**MILNGAVIE COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY SURVEY** **Milngavie Community Council response**

## Q7. Can you suggest any specific strengths or attributes within Milngavie that could be built on?

**The Pedestrian Precinct** at the very centre of the town. This large open space, with seating, provides opportunities for people of all ages to meet and socialise, and for community events. Besides a variety of shops, services and cafes, it includes the Fraser Centre (Old People's Welfare) and a children's play park, with a Youth Centre just outside the pedestrianised area.

**The Hills and Green Spaces** within and around the town. Milngavie was built around the Allander Water and nestles below the Kilpatrick Hills, with the Campsie Fells to the North. The famous Mugdock and Craigmaddie Reservoirs (Milngavie Reservoirs) lie within its boundary as does part of Mugdock Country Park. The town itself is bisected by parkland alongside the river - Allander and Lennox Parks - to the north and south of the precinct respectively. So besides the long distance walks (see below) there are many opportunities for short and medium distance walks for all abilities.

**The Start or Finish of three Long Distance Walks.** Besides the world-renowned West Highland Way, the obelisk on the bridge in the precinct also marks the start or end of the Clyde Coastal Path and the Allander Way (leading to the Kelvin Way).

**The Allander Water** itself. There are many opportunities to observe wildlife and learn about Milngavie's industrial heritage along the river. The fish ladder alongside a dramatic waterfall and the ancient corn mill are probably unique features to find in a town centre.

**The Railway Station**, with frequent trains to Glasgow and Edinburgh. The listed Victorian station forms an attractive gateway to the town centre.

**Milngavie Town Hall** is a very important asset on account of its capacity. The main hall is the only venue in East Dunbartonshire large enough for certain events, such as the Inter-Schools Chess Competition and other community events such as charity concerts by Monday Swing. Due to its sprung floor, it is particularly appreciated for ceilidhs and dinner-dances.

**Cultural Events** Milngavie is fortunate to have the Lillie Art Gallery which holds regular exhibitions including those organised by Milngavie Art Club and other arts groups. Milngavie Music Club and Milngavie Folk Club provide a wide range of concerts whilst the very successful Milngavie Pipe Band has appeared at high-profile events such as last year's Thomas Muir celebration at the Scottish Parliament.

**Conclusion:** From the above, Milngavie could boost its economy by building on its role as a walking centre and a destination for cultural and fun events, while at the same time improving the quality of life and well-being of its residents.

## Q8. What do you feel are the 3 biggest challenges or requirements for Milngavie town centre?

## *Q9. Do you have any suggestions regarding ways to address these challenges or requirements in Milngavie town centre?*

These two questions will be answered together. Here it is assumed that "town centre" refers to the town centre as designated in Local Plan 2 plus the extension recommended by the LDP reporter, which includes the railway station, Station Road as far as the Town Hall and Lillie Art Gallery, and Milngavie Primary School).

Some of the suggested ways to address the challenges may not be affordable at the present time, but they are noted as aspirations for the future.

Since we are responding as a group, rather than as an individual, we have addressed more than three challenges or requirements. These are:

1. To make more of the pedestrianised precinct within Milngavie's town centre

2. To improve access within the town centre

3. To make more of Milngavie's location at the start of the West Highland Way and other long and short distance walks, and its potential as a destination for culture and events

4. To make more of Milngavie's iconic river

5. To address the problem of parking for the railway station

6. To cater for the high proportion of elderly residents, as well as young families

### 1. The Challenge to make more of Milngavie's Pedestrianised Precinct

The pedestrianised precinct which forms the main part of Milngavie Town Centre is a rare asset that has been envied by visiting representatives from other BIDs. Whenever MCC has conducted petitions or surveys in the precinct, we have noted the high proportion of visitors from other parts of East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire and Stirling. They say they enjoy the safe, attractive ambience for their shopping. Nevertheless there are a number of challenges:

a) Shop closures
b) Improving amenity
c) Precinct furniture
d) Play equipment,
e) Community events and festivals
f) Maintaining the safe environment

**a) Shop closures.**
Shopping centres everywhere are having to deal with competition from out-of-town and, increasingly, online shopping. Despite an apparently high footfall in the precinct, a particular problem is the very high rents, and there are frequent closures.

Ideally the shops in Milngavie town centre should cater for all the needs of the resident population, as they once did. Now there are too many selling similar goods and services, and residents have to travel for other needs. Milngavie is well-supplied with food shops, but the recent announcement regarding the closure of Iceland is unwelcome, since it provided good quality but low-cost food and Milngavie has a significant deprived population.

We feel that there should be some way in which the Council, Government or BID should be able to intervene to influence the level of rents in town centres, and encourage a more diverse array of shops. Note that in the '90s, due to the devastating drop in footfall in the precinct following the opening of Tesco, the Bearsden and Milngavie District Council commissioned a professional study to look at ways to bring people back. The study recommended bringing Boots and M&S stores into the centre, and somehow this was achieved!

Suggestions for shops and services that would be welcome include an outdoor shop, a book shop and a bunkhouse. Note that the former book shop closed because the owner retired, but she confirmed that it was a viable business.

