



MILNGAVIE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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East Dunbartonshire Council
FAO Max Wilson
Cc Councillors Gibbons, Gotts and Henry

9 February 2017

TP/ED/16/0823 Land To The West Of Fire Station Craigdhu Road Milngavie

Single block of three storey building and split level block of three and four storey building to provide sheltered retirement housing with associated landscaping and parking

Dear Max,

As stated in our brief letter last month, Milngavie Community Council objects to the above development. McCarthy & Stone attended our October meeting to present their proposals but we were dismayed when they did not incorporate any of our suggestions into their final plan. Please see below our further comments.

1. LOCATION

There are a number of high density developments, including flats and sheltered housing, close to Milngavie's central pedestrian precinct giving easy access to shops, community facilities and social activities for all ages. This is not the case with the proposed site which, being almost 1km from the centre and with gradients, is not ideal for older people. We therefore consider that the density of units proposed is not justified on sustainability grounds. However we believe that a smaller development, which protects environmental quality, would be welcome since it would be convenient for residents with families in the west of Milngavie.

2. DESIGN

We strongly object to the design of the development currently proposed, which is totally at odds with the character of Milngavie. Policy DQ1 of the Adopted Local Plan 2 states "*Development should enhance and certainly not reduce the amenity and character of the surrounding area, in particular residential amenity will be strongly protected.*" The soon-to-be adopted East Dunbartonshire Local Development Plan (LDP) states, in Policy 2 "*The Council will support proposals which contribute towards the creation of distinctive, high-quality places that provide character and a **strong identity***" (MCC emphasis). Policy 6 acknowledges that the need for housing must be balanced with protecting environmental quality. Moreover the supplementary guidance on Design and Placemaking emphasises that "*the building design must relate to the wider built and visual context*".

The architect seems to have been under the impression that Milngavie is an extension of Glasgow, but that is not the case. Milngavie is a small town, surrounded by farmland and moorland, with a long history as an independent settlement. It retains its own character and identity, which residents are keen to preserve, but massive, monolithic housing with flat roofs is in no way part of it.

As indicated in the Scottish Government report on East Dunbartonshire's proposed Local Development Plan, both Council and Government Reporter agree that any development of this site should be compatible with the established character of the area and the amenity of existing residents.

McCarthy and Stone describe the prominent site as a 'gateway' into Milngavie. This is all the more reason for requiring a design that appears friendly and welcoming, that reflects the character of the town and integrates with it rather than one which would appear stark and incongruous in its setting. In response to concerns about the height, the applicants claim they wish to provide a development that is 'prestigious'. However it should be possible to build one that appears suitably prestigious but at the same time attractive and in-keeping. Diagonally across the roundabout, the recent Craigdhu Farm Cottages development succeeds in enhancing the rural outskirts of the town, but reference to this development is avoided in the application documents.

Elsewhere, McCarthy & Stone have made genuine attempts to reflect local character, such as at Fishersview Court in Pitlochry (pictured in their Planning Statement) and their soon-to-open development at Anstruther which we discussed with them at our meeting. Some of the visuals they have produced for the Anstruther development are reproduced below, and further details may be seen at

<https://www.mccarthyandstone.co.uk/retirement-properties-for-sale/beacon-court-anstruther/>

The big difference here is that instead of a massive, monolithic form, the building is broken up in various ways. In particular the pitched roof is at a variety of heights and angles, and different colours are used on the walls of some units. This development appears attractive and friendly. MCC members are agreed that something along these lines would be far more acceptable and could enhance Milngavie instead of damaging its visual amenity and character.

It is interesting to note that in an article last year on this development, "Fife Today" pointed out that "McCarthy and Stone withdrew their initial planning application and resubmitted a revised application, which was updated to address observations made by the council about the design, scale and position of the building".

We are aware of cases in East Dunbartonshire where an application has been recommended for refusal, or has been refused by the planning board, the developer has come back with a greatly improved proposal.

Visualizations of Beacon Court development in Anstruther





3. RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

In their supporting statements, McCarthy & Stone have considered the amenity of nearby residents to the north and south purely in terms of privacy. What needs to be considered is the effect of introducing a massive incongruous structure, which seems to have been uplifted from the city centre, into the foreground of their environment.

The fact that the applicants repeatedly point out that the ground floor level of the main block is below that of the road seems to indicate that they are fully aware that the fourth storey is inappropriate. In fact the elevations show that the ground floor is only partly hidden and this only at the western extremity. The full four storeys would be visible in views from Craighdu Road east of the roundabout as well as from Prestonfield to the south, but 3D visualisations of these particular views have not been provided. Moreover it is often forgotten that deciduous trees provide screening only for about five months of the year.

The fourth storey with its virtually flat roof would appear intrusive and dominating in this landscape, especially being so close to the road. It would not recede into the background as do the pitched roofs of the buildings opposite.

4. LAYOUT AND LANDSCAPING ISSUES

Considering the size of the proposed buildings, their set-back from the road seems quite inadequate, especially at the eastern end where it appears to be little more than 2m. Outwith the town centre, even small bungalows and council houses are set back considerably further than this.

