

To: NORTH AREA COMMITTEE		Subject: CUMBERNAULD TOWN CENTRE
From: CHIEF EXECUTIVE		
Date: 16 January 2006	Ref: SM/MD/SC	

1. Background

1.1 At the North Area Committee on 10 November 2005 members were advised that a seminar would be organised to update members of Cumbernauld Community Forum and the Association of Cumbernauld Community Councils on the Cumbernauld Town Centre.

2. Seminar/Report

2.1 The seminar which took place on Tuesday 13 December 2005 in Cumbernauld Court was attended by 20 members of the public representing the Cumbernauld Community Forum and the Association of Community Councils.

2.2 The seminar which I chaired had a number of presentations both from the community perspective given by the Chair of Cumbernauld community forum and the current situation from the Planning perspective given by the Head of Planning & Development. In terms of plans and visions for the Town Centre itself this was outlined in detail by the Head of Property Services.

2.3 The discussions at the seminar were facilitated by independent consultants and the seminar report is attached as Appendix 1 for information.

3. The Next Steps

3.1 It is proposed to take forward further discussions with the Cumbernauld forum and this will be undertaken by a sub-group drawn up from current membership of the forum. The sub-group will be formed at the Cumbernauld forum meeting to be held on 17 January.

4. Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the attached seminar report.

S. Whitefield

Chief Executive *S. Whitefield*
12 January 2006

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CUMBERNAULD TOWN CENTRE SEMINAR

TUESDAY 13TH DECEMBER 2005

Report by Smart Consultancy

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The workshop was convened to start a process of closer dialogue between the Council and local community, via the Cumbernauld Community Forum and Association of Community Councils. Its primary objectives were to:

- Enable participants to be updated on progress, and discuss key developments and plans effecting the town
- Establish the future vision for the town, and the key regeneration priorities for taking this forward
- Provide the initial agenda for the new joint working group involving Council officers and community representatives which will provide an ongoing forum to consider and inform new developments

Whilst it was recognised that much of the publicity leading to the seminar had been on the town centre developments, it was stressed that a range of issues impacting on the future of Cumbernauld were relevant to the evening's discussions.

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The workshop was opened by Gavin Whitefield, Chief Executive of North Lanarkshire Council, who welcomed participants to what he hoped would be constructive and open discussion on the challenges facing Cumbernauld, and the starting point for ongoing work between the Council and community groups in the town.

Gavin then introduced 3 keynote speakers who provided the backdrop and challenge for the town over the coming years. A brief summary of their presentations is provided below.

The community perspective: Tom Reilly – Chair, Cumbernauld Community Forum

Tom provided an overview of the issues and problems with the town centre, pictorially highlighting aspects of developments that had clearly benefited from investment, alongside other areas – inside and surrounding the centre – of significant neglect.

Tom then listed a series of “town centre problems”, including:

- The absence of an overall plan
- The lack of clarity on how the various phases of development will be linked
- The lack of civic public spaces, and a subsequent “sense of place”
- The need to recognise that life must go on during new construction work, and to remember existing businesses in this process
- The need for disabled access
- Clarity on the role of the Campsie Centre (Cumbernauld) Ltd

- The need to emphasise that Cumbernauld town centre is a priority for NLC, and to clarify what investment is available
- Unresolved issues regarding roads in the town
- The challenge of new competition in Glasgow and redevelopment at the former Ravenscraig site in Motherwell

Tom concluded by posing two key questions on the future developmental process: Who is responsible for town centre development? What is the future role of the Community Forum?

The planning perspective: Pat Kelly – Head of Planning and Development (North Lanarkshire Council)

Pat structured his contribution around responding and challenging a number of recent statements about his home town of Cumbernauld. In short that it was “dismal” and enjoyed no investment.

He started by reminding participants about the history and initial vision for the new town designated in 1955 – mixed housing provision, an accessible and multi functional town centre, and an ideal location for economic growth and prosperity in central Scotland. The town had grown significantly since then, and with a population of 50,000 was the largest settlement in North Lanarkshire.

There were many positives: it remained a relative safe environment; economic activity rates were high; and, unusually for North Lanarkshire towns, the population continued to grow. It was renowned worldwide for features of its architecture and landscape, recognised by a series of awards. North Lanarkshire Council’s residents survey confirmed many of these positives - with growing levels of satisfaction registered by local people.

Pat then challenged the issue of no investment in the town, and cited a range of recent significant investments in a wide range of educational, environmental, and recreational initiatives that totalled over £110 million. He then went on to detail a range of future planned commitments.

Of course challenges remained, in particular in estate regeneration and in the town centre. The Council was using its influence and working with others to address these and other issues.

In the centre, much had now been achieved – the Tesco development; town centre refurbishment; road and lighting improvements; environmental works; and the refurbishment of the Tryst Sports Centre. And an exciting new phase of development was now planned, centred on the anticipated Antonine Mall centre.

Pat concluded by suggesting that whilst there were legitimate frustrations and causes for concern, there was equally much to celebrate about Cumbernauld. There were good reasons for us all to anticipate a “bright outlook” for a thriving town.

The plans and vision: Ian Nisbet – Head of Property Services (North Lanarkshire Council)

Ian reviewed the history of developments in Cumbernauld town centre, and the complexities and extended timescales involved in the process. He shared the frustrations of the local community on the apparent lack of progress, but outlined the key barriers to more rapid development: the limited influence of the Council given significant private sector ownership; the inheritance of the Council from the former Development Corporation; and the need to respect the planning process.

