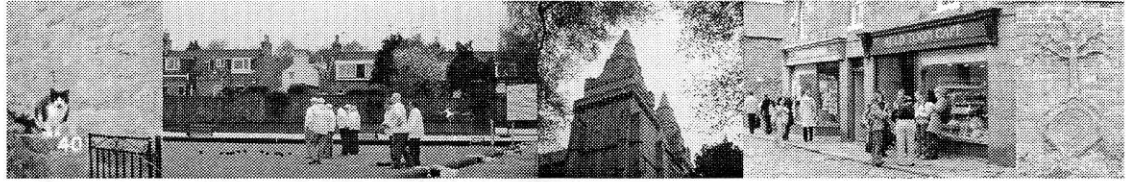


The Auld Toon News

The Old Aberdeen Community Council's newsletter is published in May/June and September/October
www.oldaberdeen.org.uk



Council's Threat to Relocate St. Peter's

With the publication of the report "Review of Culture and Learning Provision in the St Machar ASG Area in the spring, St Peter's Primary School learned it was being marked for possible relocation. The move to one of the other primary schools in the area was going to entail either the whole school or simply the Catholic pupils. Parents and staff were totally opposed to any move that would divide the school or undermine its identity and ethos, and the School mounted a swift and vigorous defence.

page 3

Sunnybank residents vent traffic frustration

At a packed meeting in Sunnybank School on Friday 15 April, around 100 Sunnybank residents finally had the opportunity to vent their frustration at the traffic measures currently in place – or not – in their neighbourhood. There was unanimous agreement that some solution had to be found for the congestion, bordering at times on chaos, at the Bedford Road, Powis Terrace, Elmbank Terrace junction. And this was without the third Don crossing.

page 3

Do We Want to Repeat the Design Mistakes of the 60s?

[xL/NL] On 16th Feb 2005 the University presented an outline of the proposed development to be situated at the former Dunbar Halls site. The public meeting was arranged for University of Aberdeen, the developers (UNITE), and their architects Acanthus, represented by Douglas Forrest and Gregor Small. This was the earliest opportunity for such a presentation as design was still at an early stage and not sufficiently complete for a planning application to be lodged.

Following a brief introduction from Angus Donaldson representing the University, Douglas Forrest gave a Power Point presentation of the proposed development. It was made clear that design was at an early stage and consequently much of the detail was not yet available. The proposed use of the site is student accommodation intended to house 460 students. This is to be achieved by the construction of three buildings, the largest one extending to 4 storeys. The scheme would also involve the creation of a new 'street' joining The Chanonry and Don Street. It was stated that this would be restricted to pedestrians and emergency vehicles normally, but access for cars would be allowed at the start and end of terms to assist students moving in and out of halls. On-site parking would be available for 50 vehicles. Mention was also made of obligations on the architects to consider archaeological matters and mature trees.

"I don't want another street"
A Resident

A question and answer session followed the main presentation to allow residents an opportunity to

"We intend to develop the area sensitively"
The Architect

have outstanding queries answered and air their views. Answers were initially using the Dunbar Halls Planning Brief passed in March 2003 as a reference point, but several residents were not aware of this document or its standing.

continued on page 2

Got a story?

Contact **The Auld Toon News** editorial by email on editor@oldaberdeen.org.uk or submit your story online at our website www.oldaberdeen.org.uk (you need to be a registered user of the website).

No Internet? Send your story to

The Auld Toon News

6 St Machar Place,
 Old Aberdeen AB24 3SF

The Old Aberdeen Community Council reserves the right to edit copy.



Who cares ...

"Dunbar Halls sits in a back land area at the very northern tip of Old Aberdeen immediately adjacent to Seaton Park." This is the opening sentence of the Planning Brief for Dunbar Halls submitted two years ago by the University of Aberdeen in partnership with Aberdeen City Council. Should we therefore be surprised at what has followed?

We've devoted quite a large section in this newsletter to the public meeting with the architects in February on the draft proposals for the development of the site. With the lack of any consultation with local residents or with St Machar's Cathedral on the planning brief, this was to be an important meeting for the University and the architects. You can judge to what extent any notice has been taken of what you, the residents, said as the planning application has now been submitted and the plans can be viewed on the 8th floor of St Nicholas House.

