



MILNGAVIE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Email: communitycouncilmilngavie@gmail.com

Milngavie hub proposals:

Response from Milngavie Community Council Hub Subgroup

I Introduction

2 Impacts of East Dunbartonshire Council's proposals for a Milngavie Hub

2a Response from users of the facilities provided at Milngavie Town Hall and Community Education Centre - summary

2a(i) Comments from Time Out Club

2b Impacts on Milngavie Library

2c Potential effects on the community environment

2c (i) Natural environment

2c (ii) Historic environment

2d Accessibility issues

2e Design issues - including impact on Milngavie Town Centre Conservation Area

3 Creating successful places

3a Creating Places - Scottish Government policy document by Architecture and Design Scotland

3b Community Empowerment, Planning and Place

3c Tackling Loneliness and Isolation

4 Alternative options for the Milngavie Hub

5 Some golden opportunities

6 Conclusion

1. Introduction

At its September meeting, the first after the summer break, Milngavie Community Council formed a sub-group of people present in order to respond to EDC's proposals for a Hub in Milngavie. The sub-group included members of MCC and also of Milngavie Community Development Trust (MCDT) and the newly formed Users Action Group, which represents groups who use the community facilities provided both at Milngavie Community Education Centre and at Milngavie Town Hall. The submission below is a compilation of contributions from members of the sub-group.

MCC welcomes the Council's proposals to provide Customer Services in Milngavie, and for the long-awaited refurbishment of the Milngavie Town Hall and Lillie Art Gallery. However, the many responses we have received from the community indicate many concerns with the two options presented at the end of June. Both of these involve a large expansion of the Town Hall building in an attempt to accommodate the facilities from the CE Centre and Library building, though these facilities would be reduced.

EDC have allocated around £4 million pounds for the Hub, to be spent mainly in 2020/21. They say it is for only one building - why? - and that it will be possible to accommodate all the groups, except for gym users, at the extended Milngavie Town Hall - is this correct?

MCDT consulted its members and a 20% response to an open question showed a desire to consider other proposals and possibilities, taking into account the difficulties and reservations described in the sections below

2. Impacts of East Dunbartonshire Council's proposals for a Milngavie Hub

2a Impact on User Groups: response from users of facilities provided at Milngavie Town Hall and Community Education Centre - summary

It appears the letting information held by EDC has been used to map the existing CE Centre rentable space into the new Hub with the exception of the Gym. As there has been no contact with the users this has not taken into account the actual facilities they use or indeed the numbers of their members who attend meetings. The User Action Group who we are engaged with have conducted an analysis with their members of the areas they use and on what days and times. This analysis also includes feedback on other facilities they require. At the meeting of the Allander Champions Group held on 11th Sep, 2019 there was a discussion of all the facilities being incorporated into the design, but no mention of the requirement to cater for users of the CE Centre gym or the need to include this provision in the replacement sports centre.

An analysis of the total current rentable space at the CE centre and the Town Hall, and the total rentable space in your proposed Hub shows that there would be an overall loss of around 30%. This is driven largely by the loss of the Gym. Some groups have heard that they may need to relocate to the Allander Sports Centre but there is no evidence that facility can accommodate them on the same days and times these groups meet. Furthermore, many other Groups use the space provided in the Gym. We assume some of these would be expected to use the Halls on the ground floor. This would inevitably create a conflict with existing Clubs that use those spaces. Given the overall reduction in available space and the numbers of groups using recurring lets, this could cause a severe constraint on ad-hoc users wishing to hire a Hall/Room for their use. The growth of population in the Bearsden and Milngavie area and the fact that we have an ageing population means we are likely to see a growing demand for Community spaces to accommodate more leisure groups in the future. The reduction in available lettable spaces does not allow for this potential growth. In order to accommodate Customer Services and the Library in the proposed extension it appears we would have to accept a 40% reduction in the size of the library. The existing library also accommodates a 'computer room' that is also used for training. It is not clear whether this could be retained.

Many of the Groups that use the CE Centre and the Town Hall store a large amount of equipment on site and it is impractical to be told to bring that to site every week. This equipment is used for their weekly meetings and is essential for the operation of their Groups. There does not appear to be enough provision for storage on the plans either on the ground or first floor. If space is allocated from the existing footprint for storage that will inevitably eat into the rentable space. Groups require a number of other facilities and we hope that there will be direct engagement with them to identify this in whatsoever plans are taken forward.

Groups cater for residents from all age groups. Parents drop off their children and pick up them up later and given the severe lack of parking (which we will come back to) will find this more difficult. There are also a large number of older members some of whom have limited mobility or disabilities. There is no indication of lifts in the proposals and these would be necessary to allow those members who cannot readily use stairs to gain access to the Community Rooms. This would eat into the already constrained footprint.

Overall, we do not believe the current proposals provide enough accommodation on the Town Hall site. The site footprint cannot allow for the building of a larger extension and therefore the Hub would have to compromise on space to allow the Groups that use the CE Centre to be accommodated. To quote: Joint Council Leader Vaughan Moody said, "The development of the Community Hub will see major investment in the town centre and will provide everyone in Milngavie with a facility they will be proud of". Based on the feedback we have received from existing users we do not see how that can be delivered.