Looking at the specific context of Craighdu Road, the stretch between the town centre and the roundabout has been developed except for the fire station field. For all the developed sections, the footways on each side are separated from the carriageway by a green strip, with trees along it in most places. (At the west end, opposite the proposal site, there is a service road as well as a footway in front of the houses). Thus in all parts the building line is well set back from the road, which helps to protect the residents from the pollution caused by traffic on a busy road. Trees also absorb carbon dioxide, dust and noise produced by motor vehicles. To conform with both the adopted local plan and the LDP, any new development must be set back to the building line. Therefore a development of the fire station field must be designed to meet this constraint as well as that of flood risk, and the price of the land should reflect the amount of development it can support.

Besides pollution, the Sanctuary block at the eastern end is adjacent to a former bus stop lay-by. If the bus service were to be restored in future, the bedrooms facing the road on the first two floors would have no privacy, despite a hedge.

The plans show that the boundary of the land the applicants intend purchasing is generally close to the edge of the buildings and parking except at the western extremity, where a small garden with sitting area has been included. Given that most Milngavie residents have their own gardens, this seems quite meagre for a 61-unit development, but the worst aspect is its remoteness from the affordable housing section, where no such provision is shown. Despite the requirements of both Local Plan 2 and the LDP, there seems to have been little effort to integrate the affordable housing. Our suggestion to the applicants that a piece of land be acquired which is more central for a shared garden was dismissed due to cost, though we assume that the cost of land which cannot be built on due to flood risk is likely to be low.

Residents would naturally want to sit out at the south-facing rear of the development, away from the road, but this area is completely dominated by parking spaces. However it would be the ideal place for a shared central sitting area.

Milngavie as a whole is characterised by large trees remaining from the old estates that once surrounded the town, and so large trees would be particularly helpful in integrating large buildings here. However the tree species shown in the landscaping plan are small or narrow and will do little to soften the high massive blocks, especially in winter, since all are deciduous. This contrasts with the landscaping of attractive Craidhu Farm development diagonally opposite, which includes Scots pine. At the eastern end of the proposed development the 3D visuals are deceptive since trees are shown in front of the building in places where there is no room for trees.

5. THE PROPORTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

During the consultation MCC expressed disappointment that the development would deliver just under 20% affordable housing, instead of the required 25%. The response from McCarthy & Stone indicates that they are misinterpreting the requirement. The proportion used in the East Dunbartonshire Local Development Plan Site Assessments document is *not* for 25% of the number of market houses, but for 25% of the *total* number of houses to be built at the site.

The applicants go on to state that according to Scottish Planning Policy "where permission is sought for specialist housing, including sheltered housing, a contribution to affordable housing may not always be required. However the company is willing to make an allocation due to the requirements of the local area."

But Policy 20 of the LDP clearly indicates that a 25% contribution will be required in this case:

Policy 20 (F): Proposals which include market housing will deliver 25% affordable housing on site; or for proposals with less than 10 units through a commuted sum. This includes market led specialist housing but does not apply to a proposal for a single house."

6. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTED CHANGES

Since the answer to so many questions in the Design and Placemaking checklist is NO, it is clear that this application in its present form must be refused. Many changes would be needed for the development to accord with planning policy and be generally acceptable by the community. There is also an aspiration to promote Milngavie as a walking centre, and the views from long distance paths on all sides, especially from higher ground, also need to be considered.

First, to avoid such a discordant feature in the landscape and huge impact on amenity of neighbours, the scale of the market housing block needs to be reduced. We suggest that besides deleting the top floor, removal of a few other units would allow for more flexibility and for setting the building further back from the road. This would also bring the proportion of affordable housing to around where it should be - i.e. 25%.

Substantial changes are required with regard to massing. As with the Anstruther development the form should be broken up instead of being big square blocks. Pitched roofs are also essential to reflect the context of Milngavie, and the third floor could be partly contained within the roof space.

The layout should be re-considered with a view to improving integration of the affordable housing as well as enhancing the amenity of all future residents. Like many other such developments, the one at Anstruther is designed as a courtyard providing a sheltered amenity space which is ideal for sitting out and socialising. We suggest that this effect could be achieved at the proposal site by turning the Sanctuary block through 90 degrees and moving it closer to the sheltered housing, relocating the intervening row of parking spaces. The block should also of course be moved further from the road. Formal amenity space convenient for both parts of the complex could then be located on part of the space south of the buildings.

At the east and west extremities there is potential for further small amenity spaces that are more natural and provide opportunities for observing the wildlife (e.g. bird feeders and boxes).

The parking would of course need to be re-arranged, but there would be more flexibility with a reduced number of units. Moving the affordable block westwards would provide space for a number of cars on the east side of the development, and further land could be purchased here, presumably at low cost since it cannot be built on. With the building set back further from the road, some parking at the front could also be considered.

Since Milngavie is characterised by large and abundant trees, to integrate substantial buildings larger trees - and more of them - would be needed than is shown in the applicants' landscape plan. They should include conifers such as Scots pine or similar. As suggested above, there is potential to acquire additional land on the east side of the proposal site, beside the fire station, where trees could be planted. Besides helping to blend a development into the landscape, this would contribute to the amenity of Craigdhu Road.

Finally, with regard to sustainability, we suggest that the possibility of including solar panels should be explored.

We trust that the above comments will assist the Council in dealing with this application.

Yours sincerely,

Milngavie Community Council