It is not that the residents oppose student accommodation per se: there has, after all, been a hall of residence there since the 1960s. But the current plans abuse that goodwill. The 300 students of the old hall have become 466 in the current plan and these increased numbers have meant building upwards to three and four storeys, to a height totally out of keeping with the surrounding low-level residential development, and they have involved creating a thoroughfare for emergency, waste disposal and parental traffic that has no precedent and with slight changes could be avoided.

The University's planning frame for this site seems, from the beginning, to have been based on the number of students it would accommodate, the bottom-line for getting developers on board. It is at best a lacklustre development that, with its flattened overhangs, simply looks like an updated, bigger version of the accommodation block that was.

"Despite the prestigious location, the site is generally well hidden behind the houses on Don Street and the substantial boundary walls of The Chanonry." Is it really being hoped by planners and developers that no-one will notice, no-one will care?

Representations have to reach the Planning Department by June 30th.

Cont.: Design Mistakes

A brief overview of what a planning brief is and how it fits in the planning process was presented by Neil Lightowler. It was also stated that so far OACC had failed to identify a single resident who had knowledge of the planning brief before it had been passed.

"There was no consultation at the time the design brief was being drawn up."

A Community Councillor

The main issues raised at the meeting were building height, building size, design style, number of students to be accommodated and their impact on local residences, the creation of a new street, parking and traffic, effect on the setting of

"Far too many students and far too high a building with far too few parking spaces."

A Resident

listed and historic buildings in the area, security, trees, disruption during construction and benefit to residents.

In response to questions on the size and height of buildings it was stated that these were within the parameters of the planning brief, as was the creation of a new 'street'. However, residents were clearly still concerned, in particular with regard to building height which it was suggested is excessive for the area, and that the "campus is becoming the community". Douglas Forrest suggested that while detail of design style was not yet available considerable effort would be made to create a street effect better in keeping with the area than the monolith of the former Dunbar Halls. Perspective drawings would be useful to get further understand the impact on the surrounding area, and the architect confirmed that this would be the case further into the design process, and agreed to return to further discuss with the community and the Community Council.

"There are good University policies that dictate that accommodation is not the core business of Aberdeen University."

A University Representative

With regard to security, there was considerable concern from some residents that there were existing problems with other student residences in the area in that there was only day cover. In the event of problems this was insufficient and

"I wouldn't mind 460 students, that's just more opportunities to meet people, although it is a bit of a trade-off, since you know it is going to be noisy."

A Student

should be reconsidered. It was of particular concern with regard to foreign students, often far from home and particularly vulnerable. It was stated that UNITE took student security very seriously and intended to install a CCTV network around the site, but it was not clear if there would be any wardens or security staff on site.

A representative of UNITE suggested that for the development to go ahead the number of students accommodated would need to be around the stated 460, though residents seem to regard this as too high a number. It was stated by several residents that with so many students the proposed parking for 50 vehicles would be inadequate. UNITE were unable to guarantee the total number of vehicles would not exceed the parking spaces available, but suggested that parking at their other halls of residences were under utilised. It was suggested that parking permits should be considered to limit or manage the number, and the meeting was reminded that Edinburgh University operates a zero parking policy. One resident pointed out that they had already encountered difficulties with access for emergency vehicles due to street parking on Don Street. It was suggested in response that the location of this site was such that students would either walk or cycle to the university.

"Universities - for competitive reasons - have all kinds of motivations to help the neighbourhoods look as good as the campus itself does."

Olis White on Smart City Radio

UNITE suggested that they would be using very high quality contractors to construct the development and thereby minimise disruption to residents and the effects on local roads due to mud. Unfortunately, they were unable to offer any suggested benefits for residents if this development goes ahead.

A 'straw poll' of the residents present found that none supported the development proposal with the exception of one student community member.