2a (i) Comments from the Time Out Club

Registration Requirements (Summary – see TOC submission for full details)

The proposed options 1 and 2 do not meet the requirements of Time Out Club. 62 families currently rely on Time Out Club for after-school care at Milngavie CE C 3pm-6pm Mon-Fri during term time (over 70 families during the holidays). The service is currently registered for 60 children per day and there is a waiting list. The current proposals do not meet the security, storage and kitchen requirements of a registered child care service. In addition, outdoor space is essential. This is outlined in the **Health and Social Care Standards: My support, my life** (June 2017)^[1] which contain the following elements:

- 1.25 I can choose to have an active life and participate in a range of recreational, social, creative, physical and learning activities every day, both indoors and outdoors.
- 1.31 As a child, my social and physical skills, confidence, self-esteem and creativity are developed through a balance of organised and freely chosen extended play, including using open ended and natural materials.
- 1.32 As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment.
- 5.1 I can use an appropriate mix of private and communal areas, including accessible outdoor space, because the premises have been designed or adapted for high quality care and support.

The children require a flexible outdoor space adjacent to the indoor space available, where they can choose activities freely and be in close proximity for staggered collection times. In addition, Time Out Club have raised concerns about road safety and parking. Even if the accommodation proposed were suitable, if Time Out Club were given access to the premises for the times required this would severely limit access by other users.

^[1] <https://scotgov.publishingthefuture.info/publication/health-and-social-care-standards-my-support-my-life>

2b Impacts on Milngavie Library

In all the East Dunbartonshire places where hubs have been provided, libraries have suffered a drastic reduction in space, to the detriment of their proper functioning. For example, Bearsden Library has been dumbed down to more of a single social space than a place where one can do serious work and study. Residents from the Bearsden and

from the Kirkintilloch areas have complained to us that in the new libraries it is difficult to concentrate with all the noise and with children playing around. It has been suggested to us by a professional librarian that an L-shape at least is needed to minimise noise from children's activities in the library, and at least one room off the library for study, reading groups, talks and/or computer usage for classes or individuals. At Bearsden, any courses or children's activities have less room to operate and seem to cause more disruption. The pod is not popular.

East Dunbartonshire boasts of high educational standards, but forgets about this when it comes to after school study. In both of the options recently proposed, the area for the library is reduced by 40%, and appears as a single open space.

The set-up of Milngavie library is currently good. It is basically L-shaped with an attractive, welcoming area for children at the western end, and a quiet area with tables for work and study at the northern extremity. The east side has a corner with private individual desks, and at the south end there is a separate enclosed space with computers, for use by individuals or classes. Douglas Academy pupils come to work at Milngavie Library - the location is convenient for them.

With so much knowledge now available online, it has been argued that there is less need for books. But there is also a lot of material that is not online. One of many reasons why Brookwood library is missed is because it had a quiet, separate Bearsden and Milngavie Local History section, where one could research material not available online, or just browse. Some of it was behind glass, but was immediately accessible if one asked the duty librarian. In the Bearsden Hub this is all now locked away and can only be accessed by the archivist who, though very helpful, comes just once a week.

Another specialist section now lost at Bearsden is audiobooks. A Bearsden resident, blinded in an accident, used to enjoy these at Brookwood, but when she asked for them at the Bearsden Hub she was told they just did not have the space for everything. Yet her specialist needs are particularly important because listening is one thing she can still do.

Rather than reducing the space provided at Milngavie library, it should be retained, or extended, to accommodate what has been lost at Brookwood and perhaps the other libraries. Surely the people of East Dunbartonshire deserve at least one decent library?

2c Potential loss to the community of a place in Milngavie that is highly valued for its natural heritage and for its historic significance

The CE Centre/ Library building and the adjacent pond lie within the Allander Park, all designated as Open Space in the Local Development Plan. Moreover, the pond lies within the designated Local Nature Conservation Site and also the Wildlife Corridor associated with the Allander Water. These designations give the area a degree of protection, however in 2014 the full Council agreed to designate all of the open space owned by EDC as a Centenary Field, to be used for recreation in perpetuity in memory of those who had given their lives in World War 1. Such a designation gives stronger protection.

The agreement was not legally finalized until recently, when the PCNA committee approved a recommendation that the pond and CE Centre at the south end of Allander Park be removed from the Centenary Field designation, raising deep concerns in the community that if the CE Centre/ Library facilities are relocated, this invaluable place would be developed for private rather than community use.

The town of Milngavie owes its existence to the Allander Water – it has been called “The child of the Allander”. The area now in question has visible evidence of this heritage – the pond is the last remnant of a larger series of ponds serving the industries that made Milngavie, and the paths in the area are old railway and tram tracks. This is a special place for Milngavie today and, we hope, for the future.

Below at 2c (i), a MCDT member describes the value of the natural heritage of the area, especially the pond, for people today, and opportunities presented for the future. At 2c (ii) a local historian touches on the history of the piece of open space excluded from the Centenary Field designation, and what can still be seen there.

