

To: Inverdunning/WS Dunsire, C/O S MacGarvie & Co Planning Consultants, Stirling

Stirling Council Planning Department

Stirling Council Ward 1 Councillors M Earl, E Tweed, JR McDonald

Thornhill & Blair Drummond Community Council and Thornhill Community Trust joint complaint concerning pre-planning consultation process PAN 2020-011

This pre-planning application was submitted on 9 September 2020 - with the website to support the application going live on Friday 9 October 2020.

Background: This plan was first announced to the Thornhill community on 1 August in the Thornhill Views community newsletter without a PAN being submitted. The lack of proper explanation and context for these plans caused confusion in the community especially as there was no real framework for response and no offer of a public meeting.

Representations were then made to the developers by the Community Council and the process began again formally on 9 September

Current situation:

- The developers' website address (*thornhillstirling.co.uk*) is very close to our COMMUNITY website (*thornhillstirling.org*) immediately causing the potential for confusion.
- When the website went live on Friday 9 October it contained less information than during the first presentation of the proposals in August.
- Initially there was no supporting information to the statements but some summary reports were added on Monday 12 October.
- A welcome postal drop of the developers' plans was arranged to go to all households/postcodes in Thornhill and Blair Drummond. Copies were not received in the farms and hamlets around Thornhill and Blair Drummond in the initial posting. The shortfall in delivery was reported to the developers on Tuesday 15 October and further copies were received on Wed 21 October.
- The 6 'Yes' and 'No' questions are impossible to answer in a meaningful way. There were several leading questions and the vague way in which these questions were phrased will make it difficult or impossible to discern whether responses refer specifically to the development in question, or to more general principles and opinions.
- The opening paragraph in the letter suggested that they had already received a large majority of positive responses which was not substantiated in any way and served to make the reader feel out of step with their neighbours should they disagree.
- Different dates for returning the responses were published: 6 November on line and 23 November on the paper copy. Clarification was sought and the website updated to 23 November
- The images of the maps on the paper plans were highly distorted and did not truly represent the sites.
- The website carried detail of the live web chat via Slido as an alternate 'public event', a requirement of the 12 week pre-planning period.
- The event was staged from 2- 6pm effectively excluding many working people
- Slido Q & A software has a limit of 150 characters which was not announced in advance thereby making more considered questioning impossible.
- Slido Q & A software had many more characters available for answers making for a very unbalanced Q & A.

- The Slido event fell very far from any expectations of what should be offered as an alternative public meeting. It was challenged ahead of the event and on the day proved every bit as unsatisfactory, clumsy and unhelpful as feared. Answers were given from a planning consultant - no voice of JCC, no voice of Inverdunning and no voice of WS Dunsire as you would expect in a public meeting.
- No images of the developers and their business partners have appeared on the website.
- Assurances have been given that the text of the Slido Q & A will be available when the planning application is made. However, the late sharing of that information takes away the benefit of a public meeting where different views are shared in real time during the period of the consultation.
- We feel the communities of Thornhill and Blair Drummond have been let down by Stirling Council in authorising the use of the Slido software. This is especially so in the light of the Scottish Government advice: Coronavirus (COVID-19): development planning consultation and engagement advice - May 2020, paragraph 12:
 - *Digital engagement should involve information in a user friendly format on a free, publicly accessible web site. Consideration should be given to providing information that can be easily accessed, downloaded and printed. Subject to resources and capabilities, digital tools and applications could be used for video presentations or hosted slideshows to help explain the plan and provide live and interactive web based events for the public to ask questions and receive responses. It would be useful for the Scottish Government to receive any feedback as regards the use of online approaches to community engagement as part of the work in relation to implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.*

Summary

We are aware of the Scottish Government's aspiration to keep the planning process moving despite the pandemic. However, we believe that the serious mistakes in this preplanning consultation detailed above, which have been identified by residents in Thornhill and Blairdrummond, need to be raised and do not give us confidence in the process going forward.

26 October 2020

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