Sunnybank residents vent traffic frustration

[cb] The bollards at the junction of Elmbank Road, Sunnybank Place and Sunnyside Road were considered by most present to be in the wrong position. The prohibition of right turns into Bedford Road from Bedford Place was an issue of particular concern involving long detours for many residents. However, other residents felt that the removal of this traffic calming measure would lead to the return of the “rat racing”, the very issue that it had been designed to stop. Both MSP Lewis Macdonald and MP Frank Doran assured residents that their views would be fed into the current on-going Area Traffic Management Review and undertook to call a further meeting in the summer to give feedback on the process.

Mr Macdonald subsequently wrote to the City Council on 25th April and a full reply has now been received from Mr Ewen Kay, the Principal Engineer. In brief, the letter acknowledges that the Powis Terrace/Bedford Road/Elmbank Terrace junction “is currently working beyond its capacity” and “a box junction will be considered in the Area Traffic Management Review” as so many drivers are failing to adhere to the Keep Clear sign. The measures taken to reduce the rat-running, however, are considered to have been a success. As yet, no date has been fixed for the follow-up meeting.

Reduce Reuse Recycle

[cb] In our first issue of the Auld Toon News we reported on the Reduce Reuse Recycle Scheme which the City Council had just introduced to half of the households in the community. We checked on the progress of the scheme and it appears those households south of St Machar Drive will definitely have their boxes and bags “by the end of the year” and all of us will have our green waste collection “by the end of the year”. Come to think of it, though, we didn’t ask which year ...!

For those of you new to the area, there are currently glass and paper recycling facilities at Crombie and Johnston Halls of Residence as well as the Neighbourhood Recycling point at the back of the Central Refectory.

Aberdeen IT Recycling Centre

[cb] Anyone wondering how to dispose of an old computer, monitor, printer, keyboard, scanner, used ink and laser printer cartridges in an environmentally friendly fashion can contact Mike Mowat at Aberdeen IT Recycling Centre, Unit 4, Riverside Business Units, North Esplanade West. Monitors have recently been classified as ‘special waste’ and so there is a small charge of £5 for these but everything else is free. Second-hand computers start at around £80 and there is a scheme in place to offer redundant computer equipment to Voluntary/Community/School groups. Mike is passionate about recycling anything possible.

Check out the website at www.aberdeen-pc-recycling.co.uk or contact Mike directly on 01224 571 700

Eco church

[cb] St Machar’s Cathedral has just won an eco-congregation award, one of 16 churches in Scotland to have received Eco-Congregation Awards in recognition of the creditable environmental work they have engaged in and their continuing commitment to making creation care an integral part of their church life. (www.ecocongregation.org/scotland)

Eco school

[cb] St Peter’s Primary School is to be congratulated on being selected as a pilot school in Scotland’s Global Footprint Education Project and for all the effort they have put into becoming an EcoSchool. (www.eco-schools.org.uk)

In the course of the year the school has formed an Eco Committee with pupils, staff and parents that meets monthly and has established an Action Plan with a focus on reducing litter, promoting health and well-being, saving energy, recycling paper and composting, conserving water and encouraging car sharing and walking to school. Each class is responsible for a particular area and there’s even a garden gang to look after the “secret garden”. The most striking project to date is the colourful wall mural in the school playground, designed and painted by all the children together with their art teacher.

St Peter’s is now well on its way to winning an Eco School green flag award.



Council’s Threat to Relocate St. Peter’s

Two parents were invited to make the case for keeping the primary school open at the meeting of the Education and Leisure committee on May 17th and at the time of going to press, Option 1B which was to amalgamate Donbank, St Machar and St Peter’s on the Donbank site has been dropped. Option 1a to move St Peter’s to the St Machar site is still extant but the School is now pushing for the necessary improvements on site. There will be a full consultation exercise after the summer

With its faith-based ethos and its strong sense of social, racial and religious inclusion, there is a much-needed place for St Peter’s in the midst of our diverse and international community.

GRAMPIAN POLICE

Non Emergency Number

0845 600-5-700

But it’s still 999 for emergencies

Beware the Summer Burglar!

*Is that the sun shining?
Are the summer holidays finally here?
Is it really time to get away from it all?*

Yes it is! Ensure that if you take a break, whether for a long weekend or a fortnight in the sun, you don’t get home to see it ransacked by a burglar.