2c (i) Natural environment

The environs of Milngavie CE Centre and the adjacent pond form an important Greenspace which is used on a daily basis, not least by children at the Timeout Club and an average of two hundred people each day, not counting West Highland Way walkers (tens of thousands per year). The protection and conservation of this area not only represents an opportunity to enhance the health and well-being of the Community, but to further develop its biodiversity and use as an educational resource for local people and visitors, including West Highland Way walkers.

It is vital that these areas are protected and conserved:

- as community amenities enhancing health and well-being
- as educational resources used by schools and groups.
- in order to comply with Scottish Government
- in order to comply with East Dunbartonshire strategies

This would have very wide community support, as has been consistently demonstrated in recent years (1)

Community amenities enhancing health and well-being:

The pond and environs were identified as an important and valued area by the survey carried out by Milngavie Community Development Trust in 2016. Since then the group have worked in collaboration with Streetscene to make improvements.

- Crowd funded in five weeks over £2000 to replace 'swan nesting island' before the nesting season started. The new island offers protection for the breeding pair who roost there at night away from predators. This has enabled all the cygnets grow to maturity this year. The timescale demonstrates the community's interest and commitment to the pond and environs.
- The area behind the concrete benches was planted with 350 plants of native species.
- An activity table was installed on the pond side for children to use, funded by Milngavie Community Council.
- The pump operating the fountain was renewed resulting in improved water quality.
- Funds are being raised at present to naturalise the pond edge in order to further improve water quality and biodiversity

All these initiatives have wide community support and demonstrate an example of Objective 4 of the Town Centre Strategy 'improving existing space....working with partners and community groups to identify local and sustainable initiatives'

The benefits of accessible green space within walking distance are well known and form a guiding principle in both government and local authority strategies. The pond and its environs, not only offer this opportunity to residents but the wild fowl living on the pond are a talking point amongst visitors and these social interactions address issues of loneliness and isolation.

The environs of the pond form a walking and cycling route into the Precinct especially from the west/east direction which might otherwise force residents to use their cars instead. It is a walking route for children attending Milngavie Primary School and Douglas Academy.

The particular benefits and rights of children in relation to outdoor experiences are considered in detail in the Timeout Club submission.

Educational resource for schools, groups and visitors:

The pond and its environs are on the route of the West Highland Way and other walks, and tens of thousands of

people use it every year. The present Hub consultation offers a golden opportunity to develop an interpretative centre in the CE Centre to meet the needs of visitors. A cafe facility already exist in which could be enhanced and run as a social enterprise to provide employment and skills.

The pond and its environs are used by children in the Timeout Club for educational purposes on a daily basis.(see Timeout Club submission).

Working in partnership with Milngavie Community Development Trust, the children were keen to encourage healthier feeding of swans and ducks. Feeding bread results in deformity of ducks' wings and reduces oxygenation of the water. Financed by local businesses, the children produced an information leaflet and supply bags of swan and duck food for visitors to use as an alternative. A survey (2) of feeding practices by visitors in July 2019, showed a 80% reduction in bread feeding and widespread awareness of good feeding practice. This kind of initiative supports the children's development as citizens and stewards of their environment.

During Milngavie Week, Mugdock Rangers lead pond dipping sessions at the pond exploring the biodiversity of the environment. Ranger Alan McBride reports,

'The pond dipping sessions are designed to make children, and adults, aware of the rich diversity of life in a freshwater pond and how important ponds are on a local and national level. From my experience, both children and adults love these events and find the whole experience of catching and observing the pond creatures fascinating. For children it can be the wonder of seeing creatures that they generally wouldn't have the opportunity to see, and for adults it can engender nostalgic memories of creatures caught when they were children.'

These sessions could be integrated into the Science Outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence. Milngavie Community Development Trust are already preparing an outline learning package.

Further, Alan observed that the number of aquatic species has remained constant, indicating the health of the pond. Mugdock Rangers also hold bat events at the pond. Two species hunt for insects near the surface of the water.

Scottish Government and East Dunbartonshire Council strategies and policy statements:

Conserving and enhancing the pond and its environs at the CE Centre will be in accordance with government policy and the strategies and aspirations of our local authority.

In particular.

East Dunbartonshire Open Space Strategy 2015-2020

Dunbartonshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021

Active Travel Strategy 2015

Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017 -2027

East Dunbartonshire Green Network 2017-2022

East Dunbartonshire Open Space Strategy states on page 8 that

'existing open space will be protected'

The pond and its environs are a wonderful asset which deserve the protection promised in this document.

