**Howgate Community Council – AGM Minutes**

**18th May 2017**

**Present:** Colin Bennett (CB, Chair), David Wilson (DW), Graham Young (GY), Adrian FitzGerald (AF)

**In attendance:** PC Phil McDonald, Cllr. Debbie McCall, 5 local Howgate/Loanstone residents

**Apologies:** James Garry

**Minutes of 2016 AGM:** Proposed: Susan Gracie; Seconded: DW

**Matters Arising:**

1. **MDLP Update**

AF advised the meeting that three Reporters were working their way through the proposed Plan and indications were that they would be reporting over the summer. Unaccompanied site visits had been made and no further oral sessions or requests for further written submissions are anticipated.

Midlothian Council had requested that the Reporters make no change to the proposed housing developments at Wellington or Pomathorn Mill, arguing that any concerns could be addressed at the planning application stage. AF argued that the decision to permit development on fields to the north of Wellington School was puzzling given that the low-density rural housing policy has been retained in the proposed Plan.

1. **Traffic Calming Measures Update**

New flashing speeding signs have recently been erected in the village. However, these appear to be inferior and it was noted that they are already failing. Susan Gracie argued that this was another example of how Howgate is being neglected by Midlothian Council.

It was noted that the failed flashing sign at Loanstone had not been replaced. CB will follow this up with David Sharp.

1. **Public Transport Update**

CB had established contact with the operations director at Borders Buses. The director would be happy to attend the June HCC meeting to discuss plans and hear views.

The Midlothian Transport team have also advised that the Ring-and Go operators would also be willing to attend a future meeting.

**Community Policing Report**

A collision between two vehicles had occurred in the village on Saturday 13th May. Two passengers sustained injuries. Speed was not thought to be a factor. More likely is the fact that the Belgian driver of one vehicle had strayed onto the wrong side of the road.

PC McDonald also outlined other incidents of note in the Penicuik and Howgate area during April.

Speed checks had been carried out on the A6094. 54 drivers were stopped, 11 warned and 4 prosecuted.

Community Police Officers had carried out a Rural Crime initiative between 25th March and 7th May 2017 with a particular emphasis on dog walking/sheep worrying and safeguarding vehicles in rural locations.

CB thanked PC McDonald and CS Michele Lindsay for their regular attendance at HCC meetings during the year and stressed that their attendance and input is greatly appreciated

**Chairman’s Report**

CB noted that 2017 is his fourth year as Chairman and expressed the view that, in his opinion, HCC has conducted itself professionally and effectively over the past year.

CB thanked the Committee members for their contribution and assistance and added thanks to other local residents such as Susan, Pat and Stephen who had been regular attendees.

Cllr Derek Rosie was also thanked for his attendance, input and support and best wishes were expressed for his future endeavours now that he is standing down from Midlothian Council.

Tommy Goldie, the Midlothian Council Communities Liaison Officer for the area, was also thanked.

HCC met 8 times during 2016/17 and was quorate on each occasion. The key areas of focus for the community had been traffic concerns and planning issues.

Traffic

Traffic speeding through Howgate and Loanstone had been identified as a key issue in the 2016 Howgate Neighbourhood Plan. The issue had been brought into sharp focus during the year as a result of fatal accidents in Howgate and Leadburn. The incident in Howgate involved the driver suffering heart failure at the wheel of his car. Donations had subsequently been received for the purchase of a defibrillator which is now installed on the wall of the Village Hall.

HCC continued to lobby Midlothian Council during the year and, as a result, has experienced some success:

* There has been a notable increase in the number and frequency of police speed checks
* A positive meeting was held with Sergeant Ross Drummond from then Road Policing Division with a view to understanding further measures that may be implemented
* Funding and support had also been received from Midlothian Council to replace the existing electronic signage and for the installation of rumble strips and gateways (Note item (b) above).

Planning

CB stressed that HCC’s approach to considering planning applications was:

1. To appraise conformity with the Local Plan
2. To seek the views of local residents

A new proposed Local Plan had been published in April 2015 and representations had been invited. HCC made a number of representations. In particular, concern was expressed over the new housing proposed for the Wellington School site and adjacent fields and the Pomathorn Mill site. HCC stressed that:

* These proposals had been adopted without any consultation with the local community
* Neither development was required to meet strategic housing needs and are simply ‘windfall’ opportunities.

All representations have now been passed to the Reporters (Note item (a) above).

In October 2016 HCC wrote to the DPEA and argued that, with respect to the proposed Howgate developments, Midlothian Council had failed to comply with its Participation Statement inasmuch as no consultation had been held with the local community. HCC’s letter regarding this matter was acknowledged but no further communication was forthcoming. Midlothian Council were subsequently advised that the DPEA was satisfied that the Council had conformed with its Participation Statement.

Other initiatives

In response to concerns being expressed regarding the change in operator for the X70 bus service, contact had been made with Borders Buses who have agreed to join the next HCC meeting. The meeting will be advertised locally and local residents encouraged to raise queries and suggestions. (Note item (c) above)

**Treasurer’s Report**

GY presented the Income and Expenditure Statement for the year to 31st March 2017. Main items of expenditure during the year were the Hall fees (£150) and the contribution of £400 made towards the costs of a defibrillator (now installed).

The bank balance at 31st March 2017 was £604.59.

**Election of New Community Council Members.**

AF had indicated that he would be standing down from the Council. CB thanked Adrian for his contribution over the years. HCC will look to appoint a new minute secretary at the June meeting.

AF reminded the meeting that HCC is required to adopt a new Constitution during 2017. A draft is currently with the Midlothian Council legal team. He drew attention to the fact that the adoption process for new candidates is required to be more rigorous under the new format.

Ian King indicated that he would be willing to stand for election to the HCC. His election was formally proposed by DW and seconded by CB.

**Any Other Business**

The prospects of a cycle track being established between Penicuik and Leadburn were discussed. The potential route, along the old railway line, has been surveyed and approved by SUSTRANS but the limited resources of Midlothian Council have created a stumbling block.

Community grants towards tools and professional advice could be forthcoming but it would require local manpower to implement.

It was generally agreed that such a track would be highly desirable.

**Cllr Debbie McCall**

Cllr McCall was invited to say a few words regarding her initial impressions after her recent election.

Debbie’s initial impression was how much the make-up of Councils has changed over the years. Unlike the situation some years ago, Councils are no longer male dominated with membership confined to the better-off in society.

Debbie explained that her own background is in welfare and social housing. She sees her role as one of collating the views of local residents and, hopefully, helping to implement improvements in service and the environment. Debbie argued that she would not promise anything that could not be delivered.

A workable coalition had yet to be established by Midlothian Councillors but Debbie believes that some workable compromise will eventually emerge.

CB Thanked Debbie for her early observations.

**2018 AGM**

The 2018 AGM will be held on Thursday 17th May.