

Local Politics

Just when you thought you'd seen the last of me, I'm back. I have been asked by the Bridge of Allan Times to do a Local Politics' column: power without responsibility - the privilege of the journalist through the ages. Just as politics start to get exciting again, too. There should be plenty of blood on the carpet in Viewforth. I shall endeavour to comment on it sensibly.

We all knew the elections would produce major changes. How many of us guessed just what they would be? The election of Keith Brown (SNP) for Ochil was no surprise. I know Keith as an officer at Stirling Council who kept his politics out of his daily work, although we all knew he wore his SNP hat during his spell as Leader of Clackmannan Council. The change in Stirling's MSP was a surprise (this should worry Ann McGuire for the next couple of years) but the changes in the makeup of the Council are the ones which interest me most.

Stirling as an SNP stronghold is a concept most of us will have trouble coming to terms with. Previously we had 11 Labour councillors, 10 Tories and 1 SNP. We now have 8 Labour councillors, 7 SNP, 4 Tories and 3 Lib-Dems. The Labour survival rate is higher than expected - evidence of the donkey vote turning out as usual, perhaps? Disaster for the Tories, but for Stirling perhaps not. The old setup entrenched Labour in their idea of democracy - what Quintin Hogg called an elective dictatorship.

The squabble about the Budget in March 2006 is a case in point. The Council needed a good shake-up. The new makeup should result in all the parties vying for approval,

which means they may actually take note of what people elected them for. We might even get the grass cut and the roads mended. I suspect we may see an informal Labour/Tory coalition against an SNP/Lib-Dem one, although in my opinion the sensible thing for the Tories to do would be to keep aloof and steer the Council on individual issues.

The result in this ward was something of a surprise. I was disappointed that Bill Baird, the Independent candidate, did not get in. He almost made it, being the last one to be disqualified. I know Bill and I believe he would have made a good councillor. I also consider local government would be better off without party politics. And yes, I would like to go back to the arrangements we had in 1972, before Ted Heath started the expansion of 'Local' government with his Regionalisation scheme. However ... the Bridge of Allan and Dunblane (and Logie plus the University and bits of Causewayhead) ward now has one councillor from each of the main parties - one Conservative (Callum Campbell, the only one who lives in Bridge of Allan), one Labour, one Lib-Dem, and one SNP - you will find them all on Stirling Council's web site at www.stirling.gov.uk.

Look for Ward 3: Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. With luck this arrangement will keep them fighting for your attention (and your vote in four years' time) which can't be bad. I must say I was surprised that the Dunblane Tory did not get in as Dunblane has always been regarded as safe Tory territory. I suspect it was the law of unintended consequences in operation, as voters experimented with their 'spare' votes. It could, of course, be a natural result of the STV proportional

representation system. A check of the other wards shows a similar result to ours.

We have four councillors, while all other wards have three. Every ward bar one (Bannockburn) has representatives from three different parties. In Bannockburn they have two Labour councillors and one SNP. The Labour councillors include Councillor Gerard O'Brien (not the Provost - that was Colin O'Brien). Gerard is regarded as something of a loose cannon. This is not a popular option in the Labour Party, where blind obedience to the dictates of the leadership is demanded. The Bannockburn public obviously think otherwise.

We had 72 rejected papers in our ward out of 7862 votes cast, so 99% of voters managed to understand the system.

The first meeting of the new council is held on May 18th, which happens to be a few days after the BoA Times deadline so I may only be able to comment on it in advance rather than explain how they all got it wrong. This is a statutory meeting i.e. by law it has to be held within a certain time after the election. This is the meeting at which the Provost is elected and responsibilities of individual members established.

The horse-trading has no doubt already begun. For the benefit of political anoraks, the agenda for the meeting includes:

Adoption of Standing Orders i.e. rules of behaviour; Appointment of Leader / Depute Leader of Stirling Council; Scheme of Delegation (what decisions council officers can make without involving members first); Appointments of Standing Committees and Panels;

Adoption of Previous Stirling Council Financial Regulations & Codes and Contract Standing Orders; Appointment of Statutory & Other Panels i.e. establishment of:- (i) Parental Appeals Panel, (ii) Social Work Complaints Review Panel (iii) Citizenship Appointments Panel (iv) Provost's Panel (this one has ambitions to control the Museum Hall funds. Bridge of Allan Community Council will have something to say about that); Standing Orders Relating to Panels; Scheme of Delegation Relating to Panels.

Then we have Appointments and Nominations to:- (a) Joint Boards, Public Bodies and Other Statutory Partnerships (b) Appointments to Local Organisations, Council Companies and Companies/other External Organisations in which the Council has an interest (c) District of Stirling Licensing Board - Appointment of Members (d) Local Licensing Forum (e) Ex Officio Justices of the Peace (f) Cowane's and Spittal's Trusts; Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) i.e. whether the council wants to maintain its membership of COSLA and if it does, which members should represent Stirling Council there; Members' Remuneration, Allowances and Expenses (very important, this one. The rules have changed. Let's hope someone understands them).

I would not be surprised to find some items put off to a later meeting so that more horse-trading can take place. We shall see. I look forward to a livelier and more interesting council than we have had for some time.

John Holliday

COMMUNITY COUNCIL MINUTES

17 APRIL 2007

MATTERS ARISING

Local hustings - The Chair confirmed that a hustings for local government candidates would take place the following evening, Wednesday 18th April, in the Allan Centre. Posters had been put up and leaflets distributed.

Community Police Constable - It was noted that once again P.C. Paul Colquhoun was not able to be present, but had taken up post.