1. Milngavie Community Development Trust - Community Action Plan 2016
2. Milngavie Community Development Trust. Survey of feeding practices and attitudes 2019

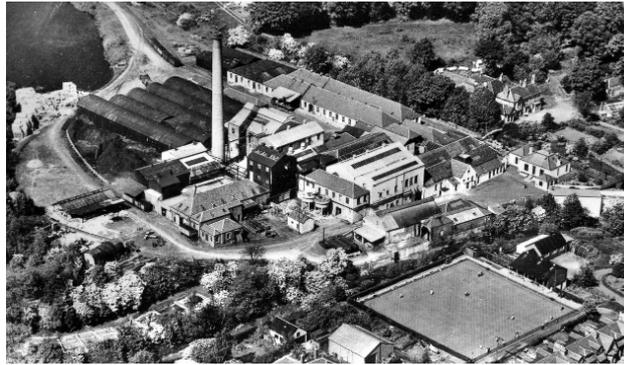
2c (ii) Historic environment

The Milngavie Cotton Mill and Paper Mill

If the Clyde made Glasgow, then the Allander made Milngavie. The Allander provided the water that drove Milngavie's transformation from a rural village with one or two corn-grinding water-mills to a town of water mills for spinning and printing cotton and for making paper. The largest and most important mill was the water-powered cotton mill where the housing estate adjacent to the Library now is, on the inside of the bend in the Allander. This mill was apparently built in 1775 and operated until the 1860s. The first detailed mapped representation of the mill is on Smith 1820 plan of Milngavie and the mill had clearly grown and expanded by the time of the mid-nineteenth century First Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 25 inches to the mile map.



First Edition OS mid-19th century mapping of Milngavie cotton mill



The Ellangowan Paper Mill, probably in the second quarter of the 20th century



The railway spur line at the paper mill. The former track bed on the right now forms the start of the West Highland Way which passes through the cutting under the location of the former foot-bridge on the right

A most obvious feature of the mill is the double mill dams that supplied water to power the mill via the mill lade. This water was diverted to these ponds from the Allander by water management structures that are still largely in place. After the mid-19th century, the mill was converted to the Allander Paper Mills, which later became the Ellangowan Paper Mills.

Paper mills require abundant clean water and the Milngavie location by the Allander was perfect, prompting the further development of the Milngavie branch railway line to bring in raw materials (esparta grass) and to ship away the finished product. The rail track bed and cutting are obvious near the Library.

The Library pond is an important remnant of the mill, being the lower mill dam, with its sluice still operational (adjacent to the Allander). The upper mill dam has been filled to a considerable depth, well above the dam's former water level, by whitish-grey alkaline clay waste from the paper mill. This was delivered to the upper dam by an extensive tramway system shown on 1930s OS mapping. Remnants of bridge footings for the tramway to cross paths and channels are still present as are small wheeled 'trucks' used on the tramway (on the banks of the Allander above the bridge off Clober Rd near Balvie Rd). The waste is known locally as the 'limies' and is home to a distinctive flora which is well suited to alkaline soils and is described in the scientific literature.

Notable features of the mill: Mill dams; railway track bed (WHWay); internal tramway track bed (narrow strip of ground between Library pond and the Allander); tramway 'trucks'; tramway bridge footings; mill dam sluice; water off-take for the mill's settling ponds; extensive deposits of alkaline mill waste with distinctive flora.

Paul Bishop, Baldernock Local History Group; September 24 2019

2d Accessibility issues

Parking is undoubtedly a major constraint to the redevelopment of the Town Hall as the new Hub, if CE Centre and library facilities are relocated there. At the moment, the existing Town Hall area is subject to major parking problems during working hours due principally to overspill into residential streets of commuters using the nearby station.

Station Road, on the south side of the Town Hall, is a very busy, single carriageway main road which carries heavy vehicles, including those serving the supermarkets. Fulton Rd and Buchanan St create a staggered crossroads, resulting in congestion. Additional Hub traffic and parking will increase congestion, pollution and hazards to vehicles and pedestrians.

On the Town Hall's west side Buchanan Street is also very busy, as besides its own residents and those from adjoining streets it serves two churches, with their daily activities as well as weddings and funerals. It also serves a primary school and a surgery. Residents complain of how difficult it can be to get out on to Station Road.

St Joseph's Church, immediately opposite the Town Hall, holds daily services but has no car park. However, its disabled members can legally park on the double yellow lines in the vicinity of the Town Hall. Due to this, Option 1, which has an entrance only on the Buchanan Street side, would be very difficult for disabled visitors. The Kersland Drive car park is some distance away and uphill from the site, and the route in between may be blocked with cars parked on the pavement. This would also be a problem for those carrying heavy or bulky equipment. Disabled people could park on the double yellow lines but there would be competition from those attending the church services or activities.

Option 2 is less worse, although it is currently difficult to get a parking place at the Lillie.

Children usually need to be dropped off and picked up, as is also often the case with disabled people. But this is not easy in Buchanan St or Station Road because of the congestion. It is possible at the moment to stop in the Lillie car park, but with additional use this space would become congested as well.

It should be noted that the CE Centre has dedicated parking close to the door, and setting down and picking up is easy because there is plenty of circulation space. But most important to note is that it is in a location which is readily accessed via local streets and the core path network linking western and northern parts of the community to the precinct, largely through the Allander Park. Many users of the library and CE Centre access the facilities on foot from these areas due to proximity, for convenience and because it is more enjoyable. (Note that the relevant page on EDC's website states: *"The Council believes that this Core Paths Plan gives the people of East Dunbartonshire a path network that enhances the daily quality of life"*).

Transfer of facilities to the Town Hall site would diminish active travel options and cause a disproportionate increase in vehicle traffic in an already congested residential area around the Town Hall and also at the junction of Park Road and Main Street. In this context it should also be noted that there is no safe cycle route from the residential area in the West of Milngavie to the Town Hall, as cycling is not permitted through the precinct.