**b) Improving amenity.**

Milngavie's central precinct is a pleasant shopping environment, partly thanks to the Council's extensive planting of trees. For the well-being of residents and to retain footfall, its amenity needs to be protected and enhanced. Measures such as strict control of advertisements, attention to cleanliness and colourful planting should help. The contribution of Milngavie in Bloom cannot be overestimated in this regard, both with their colourful planting and with litter removal, and they deserve the strongest support. With regard to cleanliness, there could be segregated recycling bins and evening venues could have cigarette stub bins in easy reach of the entrances as part of the licence agreement

Milngavie in Bloom, with help from the Scouts and Bearsden & Milngavie Ramblers, have worked hard to dramatically improve the first part of the West Highland Way, where it leaves the town centre. The Town Centre Strategy should include an aim to encourage collaboration between community groups and the Council in furthering improvements to the centre.

The precinct lies within a conservation area, which is another reason for protecting the appearance of the buildings. The current trend to totally cover all shop windows with repetitive large advertisements shouting out percentage reductions must be curtailed - enforcement measures may be required. The Council should also request that owners maintain the attractiveness of their properties - a particular example is the concrete wall around the Telephone Exchange, which needs to be whitewashed.

**c) Precinct furniture.**

There are many benches in the precinct, but they are little used except during warm dry spells. This is because the stainless steel is extremely cold to sit on, and the large pools of water that accumulate on their surfaces seem to remain there for hours (if not days) after the rain has stopped. Ideally we would like to see replacement of the benches with a type more likely to be used. One of our members observed benches provided by Pembrokeshire County Council that appeared to be made of some synthetic material warm to the touch and did not seem to retain standing water.

With regard to the location of the benches, more thought needs to be given to their function. They could be arranged in clusters to encourage conversations, or under trees to make the most of their shade in summer.

Many children from Milngavie Primary School eat their lunch in the precinct, so a few tables would also be appreciated. (They have been observed using a concrete box, part of some utility, as a table).

**d) Play equipment.**
Footfall increases dramatically at primary school closing time as well as in the school's lunch hour. Whilst there is a play park for the under-5s, older children tend to play under the trees, climbing on the lower branches or swinging on the bike stands. It might be possible to introduce some suitable play equipment for them without compromising the flexibility of the open space to host events.

Equipment should probably not be placed under the trees if there is a danger the roots could be damaged. The iconic cedar near the play park appears to be in decline. We are advised that this may be due to a fungus. However the area available for this tree's roots to grow is very constrained and it seems possible that the construction of the cycle stand in this area in 2014 could have caused disproportionate damage.

**e) Community events and festivals**
The Scottish Government considers it important that town centres continue to be a focus for their communities, even though their use for shopping has declined. It recommends that social, educational, residential, leisure cultural uses should all be encouraged. The open space of the precinct has proved a popular venue for community events, as well as for farmers' markets. The BID now organises a series of events which are very successful, and this year the new Milngavie Community Development Trust brought back the "Milngavie Week" which had not taken place for a number of years.

Most of the community events that have taken place in Milngavie, as with Bearsden, have been due to hard work by a few dedicated members of the community, with virtually no help from the Council. This contrasts sharply with Kirkintilloch, where large amounts of effort and money are thrown at the Canal Festival. We hope that with the completion of the Town Centre Strategies, resources will be distributed more fairly. Much may be achieved by community groups working together with the Council.

Many people would like to see a Walking Festival in Milngavie. Other enhancements or activities that have been suggested for the centre include a community cinema, an outdoor chess board by the Town Hall and a Men's Shed.

**f) Safe and relaxing environment**
The exclusion of vehicles of all kinds has meant that people of all ages and abilities can use the precinct without fear, and everyone can relax without looking over their shoulders all the time. The few cyclists who now choose to ignore this rule are mostly young and able bodied, with no concept of what it means to have a sensory, neurological or physical impairment.

To ensure that the precinct remains a place for *everyone*, new signs are needed to reinforce that cyclists must walk with their bikes within the precinct, providing information on the location of cycle stands if required. Considering the small distances involved, walking is a very trivial inconvenience.

It has been suggested that cycling would not be a problem if there were cycle lanes within the precinct, but it is difficult to work out where these could be located. At the sides they would conflict with people going in and out of shops, and in the central areas with seating, farmers' markets or stalls and other equipment used during events.

