

Newsletters

THE VOICE OF LOCAL PEOPLE

On occasion HALL has used Newsletters to inform local people of what is taking place and to assist them in making their views known. In response to these newsletters over 350 local people confirmed to the Council that they wanted Manse Field to remain as Open Space. Over 140 have objected to the application that was submitted at the end of October. HALL intends to issue at least one further Newsletter when it is known what the Council and the applicant has agreed is the final application. It may be necessary for objectors to make their voice known at that time.

HALL's previous Newsletters contained:

NOVEMBER ISSUE

HALL HAS OBJECTED Council bosses couldn't explain to the Chairman of the Community Council when he asked them why a company called Mactaggart & Mickel Ltd. applied for planning consent on 29 October 2007 and named themselves as Owners of the site. Council bosses tell HALL that they want more time to consider 'this complex application'. They don't need more time - they should do their job properly and reject it immediately, and save us all more anxiety. The Application is completely against the Local Plan adopted by the Council. HALL has objected on the following grounds:

- Not identified as a Housing Opportunity Site in the Local Plan.
- No requirement for private housing in Houston in the Local Plan.
- The Applicant is proposing family houses not for elderly or special needs as was previously claimed by the Council.
- The Applicant makes no reference to the provision of affordable homes.
- The Application ignores the Council's Local Plan Transportation Policies.
- The Application is for an excessive density compared adjoining developments.
- The Application is for two, three and four storey units, whereas the adjoining developments are single and two storey units.
- The Application includes flats and terraced houses, whereas the adjoining developments are detached or semi-detached houses.
- The proposal does not meet the Council's open space and children's play area standards.
- The Applicant has made no provision to retain and protect important landscape and ecological features.
- The Applicant ignores the Council's policies for Flooding and Sustainable Drainage.
- The proposal fails to make adequate and safe provision for pedestrian access.

The proposal will be visually intrusive and overlook other properties causing a loss of privacy and amenity.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL COUNCILLORS

David Clews – Conservative. Audrey Doig and Allan Noon – SNP. Anne Hall – Labour.

The Paisley Daily Express on 22 November 2007 reported that the new Scottish Government has recently endorsed a requirement for Renfrewshire Council to draw up an action plan to protect and improve open spaces.

What are your councillors doing about protecting and improving Houston's open space?

CALL FOR A PUBLIC MEETING

Council bosses are keen to tell us that the deal between them and Darwen Development (Scotland) Limited is so highly confidential that your local councillors can't tell you all of what's going on. We understand that the Leader of the Council has told the Chairman of the Community Council that 'a Hearing could be held at the discretion of the Convenor of the Planning Committee to receive submissions relevant to the application. The hearing is not open to the public and those attending would be by invitation only.' The planning system is supposed to be open to public scrutiny. Why should this application be dealt with behind closed doors and kept secret? We think that there should be a public meeting where the Council and the Applicant can explain themselves. All local people should be allowed to have their opinions heard. Add your voice by completing the box and sending it to the Head of Planning.

WILL THE OWNERS OBJECT?

Renfrewshire Council own the land. They weren't formally notified of the application. Council bosses say that they don't know why. Renfrewshire Council should object to this application which meets none of their requirements for homes for the elderly or socially disadvantaged.

TOXIC FLOODING DANGER?

There are geysers of sewage regularly seen erupting through the above ground manhole covers along the banks of the River Gryffe which are adequate proof that the sewage system is already well overloaded. Any new development of this size could cause more frequent and more extreme sewer flooding. Our sewer system is old and significant amounts of

trade effluent are thought to discharge into the system which can back up into the underfloor drainage of low lying properties. Local people say that fish are said to be killed from spills into Locher Water. If the Council aren't bothered local people and all councillors in the Gryffe Valley should be. The impact of any new development should be thoroughly and openly investigated.

PACKED IN LIKE SARDINES

Mactaggart & Mickel are proposing a development which will have twice as many houses as any comparable development in Houston.

GO OUT AND PLAY IN THE ROAD

The only play area proposed for 41 family homes is an area no bigger than a good sized family garden, surrounded by roads and with a steep cross fall.

ACCIDENT RISKS AT ROUNDABOUT

The Police reported to the Community Council that the roundabout is the scene of serious accidents. The Council want to redesign the roundabout to improve public safety. But they are now delaying it to wait the outcome of this ill conceived planning application.

Who will accept responsibility if there are more accidents whilst we wait for the Council?

DO YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU READ IN THE PRESS?

