

Old Aberdeen Community Council

Tuesday 17th June 2014 at 7.30 pm

Old Aberdeen Townhouse

Minutes

1. Present: Isobel Aitken (chair), Trevor Stack (secretary), Christine Burgess, Gordon Mutch, Hugh Elder (Police Scotland), George Wood, Dewi Morgan, Jacinta Birchley, Rosemary Baxter, Sheila Sinclair, Clive Kempe, Robert Fletcher-Greenby, Alan Paxton, Gwen Paxton, Claire Roberts, Lorraine Grant, Helen Leith, Emily Beever (AUSA and resident), Marc McCorkell (AUSA and resident), Ally Thain (ACC), Graeme Stuart (ACC)

Apologies: Cllr. James Noble, Shaunagh Kirby

2. Minute of May Meeting and Matters Arising

Minutes: One minor change, then approved and seconded.

Matters arising: To be discussed under main business.

3. Police Update (Hugh Elder)

- Few crimes reported and some progress on previous crimes.
- TS reported police car stopping at red light on College Bounds and then driving through it, before continuing up the High Street to the top. CB says that review of effectiveness of traffic light has been promised.
- CB enquires about the fatality on King Street – police will update at next meeting.

4. HMOs

- DM asks what information Council can provide about HMO policy. Graeme Stuart reports that staff carried out legally-mandated consultation on HMO provision and reported back to Housing & Environment Committee in 2013, and to report again on 26 August to Committee on HMO provision in Old Aberdeen.
- Resident queries whether letter from HMO provider should have same value as letter from Community Council that might represent 13,000 residents, asking how ACC weighs up and respond to opinions. Community Council needs to be able to understand ACC's decision-making process to be able to influence it. RM explains that Community Council did have influence in ensuring that Old Aberdeen was identified as an area needing special attention.
- Emily Beever notes that students and young professionals are part of community and need HMOs, disputing that Community Council can speak for 13,000 people.
- CB notes that ACC report acknowledges that most submissions were from HMO providers but goes on to state without much further evidence that majority of City residents are against HMO over-provision policy (i.e. controls on provision).

- Resident notes that there are signs of neglect in HMOs, for example on Orchard Street where houses are not maintained and gardens not being kept.
- Marc McCorkell restates that students are part of community and do contribute to community. CB observes that increase in HMOs leads to families moving out of the neighbourhood rather than putting down roots.
- Resident argues for mixed neighbourhood that includes students as well as families, but which does not end up with critical mass of HMOs that changes character of neighbourhood.
- Clive Kempe observes that under-provision of University accommodation has over years led to family houses with gardens being turned over to HMOs, and subsequently being neglected, although recognizes that recent expansion of purpose-built accommodation for students.
- Ally Thain clarifies that planning permission is only required in Aberdeen for HMOs with more than 5 occupants, which is only around 10% of all HMOs, thus planning permission is not required for vast majority of HMOs. CB asks how this could be changed, given that some other Scottish councils require planning permission for 3+ occupants -- AT says should approach RM as councillor.
- DM estimates that 40% increase in HMO licenses in last 2 years in Old Aberdeen. Graeme Stuart explains that Council has not yet measured number of HMOs within OACC boundaries over time.
- Graeme Stuart explains that public can make representations to Housing & Environment Committee on 26 August in relation to ACC report, which will be submitted to Committee a week in advance. Recognizes that public are also supposed to make representation in advance, so will look into how can make report (or draft) available in good time to OACC.
- Marc McCorkell asks to work more closely with OACC to hold to account unscrupulous landlords and ensure they are properly regulated. AUSA Student Advice Centre maintains list of unscrupulous landlords and is happy to add landlords to list on recommendation from OACC. Ally Thain explains that there is Repairing Standard code for landlords and tenants have recourse to Private Rental Housing Panel, but he notes very few tenants know about their rights.
- With regard to gardens, Ally Thain notes that ACC has little recourse against landlords who do not keep up their gardens. Explains, moreover, that impossible to inspect c. 19,500 registered landlords in Aberdeen (including to verify how many have more than 2 occupants without HMO license).
- Marc McCorkell asks whether controls on HMO provision in Old Aberdeen might make renting still more lucrative and just encourage more unscrupulous landlords to take advantage of the opportunity, especially given ACC's difficulties in regulating landlords.
- Ally Thain encourages residents to report suspected unlicensed HMOs, i.e. where 3 or more unrelated occupants sharing kitchen and bathroom, by emailing allyt@aberdeencity.gov.uk or calling 01224 522870.
- CB asks whether would be possible to add clause to HMO license making landlords responsible for upkeep of house and garden. Graeme Stuart agrees to enquire about whether this is feasible.

5. Draft Character Appraisal (CB)

- CB reiterates that Character Appraisal needs significant re-editing, and explains that she submitted letter enquiring about state of play. RM reads out statement explaining that the document has been revised in the light of the comments received, but will try to

ensure that OACC gets sight of document prior to it going back to committee in July (even if there will be further opportunities ahead).

6. University's application for licence for operating centre

- DM has verified that community councils cannot make representations on this kind of license, but TS will email Angus Donaldson to ask what is involved.

7. River Don Gateway (GW)

- Resident explained that this is artistic installation designed to draw attention to estuary as beauty spot. Further information will be sought.

8. Seaton Park walkabout (GW)

- DM notes that Seaton Park Friends were invited at only one day's notice to the walkabout of ACC officers and representatives. RM says ACC is interested in having representation from Seaton Park Friends in the future.

9. Old Aberdeen CPZ review (GW)

- GW noted in response to email requesting comments from Kevin Abercrombie that OACC submitted comments 2 years ago, and surprised that has taken so long to produce review.

10. Planning Matters (GW)

- Chaplain's Court: GW to draft a letter registering OACC's displeasure at the use of machine-made brick to face the end of the wall, and asking that it is not considered a precedent for Old Aberdeen.

11. Treasurer's Report (GM)

- Finances are healthy.

12. Reports of Other Meetings

- None attended.

13. Correspondence

- None

14. Date and Venue for August meeting

- Tuesday 17 August at 7.30 in Old Aberdeen Townhouse

15. AOCB