The close proximity of the railway and bus stations is irrelevant as users of the Hub are unlikely to use them. The sub-group have concluded that if the Hub, with CE Centre/Library facilities are all located at the Town Hall, the lack of parking will result in a significant detrimental impact on the residential streets and on the use of the Hub by the community.

2e Design issues - including impact on Milngavie Town Centre Conservation Area

The Town Hall site lies within the Milngavie Town Centre Conservation Area. LDP Policy 10 states that *development within a Conservation Area will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area*. The proposed new building would be contrary to this policy. Neither of the designs would fit comfortably with the character and appearance of this area due to their massing, flat roofs and huge windows.

Viewed from the station and travel hub, the proposed massive, incongruous structure would not appear welcoming to the many visitors who arrive in Milngavie, neither would it to the local people who come to use the facilities.

Note that in 2016 EDC commissioned a submission for a Sustrans competition. The consultant saw the civic buildings of the Town Hall, listed Railway Station and St. Joseph's Church as the eastern "gateway" to Milngavie Town Centre, and produced imaginative ideas for *enhancing* the visual quality of this gateway. It also included proposals for better pedestrian links between the town hall and the precinct, and better links for cyclists coming from the west of Milngavie. (MCC promoted these ideas in its response to the Milngavie Town Centre Strategy consultation. Such proposals could be funded separately).

Huge windows inserted in the Bearsden Burgh Hall, now called a hub, have presented serious problems with overheating. They cannot be opened because of the traffic noise. But Bearsden North Community Council's requests for air conditioning have been turned down due to lack of funding. This will be more of a problem at the proposed Town Hall site than in Bearsden, as the vast glass panels will largely be south facing and will contribute hugely to the problems controlling internal temperature. Aware of the threats of climate change, forward-looking architects are now going in for smaller windows to avoid the energy costs of air conditioning.

In both designs, the amenity of the internal spaces would be compromised due to the massing of the building. For example, the Lesser Hall would have no daylight whatsoever and this would particularly affect the Friendship Circle, who bring housebound people there to enjoy company during the day.

Neither design appears to provide space for a Heritage Centre, nor for storage, lifts or first floor toilets. But this floor would be used mainly by children and retired residents during the day.

3. Creating successful places

3a *Creating Places* - a Scottish Government policy document by Architecture and Design Scotland

<https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00425496.pdf>

Architecture is not just about designing good buildings, but also about making good places - places that enhance quality of life, are desirable to visit and where communities thrive. The Scottish Government set out ambitious plans for all this in *Creating Places*, a Policy document for the way Scotland should develop in the future. The document considers 'place' to comprise the environment in which we live, the people that inhabit these spaces, and the quality of life that comes from the interaction of people and their surroundings.

The six qualities of a successful place are set out as:

- * distinctive
- * safe and pleasant
- * easy to move around
- * welcoming
- * adaptable, and
- * resource efficient

Milngavie is a distinctive place, with its own character and identity. The safe, pleasant open space of the precinct, which encourages leisurely shopping and social interaction, contributes to this distinctiveness, as does the unique art gallery and large town hall.

Importantly, the town is located at the northernmost tip of the largest conurbation in Scotland, and provides access for that conurbation (and for the rest of the world) to both long and short walks in the magnificent open countryside beyond. At the start of these walks, the Community Education and Library Centre contributes greatly to community life in Milngavie and the wider area. Together with its distinctive surroundings which, as described above, have great biodiversity and heritage value, it is a peaceful, interesting and enjoyable meeting place. The Centre also has potential for adaptation in ways that might have economic advantages – see below in the ‘opportunities’ section.

Moreover, this Centre is a place that can be easily and safely accessed by everyone because 1) it has a dedicated car park for the less mobile and those who come from further afield and 2) it is located on a network of safe, pleasant off-road paths from the major residential areas of west and north Milngavie, and from the precinct. Active travel is promoted in EDC’s transport strategies because it improves health and does not contribute to global warming.

With regard to the development of a particular place, the importance of engaging the local community at the earliest and all later stages runs right through *Creating Places*:

“Whether in urban or rural situations, communities have a unique and valuable knowledge about the neighbourhoods and places where they live. Successful places are made by involving people at the earliest stage and by continuously harnessing this wealth of skills and knowledge. Meaningful participation enables places to endure, and meet the needs of future aspirations of the people who live and work in them.”

“The involvement of communities in delivering good places should not be restricted to the consultation of their views. For engagement to be meaningful, communities must be participant from first to last. This is because communities not only possess knowledge important to the design processes, but they will most often play a leading role in the stewardship of their towns and neighbourhoods.”

“Design processes should harness and utilise the knowledge of communities and encourage active participation in the process, to deliver places with local integrity and relevance.”

Many people responding to this consultation may have referred to the dimensions of particular rooms in the proposed designs, but this is secondary. It is the layout of a town, and the location of facilities within it, that is the focus of *Creating Places*.

In discussing an appropriate government strategy for Architecture and Place, *Creating Places* points out that “communities and places benefit from investment decisions that consider all impacts – societal, environmental as well as economic. Decisions should prioritise **long term benefits**.” (MCC emphasis).