THE HERALD – 15 August 2007. The Herald reported on Mactaggart & Mickel's purchase of four parcels of land including the Manse Crescent site where it was said they intended to build 35 semi-detached and detached houses. It also reported that Mactaggart & Mickel like “to work in tandem with the local community and consult with them …to provide the level of housing necessary to compliment and enhance the area.”

THE EXTRA 16 August 2007 The Extra reported that Mactaggart & Mickel intended to offer first time buyers an opportunity to get on to the property ladder.

THE ACTUAL APPLICATION

Despite the Council only wanting maximum 30 homes for the elderly and socially disadvantaged for the southern part of the site - 41 family homes of 2, 3 and 4 storey up to 5 bed houses and flats are proposed. Compared to the proposals envisaged by the Council - The number of bedrooms has increased from an estimated 37 to 109. We estimate the number of occupants has increased from 50 to 150. We estimate the number of cars has increased from 25 to 80. The development density has increased by 37%. And this doesn't include the four luxury homes proposed on open space at Manse Crescent itself. The Chairman of HALL wrote to the Chairman of Mactaggart & Mickel and the only response he got was a telephone message to say that the Chairman had been on holiday. The

Can the Chairman of Mactaggart & Mickel find the time to work in tandem and consult with the people of Houston?

SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Two campaigners, 50 years apart, same fight, same message

“This land is recognised as valuable, informal open space to the people of Houston and should be protected as such” (SNP Councillor Ian Nicolson May 2005) “There’ll always be a Houston” (The Very Reverend Andrew Herron – Late Moderator of The Church of Scotland” 1955).

What the Experts Say

HALL asked expert Ecologist Nikki Drayton to look at the site. She says: “The site is important for its position as a green corridor between the old and new parts of Houston. This field provides a corridor between the mature woodlands around Houston House and the woodland around the cemetery and connects to the Gryffe Valley along the old road. This is used by a number of protected species including bats and birds to access feeding grounds and for dispersal. Any proposal for this site should recognise and retain this link, preferably enhancing it with new planting of indigenous trees and herbs and providing nest boxes for bats and birds. This site is also an important recreation area for local residents”.

Manse Field is part of our history

Fifty years ago, the late Moderator of the General Assembly the Church of Scotland, the Reverend Andrew Herron (who lived in Glebe House) formed the Houston Preservation Association to maintain a clear boundary between the historical settlements of Houston and Craighend. The Community Council and HALL are continuing the fight.

Rights of Way are important

The right of way at Quarry Brae has been in existence for some 500 years. Local people have used it daily to go about their business – it shouldn’t be destroyed now.

This is public open space, where will the Council strike next?

This land is important open space for the use of people who live in Manse Crescent, Speirs Road, The Neuk and adjacent to Old Bridge of Weir Road. There is no convenient alternative. This is the public’s land it is not “owned” by the Council. The Council’s own policy is to preserve public open space and build on “brownfield” land. Are the Council selling off public open spaces to pay for their mistakes?

Ten reasons why you should support retaining the land as Open Space

1. The Council asserts that the land is designated as “Lesser Open Space”. As such any application should be measured against the value of the land as a local amenity and for recreational purposes
2. The Council’s proposals could destroy important ecological and environmental assets including the magnificent old ash tree
3. There is evidence that roosting bats and foraging badgers use the land
4. The Council’s proposal could destroy an historical right of way
5. The land forms a distinct boundary between the ancient separate settlements of Houston and Craighends. It is also a green corridor with a wide and informative bio-diversity
6. The Local Plan does not identify a need for any residential development in Houston. If there is a need for affordable homes or homes for the elderly then there are alternative sites which should also be considered
7. The developer has no obligation to adopt the Council’s proposals
8. Development will adversely impact on house prices in the area
9. The local infrastructure is already at breaking point
10. New development could increase the risk of flooding.

Some other relevant information ·

The Council have prejudiced their ability to decide on any planning application by pre-determining its outcome;·

The Council’s actions are the subject of an investigation by the Ombudsman;·

The Council have not consulted with the Community Council and interested parties.

The Community Council is seeking an urgent meeting with the Council

There is uncertainty on timescales as we move forward, both from a legislative and planning application perspective. The Convenor of the Planning Committee has advised that a review of the Local Plan has started. The Director of Planning seems to be disassociating himself from his Convenor asserting that there will not be a review until it is required by legislation after Autumn 2008. The Community Council get no answer when they ask to be told what the need for Affordable Homes in Houston is. Renfrewshire Council should have a well thought out strategy. We think that Renfrewshire Council have a lot of explaining to do.