The dominant theme across the majority of responses received related to traffic management and parking. This encompasses a range of concerns and potential solutions. Many made reference to the considerable apparent increase in traffic in recent years. This has resulted in a shortage of parking spaces and congestion causing delay and frustration in some parts of the village. Others highlighted the need for improved traffic calming measures in Duirinish village and in front of Plockton Primary School.

Many respondents highlighted the urgent need for more parking spaces. Other possible solutions put forward included some form of residents parking system, a ‘park and ride’ scheme, improved signage for campervans, an increased number of ‘Keep Clear’ spaces in the village (inc. Innes St & Cooper St) - some suggested that these could even be double yellow lined and enforced. An idea of extending the road through the village to create a loop, enabling cars to exit the village via Frithard Road was also proposed by more than 1 respondent.

The poor state of the road surface throughout much of the Plockton & District CC area was also highlighted by a number of respondents.

Housing & Community Composition

Following on from traffic management, roads and parking, the next prominent theme of the consultation responses related to the need for affordable and rented housing and opportunities for young people and even the need for sheltered housing or an old folks home. Connected to this is the need for work opportunities for young people. Several respondents referred to the challenges posed to the community by an ever growing number of holiday homes and the impact that this has on both the community and the affordability of housing.

Playground & recreational area

A number of respondents highlighted the need for a children’s playground and improved recreational spaces for children. A project is already actively underway to create a children’s playground in the village. Some respondents may have been referring to this project, but others indicated additional needs in this area – for example green space for general recreation and primary school sports or an additional playground at Burnside.

Broadband / mobile phone coverage

Another theme mentioned by several respondents was the need for improved broadband access and mobile phone coverage in many parts of the Plockton & District Community Council area.

Village Management

The need for improved tidiness was mentioned by a number of respondents. Connected to this was the need for more litter bins (including between the village and High School). Some also mentioned that improved tidiness of the beach and harbour area was needed (including fishermen’s gear – where dedicated storage is required). Some mentioned the need for improved grass cutting to keep the village tidy, including the need to cut gorse on the island.

In relation to village management some mentioned that the Community Council should have a stronger voice on planning matters. And even that the community should “stand up for itself better”. Others also stated that something should be done to ensure that building developments are completed in a timely manner – particular mention was made to Sgeir Bhuidhe.

Finally, some respondents also highlighted the need for the community council website to be more prominent.

Facilities

No single facility was identified by large numbers of questionnaire respondents, but there were many suggestions from a small number of respondents (i.e. 1 or 2). Aside from those mentioned above under other themes, these included the need for shower facilities, facilities for visiting boats improved boat storage and launching facilities, somewhere for storage of fishing gear, a cash machine and a sign for the library.

Aird a Mhorair

The green space at the end of Cooper St was highlighted by a number of respondents as being particularly unsightly. Suggestions as to what to do included seeking to remove the fence and cut the grass, or to seek to do a community buy-out to create a public recreational space.

Other suggestions

In no particular order, mention was also made of the need for noise dampening of the Burnside Cattle grid, the need for a Wildlife & species survey, improvements to the village hall (i.e. toilets),

improved morning train access, more local produce for sale, more eating places and the return of cows to the village (see question 5).

2.4 Question 4 – Does Plockton need a Community Development Group to take forward new projects and improvements for the village?

The large majority of respondents thought this was a good idea. Some of these were unequivocally positive (“when you look at what other groups in surrounding areas are achieving, we’re getting left behind”), whilst others were more cautious in their support for the idea, with a number of caveats. One good example of this stated “yes, if there is full resident agreement, consultation and consensus on development and improvement plans”. Another pointed out that this needs to include outlying villages and that it should include representation from young and old and from across the various groups and associations already playing key roles.

That said, there was not universal agreement on the need for a development group. Some stated that the Community Council should manage “this” in conjunction with the Harbour Association, or that the Community Council is already doing some of this or that there are “too many groups and not enough communication”.

2.5 Question 5 – Other thoughts? Vision for the next 20 years.

The final question in the questionnaire produced responses that had a lot of cross-over with comments reported above for the earlier questions. In particular issues about parking, traffic management, tidiness and affordable housing were again highlighted here. Rather than repeat these here, the following summary of responses instead focuses on the ‘vision’ aspect of the question.

Some expressed a fear that the village will be increasingly dominated by holiday homes and seasonal tourists. Some respondents set out their vision:

“A vibrant community with a balanced age demographic and opportunities for young people”.

“A full primary school! More affordable housing for young people and families”

“Reducing the frantic nature of tourism in Plockton with more sympathy to those living and working in and around the village”

“A village that supports young people to be able to continue to afford to live in the village through housing opportunities and jobs.

Connected to this, a number of respondents pointed to the need for a sustainable tourism strategy and a strategic plan for the village which addresses issues such as affordable housing, traffic and parking and local enterprise and looks at potential for other facilities – ranging from sports facilities, to charging stations for electric cars and community renewables. Several respondents also highlighted the potential for community owned assets – noting a number of recent examples of land or property that has been on the market, which could have made a valuable community asset, if the community had been in a position to buy assets.

Simpler suggestions for activities for the future include the establishment of a cinema club and a village or music festival “Plock-Fest”.

Finally a number of respondents raised the issue of cows returning to the village. Some of these were positive, pointing out that this would help to keep the grass down, whilst others were negative pointing out issues in relation to higher numbers of tourists and traffic and health concerns.

3 DISCUSSION

3.1 Notes on methodology and approach

Although participation at the event was reasonable, it is likely that with more notification or publicity the event may have had better attendance. Similarly, it may have been preferable to also offer the possibility of taking the questionnaire away and handing it in later. This may have resulted in more responses. Finally, although the questionnaires were anonymous, the process of collection of questionnaires at the event perhaps led some to feel that their responses would not be treated anonymously, therefore this may have contributed to fewer responses.

Any future consultation events should seek to improve on the methodology – particularly if a quantitative consultation is required. These limitations have not undermined this consultation exercise, as the interpretation has not been done quantitatively.

3.2 Next steps

There are several possible next steps ranging from maintaining the status quo to minor improvements or bigger projects. In some cases responsibility for addressing some of the issues raised in the consultation are likely to lie with the Highland Council, others may lie with the community council or even clubs, associations and societies in the village. But there may be other actions or projects which cannot easily be addressed by any of these bodies.

The next step is likely to be to identify an action plan, setting out priorities for actions, identifying where responsibility for any action lies.