With regard to designing for a low carbon economy, it states “A ‘**re-use not replace**’ approach should be considered first when dealing with our existing built environment” and “We will advocate the delivery of places that prioritise pedestrians and encourage activity and healthy lifestyles”.

3b Community Empowerment, Planning and Place

The East Dunbartonshire Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2017-2027^[1] contains a guiding principle of coproduction and engagement as follows: “*We will continuously strive to understand the different needs of our communities, supporting them to strengthen their own communities and involving them in the design and delivery of services.*”

The LOIP promotes the use of the National Standards for Community Engagement, recognising that they “help us to realise the spirit of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 in East Dunbartonshire”. The LOIP also explains how “place planning” allows our Community Planning Partnership to look at outcomes in the context of smaller communities and to plan how we will work with each other and with local people in these areas. Although it is reasonable for EDC resources to be focussed on the most disadvantaged areas, this should not prevent place based approaches being applied across other communities.

Scotland’s Public Health Priorities^[2] contain as Public Health Priority 1 “A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities”. It is well evidenced that how we design our environment affects people’s health. The Community Empowerment Act aims to make it easier for communities to have more influence over the

decisions that affect their area and the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 aims to strengthen these powers further and to develop a greater link between community planning and development planning – working towards communities themselves being able to devise plans for their places. In order to prevent future burden on public services, decisions affecting facilities and amenities in Milngavie would be better made in the context of a **local plan for place** rather than as a series of separate decisions.

^[1] <https://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/our-local-outcomes>

^[2] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-health-priorities/>

3c Tackling Loneliness and Isolation

The Scottish Government has developed a vision for a more Connected Scotland [3], where physical spaces make it easier for communities to gather together for mutual support and self-help. There is an expectation that the strategy will be taken forward by a range of key actors from all sectors, certainly including individuals, communities, the Third Sector and social enterprise, local authorities, other public bodies, and business. While reducing isolation and loneliness is not always explicitly stated as an aim in planning arrangements, we know that community operated/ programmed buildings can bring local communities together. Assets based approaches, focusing on the strengths of a place to build locally directed improvements, are a positive way to engage with people and support the prevention agenda. With an ageing population who are experiencing more complex health needs we will need more, not fewer, community facilities and these will reduce the burden on public services in the future and contribute to the achievement of these outcomes in the LOIP:

- Local Outcome 5: Our people experience good physical and mental health and wellbeing with access to a quality built and natural environment in which to lead healthier and more active lifestyles.
- Local Outcome 6: Our older population and more vulnerable citizens are supported to maintain their independence and enjoy a high quality of life, and they, their families and carers benefit from effective care and support services.

Relevant here are the comments of the U3A Bookworms Group, who use the CE Centre, when they endorsed the user group response:

“We are a group of senior citizens, a few of us with mobility problems, and none of us getting any younger, and the present building suits us well. There is ample parking, the room provided is accessible and large enough and there are toilet facilities on the same floor. It is also very cheap. If the CE Centre was refurbished (it has become rather scruffy), and cleaned more often it would be ideal. There is even a disused cafe on the premises which could be put back into use.

There is much concern at the moment about the isolation that elderly people can fall into, and here is a building which is suitable for the promotion of activity and social life for this vulnerable group (along with the other user groups). Bearsden and Milngavie council would be losing a great opportunity by closing it. Good Luck with the submission.”

^[3] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections/>

4. Alternative options for the Milngavie Hub

As demonstrated above, EDC’s proposals would have serious negative impacts on health and well being of the Milngavie community and also of people from a wide area who come to use the facilities. Most affected would be children and older people. The general view is that both CE Centre/ Library and Town Hall/ Lillie buildings should be

refurbished. and the Customer Services provided at one of these sites. Such options could bring benefits in terms of all the outcomes of the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, including opportunities that could boost the economy and also provide more revenue for the Council.

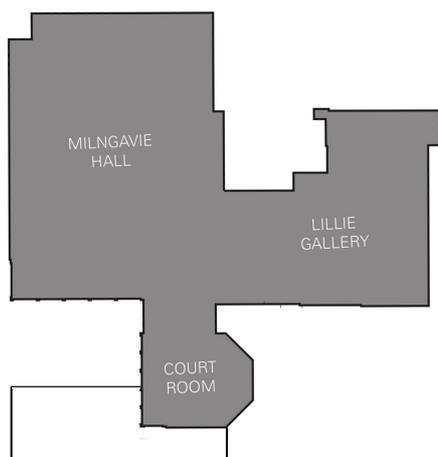
Milngavie has many dynamic organisations whose efforts support the work of the Council, and who have ambitious plans for the future. These organisations deserve to be encouraged rather than constrained.

Councillors have told us that EDC cannot afford to refurbish both sites. However, we have looked at the capital expenditure figures which were given to us by EDC for Options 1 and 2, and consider that a two site solution is possible within these costs. We request that the Council works with us to provide the best for the people of East Dunbartonshire. Two possibilities are explored below.