Community Council email address - The Community Council email address bofacc@hotmail.co.uk is up and running for residents to make contact. Members of the Community Council can access all emails. Tactran Report - The Community Council has lodged an objection to the proposed road from Kildean to the University. Voluntary consultants are currently preparing a report so that a properly considered objection can be lodged via the Structure Plan process. A map showing the proposed route was circulated for information. It was noted with concern that various spur roads, presumably for future developments, appeared on the map. An officer of Stirling Council had indicated that the road would be "partly developer funded". Other concerns were that the level crossing on Cornon Road appeared to be closed and that would mean residents at Forthpark would need to make a detour to access the local shops in Bridge of Allan. Names for new developments - The Secretary had submitted suggested names for the developments at Chalmers Church and the Museum Hall but had not yet received a response. Fountain - Ian Anderson confirmed that investigations were ongoing. It had been established that a copper pipe had been installed down the middle.

POLICE REPORT

As P.C. Paul Colquhoun was not present, there was no Police Report. The Chair offered to make contact with P.C. Paul Colquhoun to see if he would be present at the May meeting

Decision

The Chair would contact P.C. Paul Colquhoun regarding attendance at Community Council meetings.

TREASURER'S REPORT

John Gill had now taken over the financial records. He needed to complete and submit the necessary forms so that he could operate the account.

Decision

John Gill would submit forms so that he could operate the Community Council account.

PLANNING

Stuart Ritchie reported that in the past month five new planning applications had been received by the Planning Authority, none of which were contentious. He also reported an Enforcement Action - notice had been given to remove a fence surrounding property in Keir Street.

Frances Hamilton brought to attention that the Development Management Panel would be meeting on 19th April at which time the Panel would consider the Mart application. Changes had been made to the retail element of the application to satisfy the Planning Authority. Any approval will need to be notified to the Scottish Executive as the application is a departure from the Development Plan.

CORRESPONDENCE

The following correspondence had been received since the last meeting of the Community Council:

Disabled parking - Stirling Council had agreed to provide a space on Henderson Street.

Advice that consultation would take place on a new Parking Strategy 2008. It is anticipated that metered parking will be proposed.

It was noted that there had been correct reasons for the tree cutting at the Police Station.

Trees at Blairforkie Drive - The Community Council needed to advise Tony Oteniya, Tree Officer, who owns the land on which the dying trees are located. Bus stop, Fountain Road - Letters had been sent to First Bus, the Police and Stirling Council regarding the situation of the bus stop, road marking and policing of illegal parking. Stirling Council are considering re-siting of the bus stop and

offered to meet with a member of the Community Council. Marjory Russell agreed to attend this meeting, preferably between 9-10am when the area is busy. Lyn Kennedy, Community Governance Manager, had made contact to confirm that Stirling Council has approved the appointment of a "champion" for each Community Council, at Service Manager level, to help progress enquiries that are not receiving a prompt response. Public Toilets - These have been closed since August 2006 and there has been poor response from Stirling Council. A surveyor's report had been expected in November, as this was supposed to be a two-month analysis. The toilets also had the appearance of being padlocked when they were actually open - this discourages people from approaching them. It was also noted that if the building was in danger of collapsing, siting the portaloos against the wall of the building may not be the safest location! A letter would be sent on this matter.

Area Forum - Barbara Allan had written suggesting a meeting of the Steering Group on Wednesday 9th May at 2pm to look at the future of the Forum. Whilst it was agreed that the three communities - Dunblane, Bridge of Allan, Blairlogie - have little in common, the Forum may be more appropriate when the new ward structure takes effect. It would be easier to have influence inside the Forum, rather than from the outside. Marjory Russell agreed to attend the Steering Group and Stuart Ritchie the planning meeting. Notice had been received confirming parking arrangements across Bridge of Allan. This was circulated for information.

Grass cutting - Details of this year's proposals had been received, along with maps and a questionnaire for completion by 11th May. The Community Council would request an extension to this deadline until after the May meeting. Proposals appeared to be similar to 2006 arrangements. It was agreed to put the map up in the library so that residents could give comments. Concerns include proposals to "cut and leave" at the football pitches and more important at Memorial Park.

It was agreed that an appropriate officer of Stirling Council be invited to the May meeting for feedback.

It was also agreed that notice should be put in the Stirling Observer and

Allanwater News advising that the map was available for residents to see.

Tennis courts - Despite years of correspondence, these were not being properly maintained. A meeting would take place on Wednesday 18th April at 4.30, attended by Gordon Pomphrey, to see the condition of the courts. Ian Thomson, who is carrying out an audit of sports facilities, would be advised of the meeting. Callum Campbell had sent a letter welcoming the hustings on 18th April. letter inviting a member of the Community Council to attend a Community Public Participation Forum had been received. Keith Ironside agreed to attend.

Decisions:

It was agreed that

* The Community Council advise Tony Oteniya, Tree Officer, on ownership of the land on which the dying trees are located

* Marjory Russell would attend a meeting concerning relocation of the bus stop on Fountain Road

* A letter would be sent concerning the length of closure of the public toilets and lack of surveyor's report

* Marjory Russell would attend the Area Forum 3 Steering Group

The Community Council would request an extension to the deadline to respond on grass cutting, until after the May meeting.

* An appropriate officer of Stirling Council be invited to the May meeting for feedback on grass cutting

* A notice be put in the Stirling Observer and Allanwater News advising that the map is available at the library for residents to see

* Keith Ironside would attend the Community Public Participation Forum

COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

Councillor Holliday circulated his report, drawing attention to the Bridge of Allan Victory Fund. Whilst Councillor Holliday will no longer be a member of external organisations after his resignation on 3rd May, he was keen to let the Community Council know that there may be money available towards the War Memorial. He intended writing officially on this matter.

The next meeting of the Community Council was scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 15th May at 7.30pm.