

Royal Burgh of Wigtown & District Community Council

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CONVENOR'S REPORT - AGM 8.6.2015

This has been my third year as Convenor of the Royal Burgh of Wigtown & District Community Council. My time in the chair ends tonight. Another Community Councillor will take over. Community Councils have a long heritage of long-serving members and office bearers; this brings obvious benefits of continuity and consistency, but it also risks exhausting the incumbents, failing to share out CC tasks amongst the membership, and missing out on innovation from new people taking the lead for a spell. I firmly believe in time-limited posts so that people have to stand down and someone else has to step up, for two reasons. It prevents lingering until someone else offers to take over (which may be never, if there is any hint that one might stay on); and it saves people from becoming scunnered in office so that some day in future they may serve another spell. I hope that colleagues will agree. I wish whoever takes on the role of Convenor the best of luck with the challenge.

As usual, the Community Council has had a busy year, with some positive aspects and some challenges. We have struggled - and so far failed - to attract youth representatives, despite the level of democratic engagement across the breadth of Scottish society in 2014 leading up to the referendum. We have struggled to get meaningful engagement from some D&G Council departments, with Education standing out for their signal failure to communicate with the broader community about the impact of budgetary changes. I hope that D&GC Elected Members have more luck than Community Councils and Parent Councils at bringing Education Dept management to this locality to explain planned changes and consider their implications, with those actually affected. If this fails, it will be an indictment of the democratic process, with potential detriment to future generations.

We have had some excellent experiences with D&G Council however. Presentations on community safety developments, and on kerbside recycling gave us full explanations of change, and the opportunity to discuss things with the relevant D&GC Officers. Through the Broader Machars Federation of Community Councils, there were presentations from D&GC Chief Executive Gavin Stephenson and Galloway area senior officers of Police Scotland. The Federation pressed for a direct voice at Area Committee business meetings, and the Elected D&GC Councillors were highly supportive. D&GC is currently considering a proposal to allow each CC in Wigtownshire to delegate a Community Councillor to comment on agenda items at business meetings and to ask for specific items to be added to the agenda where the community has an issue that requires that forum to consider it. This shows splendid promise for democratic progress.

Other good things happened too; I will mention highlights. The Information & Signage Project concluded with the Martyrs' Stake information monolith being inaugurated in January, thanks to Andrew Wilson's determination, on the Community Council's behalf, and support from the community shop, the Galloway Association of Glasgow, and the Scottish Covenanter Memorials Association. We set up a working party to consult on and develop plans for the centennial commemoration in 2018 of Louis McGuffie's Victoria Cross award. We saw ongoing improvements in broadband and electricity infrastructure. Matt Kitson took over the Community Council website and launched the CC's Facebook page.

There were several NHS issues, including threatened reductions in dentistry in Newton Stewart and the possible provision of an automatic defibrillator in central Wigtown. Both these issues remain live.

Working Parties for Consultations and Planning have been busy throughout the year. We should thank Jak Kane in particular for his splendid efforts with consultation summaries and responses, often with sadly little feedback from colleagues in the drafting stage. Planning headline spot goes to the proposed California Windpark, across Wigtown Bay, which has virtually united the people of Wigtown (not an easy thing to do), both residents and visitors, as well as people across the eastern Machars. It remains to be seen how this works out.

Christmas was not cancelled in 2014. The Community Festival went ahead despite the struggle to find volunteers. For 2015, Festival planning is well underway and the Common Riding is being resurrected after an absence of 54 years.

2014 saw the adoption of a revised D&G Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils influenced significantly by our feedback at each stage of consultation. We adopted the new constitution brought in by the revised scheme at an Extraordinary General Meeting in December. And again this past year, we met outwith Wigtown twice - October in Kirkinner and March in Whauphill. Sadly, Kirkinner Community Association is winding up due to lack of local participation; meanwhile, Whauphill Community Association is going from strength to strength with impressive grants for playground developments and further Community Hall improvements.

As with each year, there have been some changes in Community Council membership. This past year has seen us co-opt Matt Kitson, and has seen Agnes Cluckie stand down due to other commitments. This year also saw Betty McGowan's retiral after more than two decades on the Community Council. Betty's contributions are well known, but her role in developing community activities (such as Wigtown Week) warrants special note, and she was Community Council Treasurer for several years. We intended to make a formal presentation at this Annual General Meeting but she was unable to attend.

My thanks to Matt Kitson as Secretary, David Moran as Treasurer, Willie McCartney as Vice-convenor, Jak Kane as lead for consultations, and all Community Councillors for the wide range of contributions we are all expected to make throughout the year, and for tolerating my chairmanship. Thanks from the Community Council to our D&GC Mid-Galloway ward Councillors, Alistair Geddes, Jim McColm and Graham Nicol, for their support and participation. Finally, my thanks (indeed our thanks) to June Robinson as Minute Secretary; this is especially important today as June is standing down from this role after this meeting.

I have enjoyed my three years as Convenor. I hope to continue on the Community Council in a reduced role. I wish my successor well. And I fully expect the Community Council to continue to:
Let Wigtown Flourish!



Nicholas Walker, Convenor, June 2015