Option 3

For Option 3, the Town Hall, Lillie Art Gallery and their ancillary facilities would be refurbished as in Option 2. The indicative cost for this would be **£1,870,000**. The Court Room would also be left intact. Since no demolition would be required, there would be **£2,147,000** of the total indicative cost of Option 2 left over for the following:

A. Construction of a relatively small extension to provide the customer services, staff facilities and also storage space for the Lillie. (Note that storage proposed in Options 1 & 2 robs the lesser Hall of daylight). The required dimensions for all these are given in the plans for Options 1 & 2. This extension should be designed to blend with the existing building which is considered a good example of the architecture of its time. A possible location is illustrated below, where a 2-storey extension forms a third arm around an attractive green square.



B. Refurbishment of the Court Room, adapting it as a permanent Heritage Centre (Action 4 of the Milngavie Town Centre Strategy) and making a link to the Lillie Art Gallery so it becomes part of the visitor offering.

Clearly A + B will cost a lot less than the massive extension proposed in Option 2 which, besides storage, customer and staff facilities plus the heritage centre promised to the MHC group, crams in the Library and CE Centre facilities

Therefore, a substantial proportion of the £2,147,000 would be left over, and ideally a decision would be made to use it for upgrading the CE Centre/ Library building. Even if this is not possible, users of the facilities agree that retaining the status quo would be far preferable to a dumbed down library and unsuitable facilities in a less easy to access place. We realise that EDC has sought to provide the customer services together with the library to save on revenue costs, but, since the library and art gallery both come under EDLC, shouldn't providing customer services together with the art gallery have the same effect?

Option 4

There is a strong case for locating the customer services at the CE Centre/ Library site, which has formed a true hub for the Milngavie community for over four decades. Although to outsiders the site may seem dislocated from the currently designated town centre, it is at the heart of the town and very easy to reach on foot or bike from homes or

the precinct, so encourages active travel. For the less mobile and those transporting equipment there is parking close to the door, and potential for the number of spaces to be increased.

This is probably the best site for the hub so long as the funds for the project can be split between the two sites. Otherwise the town hall and the Lillie, both extremely valuable assets for East Dunbartonshire, might be allowed to deteriorate further. The customer services could be built as a southwards extension to the gym, or another floor could be added to the south wing of the building, placing the customer services at ground level.

5 Some golden opportunities

Retaining both sites would allow what Milngavie Community Development Trust describes as “golden opportunities” for the future, many of which could be community projects with outside funding. Some have been suggested above, and others are listed below:

Town Hall/ Art Gallery/ Court Room

This complex was opened in 1962 on the site of the Victorian Town Hall which had been destroyed by fire. Extra land was acquired for the gallery, using a bequest from local businessman James Lillie, a member of Milngavie Art Club, and for the Court Room. The design, combining the three functions with good ancillary facilities, was the result of a UK-wide competition and is greatly admired by some experts. The building now badly needs refurbishing but has great potential as a cultural centre, for local people and visitors alike.

The redundant space of the former District Court is currently let to **Milngavie Heritage Centre** group for their talks, meetings and popular six-monthly exhibitions, but the group wishes to form a permanent centre/ museum and this is reflected by Action 4 of the Milngavie Town Centre Strategy. Storage for donated historic documents and artefacts is required. The facility could also cover the surrounding villages and Bearsden, including the Antonine Wall, and going back even further in time, the Bearsden shark replica could be displayed once again - there was no room for it after the Brookwood Library was crammed into the Burgh Hall. Heritage gives a place its own identity and is also an attraction for visitors. A direct physical link to the entrance for the Lillie should be made.

The Lillie Art Gallery has been described as a “national treasure” which was specially designed by an expert, but as well as refurbishment it needs more storage and up-to-date equipment for presentations etc. Some themed concerts held in the gallery combining modes of expression have worked very well. From the outside, however, the gallery appears as a ‘backwater’ to the town hall, but the open space in front could be enhanced – e.g. with an imposing artwork, attractive paving and trees. This could be a separate project, for which a grant could be obtained.

Milngavie Town Hall is a great asset for East Dunbartonshire as it is by far the largest public hall in the Authority and has good ancillary provision - changing rooms, kitchen, bar and lesser hall - all at the same level. It is the only one with a proscenium stage and the hall has a sprung floor. Its uses therefore include performances, large public meetings, ceilidhs and dinner dances, and also annual events such as horticultural shows. Such large scale events take place mainly in the evenings or at weekends, when parking is not a problem, and the proximity to public transport an advantage for visitors from further afield. It is however in a neglected condition and equipment is so outdated that it is no longer used by visiting artist on tour (including, but not only, folk artists) or by local voluntary performing groups.

The hall requires updated lighting and sound systems, and better kitchen equipment. Sound proofing between main and lesser halls should be considered, although the flexibility to combine them is also appreciated. Moreover, the venue could be redesigned in such a way with new equipment and as to provide for flexible use, such as a community cinema. Such improvements to this venue would allow for income- generation both for voluntary organisations and for EDC. A venue for a community cinema is identified in Milngavie Community Development Trust’s Community Action Plan, which was based on a survey of every household in 2015. Moreover, the survey last month of MCDT members showed a strong desire to use funding to improve the attractiveness of the Town Hall.

