1. **Chairman’s Report (Colin Bennett)**

This is my 5th and final year as Chairman and HCC has experienced another busy year. We continue to focus our efforts on key areas that impact the local community and, in my opinion, have conducted ourselves professionally and effectively at all times.

I would like to thank the committee, Bruce, Ian, Ian, Graham, David and James for their contribution and assistance over the last year. I would also thank those local residents who attended and provided valuable input during the meetings.

We have continued to benefit from Cllr Debbie McCall participating in our HCC meetings. Debbie’s attendance, input and support has been very much appreciated.

Our thanks also go to Tommy Goldie the Midlothian Council Communities Liaison Officer for our area, for his support and assistance over the year.

The community council met 7 times during the 2016/17 and was quorate at each meeting.

The key areas of focus for the committee during the past 12 months have been:

1. Traffic, and
2. Planning, in particular the Midlothian Local Development Plan

Traffic

Traffic, in particular speeding through both Howgate and Loanstone villages, and at the Leadburn junction continues to be a significant issue for local residents; indeed, speeding through the villages.

We were pleased to confirm this time last year that some success had been achieved with funding and support from Midlothian Council to replace the existing electronic signage in both villages, installing additional electronic signage on the South entrance to Howgate, along with installing rumble strips and gateways on both the North and South entrances to Howgate. Whilst the signage and rumble strips were installed shortly after the AGM, the gateways have unfortunately not been installed and we continue to chase the council to undertake this work. We have also highlighted to Midlothian Council that the electronic sign to the north of the village has been very inconsistent and we believe reads incorrectly (underestimating car speed), but this has not been followed up by the council.

Midlothian Council have undertaken speed and traffic monitoring in the village not long after the signs where installed, and whilst it was therefore too early to suggest if the new measures have had a positive impact, we have useful benchmark data from which to compare future results and will be requesting that Midlothian Council undertake these checks at regular intervals going forward.

David will also continue work with the Federation of Community Councils to ensure any HCC is feeding into Midlothian wide traffic initiatives.

Planning

On planning, we continue to be kept busy with the usual mix of applications for new houses and other planning proposals across our district. Our approach is to consider each application independently focussing on two key areas:

1. Does the proposed application comply with planning policy and the Local Plan, and
2. Seeking feedback from local residents on their views on the application.

The council continue to liaise with the Planning Department and Midlothian Council to play our role in the planning process and exercise our rights and responsibilities.

Key activity has however been focussed on the new, proposed Midlothian Local Development Plan. This has been prepared to provide an updated development strategy and planning policy framework to guide growth and investment across Midlothian to 2024.

As raised and discussed at the last AGM back in June 2017, the Community Council reviewed the various consultation documents and sought feedback from local residents. Following this process, the community council made a number of representations, in particular in relation to the proposed re-designation of land adjacent to the Wellington School site and Pomathorn Mill for residential development. It was particularly disappointing that these significant housing proposals had been agreed by the Council prior to any consultation with the local community since neither was contained in the earlier Major Issues Report. It is also important to note that neither development is needed in order to contribute to Midlothian’s strategic housing needs, both being identified as ‘additional’ or ‘windfall’ opportunities.

Following attendance at the May 2016 Midlothian Council planning committee the council confirmed the issues raised were passed to the Reporter being noted as unresolved issues.

In October 2016 HCC sent a letter to the DPEA arguing that, with respect to Howgate issues, Midlothian Council has failed to comply with its Participation Statement in as much as there had been no attempt at consultation with the local community prior to adopting the proposed developments. The DPEA had acknowledged receipt of HCC’s letter but no further communication has been forthcoming. Midlothian Council was advised in a letter from the DPEA on 4 November 2016 that DPEA had completed its consideration of conformity with the Participation Statement and would now be starting its main examination.

We received further correspondence in April noting recent progress and milestones in production of the MDLP. This stated that that MDLP was being examined by the DPEA and the report was expected in April and subject to the reporter’s recommendation, will receive possible approval in Summer 2018.

In response to this communication HCC wrote to the DPEA again raising the communities’ concerns regarding these same issues and asking the DPEA to confirm what detailed consideration had been given to the issues. We have recently received a reply from the DPEA case officers stating that they had finished their report and passed their recommendations onto the appropriate bodies. We therefore await the final decision, but remain frustrated by the lack of engagement and consideration given the communities feedback, a view shared by the Federation of Community Councils.