

Royal Burgh of Wigtown & District Community Council

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CONVENOR'S REPORT - AGM 12.6.2017

This has been my second year as Convenor of the Community Council, and after much deliberation it will see me stepping aside to let someone else steer the ship. The rules for the establishment of community councils allow officers to stay in post for up to 4 years, however commitments in everyday life mean that I am unable to offer the level of input that is required of this role. I will be remaining as a Community Councillor and will offer my support to the Burgh from “the back benches”.

The past 12 months have once again been a mix of successes and failures, of optimism and frustration, of changes that improve and enhance the future of a flourishing Wigtown, and the removal of services that will make life in a rural community more of a challenge for many of our fellow residents without access to private transport.

2016/17 has seen severe blows delivered to the town's services. The surgery reduction to half days following the merger with the Galloway medical practice has resulted in residents facing the option of a longer wait for an appointment in the town or having to travel Newton Stewart. Efforts to attract new GPs to the Wigtown Surgery have proved impossible, as is the case elsewhere in rural practice and we were therefore faced with a fait accompli. The town's only remaining bank, Bank of Scotland, also announced that its Wigtown branch would close in September 2017, mid-way through the book festival, with the promise of continued service through a mobile bank. However at the time of writing no details of the future service are forthcoming.

The issue of derelict properties in the Burgh has once again taken up considerable agenda time, however it was promising to see work recommence on the property on North Main Street, and visible progress on other properties. The Councillors and I remain frustrated at the length of time that these items have taken to be moved forward by the County Council, and whilst these appear to now be moving to resolution, we have little confidence in any quicker solution being achieved should a similar situation arise in the future.

Renewable energy continued to be an item high on the agenda with the California Wind Farm application being sent to appeal after D&G's failure to issue a planning decision within timescales. We were happy to see that local views are being heard at Government level and that it was rejected early last year. The effort required by small communities in responding to applications of this magnitude however still gives rise to concern for the future.

On the positive end of the scale, superfast broadband has reached Wigtown, and many residents and businesses are now able to enjoy at least a proportion of the digital speed available to the cities and urban areas. The addition of a new street cabinet at Bladnoch has improved services to the Distillery and businesses at the Old Creamery industrial estate, and should, in time, provide

improvements to residents beyond Bladnoch. However, speed and access does not extend much beyond the Wigtown town boundaries, and we await improvements to enable all residents to be able to connect beyond basic levels. Access to 4G data services remains scant and mobile communication in general remains an ongoing concern.

Conclusions to the Historic Newspapers relocation to Bladnoch provided a welcome boost in jobs, and work continues at the Bladnoch Distillery, which after a few quiet years has and will hopefully continue to be jewel in our rural industry.

Wigtown Week and the Christmas tree lighting and Kist were again largely successful. Wigtown Week joined up with the Riding of the Marches and ambitious plans to put on more events on the first Saturday were dealt a cruel blow by the weather. Most people felt that combining the crowning of the princess with the Ridings event was a good idea and it will be repeated next years but will be later in July and will hopefully benefit from being in the summer holidays for all schools. It is becoming increasingly difficult to gather volunteer support for community events, and it usually falls to the same group of hardworking individuals to pull together schedules and activities. Without more volunteers coming forward, the future of Wigtown Week and the Christmas tree lighting and Kist could soon fall by the wayside. Too many people complain about the lack of events and activities but are not prepared to put in the hours to support them.

On the Community Council membership front, we welcomed David Moran, Sandra McDowell and Kevin Witt as newly co-opted councillors, swelling our team to 14 of the 15 maximum. It is great to have a near full complement of councillors which enables a wider range of views to be heard. However not everything went smoothly with the co-options, with several months of confusion over the process to be followed and I take this opportunity to apologise again to those who put themselves forward about the length of time taken to resolve all of the issues.

To conclude my report, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their support throughout the year. I was also like to thank Councillors Alistair Geddes, Jim McColm and Graham Nicol for contributing to all of our meetings and their efforts on our behalf within the D&G Council. Many thanks also go to Jak Kane for his efforts in dealing with the multitude of Consultation documents presented to the Council and for taking on the mantles of Secretary and Treasurer. Once again Nick Walker has diligently kept us all regularly up to date with a multitude of planning applications, the preparations for the Louis McGuffie memorial to be unveiled in 2018 and his work to sustain and develop the Machars Federation of Community Councils. Willie McCartney as Vice-convenor was called up on twice this year to convene the council in my absence and my thanks to him for his support throughout the year.

I wish all of the Community Councillors well for the next twelve months of debate and deliberation.

Let Wigtown Flourish.



Matt Kitson, Convenor, June 2017