As noted above, the Town Hall Complex is at the eastern gateway to Milngavie Town Centre and, besides visual enhancements, such as with trees and paving, there are opportunities to improve links with the pedestrian precinct on foot and from the west of Milngavie by cycle. These could be funded separately.

The Community Education Centre/ Library building and its surroundings.

This area is wholly within the designated open space of Allander Park, and the pond within the local nature conservation site and the wildlife corridor associated with the Allander Water. As described in previous sections, the surroundings have great biodiversity and heritage value, and there is potential to make much more of them for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. Funding for such projects may be obtained through separate grants.

The area could form a kind of 'base camp' for Mugdock Country Park, and connect with the rangers there for wildlife projects. Improvements to the route between them should also be progressed. MCDT would like to see the first part of the WHW, as far as the Iron Bridge, made suitable for less mobile people. This would mean an improved surface and perhaps more seats, especially at good viewing points. Interpretation of the heritage could also be provided along the paths.

The building itself has evolved to work well for its present functions, and there is room for extension, northwards or upwards, if needed in the future. Further uses could also be accommodated within the existing centre, some of which could raise revenue for the Council.

For instance, the need for a Walking Centre, or Welcome Centre, was highlighted by MCC for the Milngavie Town Centre Strategy and this building, sited on the WHW, would be an ideal place for it. The centre would welcome not only long distance walkers, but also day trippers throughout the year. There is a huge variety of walks of different lengths and levels of difficulty, and Milngavie is at the end of a railway line accessible to a large urban population. Information on all the walks could be provided, with details of natural and historic heritage. The cafe could provide this facility in parallel with its current function, and an adjoining room used as a shop for items visitors might need.

Improvements to the building itself, if there is any money left after refurbishment, would ideally make it relate better to its surroundings. Simple changes, such as more and larger windows overlooking the pond, would help. Ideas for the library have been described previously.

Both on-road and WHW routes between the CE Centre/Library building and the precinct should be improved, as per Actions 7 and 22 of the Town Centre Strategy, and better signage is needed. Projects by the BID and Milngavie in Bloom have already enhanced the WHW route, and further work is planned. Colourful shrubs, heritage interpretation and/or artworks could make this route an attraction in itself. The ramp from the WHW to the CE Centre also needs upgraded and provided with welcoming signage.

6 Conclusion

EDC's presentations in June, unlike the ones in December 2017 which provided us with no new information, have been very useful in that they have kick-started constructive thinking within the whole community. The two options presented have made us think about what Milngavie really needs in the way of community facilities, and also about how to make it a more successful place, both in terms of the well being of its residents and of economic advantages for the area. Now we are ready to begin meaningful discussions with the Council.

After careful consideration and discussion with relevant Community Groups, and taking account of the views of the Milngavie residents, the consensus is that we whilst we welcome the proposals to refurbish the Town Hall Complex with improved facilities, neither of the proposed options meets the community needs. We are of the opinion that neither option would provide Milngavie with overall improved facilities and if progressed would represent a missed opportunity to revitalise service provision in the area.

The main concerns and issues are:

1. The Town Hall is poorly located for access by the community residents during working hours, particularly children and those with reduced mobility, and this will act as a deterrent to use of the Town Hall as a hub.
2. The Town Hall proposals have insufficient space to accommodate the present community groups' activities, and would compromise existing activities at the Town Hall.
3. Since parking at the Town Hall is inadequate for the proposed use, the existing congestion on surrounding streets would be exacerbated.
4. At the CE Centre/Library there are traffic free pedestrian and cycle routes to the building. Moving facilities to the Town Hall will force a shift away from active transport as a viable option, contrary to EDC's transport policies.
5. The potential for loss of an important community space, rich biodiversity and historic heritage, at the pond/woodland area.
6. The loss of interaction between the children and the natural environment at the CE Centre woodland and pond area, and the associated educational benefits and in health and wellbeing.
7. The loss of the opportunity to develop the long-held aspiration to strengthen the links between Milngavie and Mugdock Country Park, and to create a Welcome Centre for both short and long distance walks, including the iconic West Highland Way, with advantages for the area's economy.

We are extremely concerned about the potential loss to the community of the CE Centre/Library venue, and would prefer to see customer services developed at this more centrally located site, with the Town Hall complex refurbished as a performance venue/heritage centre and unique art gallery. We would recommend that the "Ring Fenced" available funding for the Milngavie Hub is used to best advantage across the two sites to ensure that community provision for the growing population of the area is fully catered for, including the young, old, and the deprived sections of our community. We are of the opinion that EDC should give consideration to more enterprising and imaginative solutions to reflect the aspirations and requirements of Milngavie.

This view is endorsed by at least 2,000 individuals, including members of the groups represented on the Hub sub group, and residents who have communicated with MCC.

Because there are so many downsides to the present proposals, and endless opportunities presented by retaining both sites, we request that officers and our elected councillors begin meaningful discussions on alternative options with community representatives, reflecting the requirements of the Scottish Government's *Creating Places*, the Community Empowerment Act and the Council's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan. The two options proposed reflect neither consideration of long term outcomes nor a detailed knowledge of Milngavie.

September 2019