Within this it was important to appreciate that an apparent lack of physical development did not equate to an overall lack of progress or effort– construction comes at the end of the process, not the beginning.

On phase 5b – the development of the Antonine Mall – there were now considerable grounds for optimism. Due to the efforts of the developer, 3 key “anchor” tenants had now legally committed to the **development**. A site start of early 2006 was now a possibility, which would lead to the new facility opening in the spring of 2007.

The gains from this for Cumbernauld were significant:

- £50 million of investment
- 600 jobs
- a revitalised town centre

Ian concluded by noting that understandable community scepticism on the new developments going forward should not detract from what had been real progress in recent weeks. There are many reasons to be optimistic.

Plenary discussion

Following the presentations there was a short period for questions and comments. Key points raised were:

- positive news on the phase 5b development was welcomed – but it had been a long time coming. Local groups felt they had been given a range of potential start dates in the past that had come and gone without action. It was essential this time that action now followed quickly
- there was a concern, linked to the above, of a lack of conviction in the presentations about the future of the town centre. This did not build confidence within the community
- there were doubts about whether Cumbernauld could fairly be labelled a thriving “town” at present. This required a wider range of services and facilities – at present it was more a large collection of houses
- concern was expressed that Tesco and ASDA may have some influence over the new developments, and could block some new shops coming in
- wider issues with new road developments connected to the town needed to be factored into the future plans
- the new town centre developments must ensure a link between the different phases – people would not walk through malls of empty shop units
- the impact of new developmental work on existing businesses needed to be fully considered and minimised
- concerns were raised that new sports facilities developed by the Council were not priced out-with the reach of many potential users
- disabled access needed to be factored in to all future developments

WORKSHOP SUMMARIES

Participants split into 3 smaller discussion groups following the opening session. These considered 2 questions:

- (a) What is your vision for the future of Cumbernauld?
- (b) What are the key issues in the regeneration of Cumbernauld?

Responses to these questions inevitably varied across the groups in terms of emphasis, but on the key points there was a significant level of agreement. These are summarised below:

What is your vision for the future of Cumbernauld?

Common features of the vision were:

- a strategy driving developments in the town - informing short and longer term developments. This should restore civic pride, “put Cumbernauld on the map”, and aim for it to look and feel like the biggest town in North Lanarkshire
- access to a range of services which allow people to “live here in full”, and become a place people from elsewhere wanted to visit
- a revitalised and integrated town centre – involving more than just shops, and including civic public spaces, restaurants, and other recreational and social facilities
- well maintained facilities and public areas
- a safe and friendly community
- improvements in all aspects of life in the town – GPs, dental services, leisure and recreational facilities, and local shops
- a variety of mixed housing provision
- a sense of enthusiasm and commitment to Cumbernauld from the Council and other key agencies
- the local community engaged and informed, working together with the Council and others in a spirit of co-operation and trust

What are the key issues in the regeneration of Cumbernauld?

10 key priority action areas were identified:

1. Development of a strategic and long term plan for all aspects of life in the town – anticipating rather than responding to problems after they have arisen
2. A clear statement of commitment from the Council to develop Cumbernauld and make it feel a full part of North Lanarkshire
3. A positive marketing strategy, alongside real action, focusing on the positives and the future, not the past

4. The establishment of mechanisms to inform and involve the local community in ongoing developments
5. More equity in the Council receipts generated in Cumbernauld being spent on future improvements for the town
6. Visible action on the town centre now – progress on phase 5 b; clear linkages to earlier developments; and improvements in the external fabric of buildings
7. Upgrade hard and soft landscaping in the town, linked to an audit of the safety implications of these developments
8. Reconsider the option of closing central way, and fully identify and assess all the likely implications
9. Improve general facilities in the town – especially for young people – and ensure these remain accessible and affordable
10. Review and improve the connections between bus and rail services

CLOSING DISCUSSION

The seminar concluded with a short feedback on the small groups sessions, followed by further discussion on the points raised.

Finally, Gavin Whitefield provided some responses from the Council's perspective on a number of the key points raised during the evening:

- The issue of the maintenance of public places had already been identified by the Council and action would be taken to address this
- Cumbernauld's aspiration to be "the best" echoed the Council's commitment to achieve this status for the whole of the local authority area
- Immediate action on the town centre was essential – the Council was, and would continue, to use all of its influence to make this happen
- The desire for ongoing involvement of the community sat well with NLC's commitment to meaningful community involvement across all issues and areas. Tonight was a good start to a new phase in these relationships – but it was only a start, we all had to build from here
- More positive promotion of the town was essential – some recent criticism masked other very positive developments. Looking to the future, there was much to be optimistic about
- Receipts from sales accounted for under a fifth of the Council's capital budget – these were pulled centrally and had to support a huge range of demands from schools, roads etc. Pat Kelly's presentation had highlighted that a significant share of capital spending had, and will continue, to be spent in Cumbernauld.

Gavin concluded by thanking everyone attending for a constructive and honest discussion, and looked forward to the Council continuing to work with local groups in the potentially exciting times ahead.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

A constant theme of the seminar from community representatives was the danger that this was “all talk”. Action was long overdue. It was agreed this note of the workshop was quickly produced and circulated, and then led to and informed the initial meeting of the new Council/Community Forum sub group.

scs ltd

16th December 2005