## 2. The requirement to improve access within Milngavie town centre

The town centre by-pass, Woodburn Way, was constructed in the early '70s. Originally it was designed for fast motorised transport, with no footways, pedestrian crossings or cycle lanes. Later a footway was added but only on the south east side. More recently a short stretch of northbound cycleway was designated, but only in the town centre in the part of Woodburn Way outwith the town centre.,

Now that Tesco has been built on the other side of Woodburn Way and included within the town centre, the road is no longer a by-pass but a motorway dividing the centre. This poses a number of problems, which we have attempted to address below. Please see the map below, which shows how this road could be shared with pedestrians and cyclists, and transformed into an attractive central 'boulevard' that is more people-friendly and provides a sense of arrival at the town centre. (These ideas are based on a report by Page\Park Architects, commissioned by a community group supported by MCC in 2011, see http://milngavie.org/documents/PP_report.pdf)

The following will be addressed:

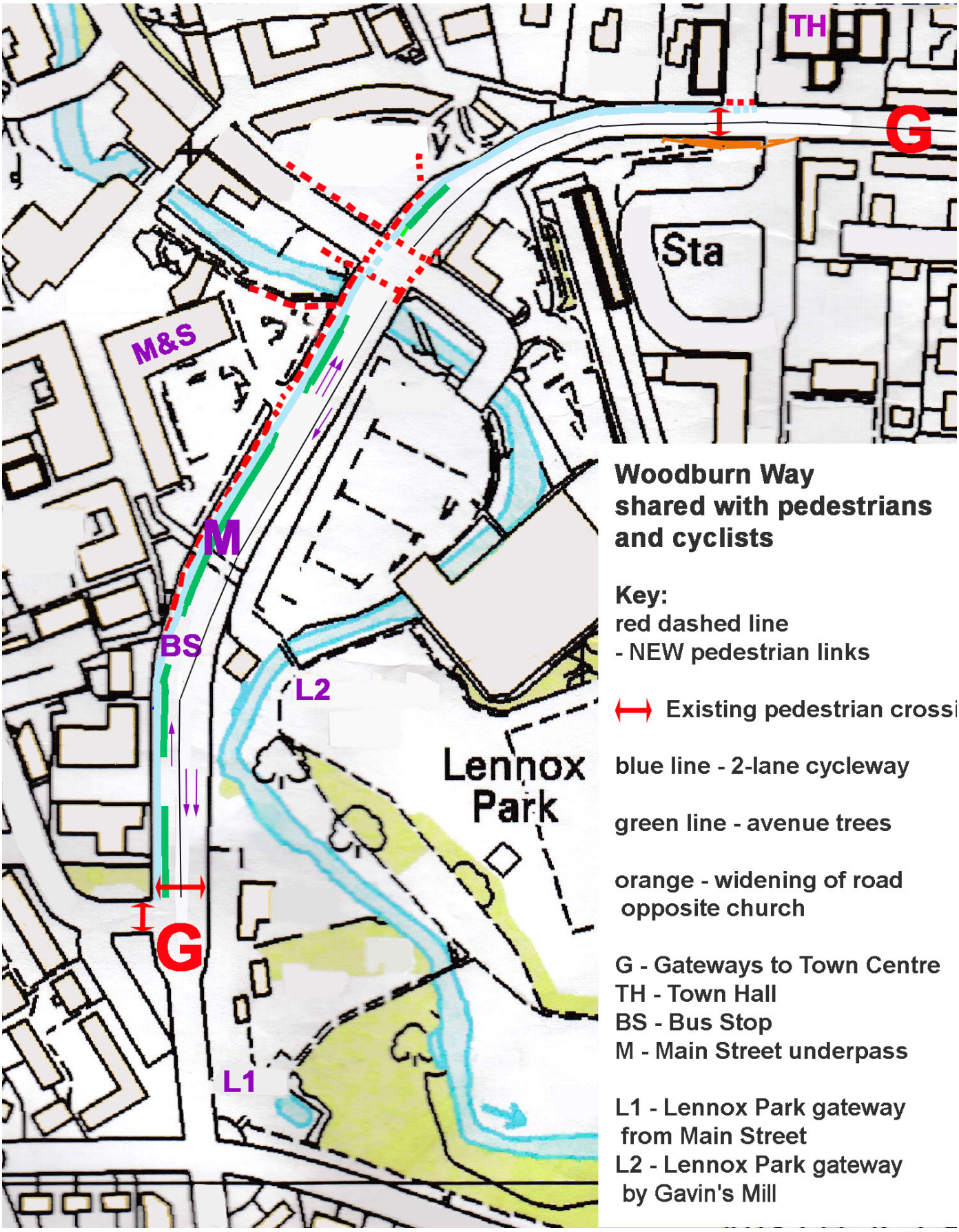
a)Woodburn Way is a barrier for many pedestrians.
b) Cyclists may wish to by pass the pedestrian precinct
c) The by-pass has dislocated the Town Hall and Lillie Art Gallery
d) Better signage is required
e) Access to adjoining green spaces could be improved

**a) Pedestrian access.**
Whilst it has provided the safe, traffic-free precinct, for many pedestrians the by-pass forms a barrier to Lennox Park, the station, Gavin's Mill and now Tesco. Apart from the one to the Station, the underpasses are too steep to be DDA compliant and are hard work for anyone pushing a pram or carrying shopping. They can be slippery with leaves in autumn or with ice in cold weather, and the one by the Allander Water regularly floods. 'Desire lines' through bushes show that people take their lives in their hands and cross on all four sides of the lights at Ellangowan Road. (Note that there are pedestrian crossings at both ends of Woodburn Way, but none along its length).

The map uses dashed red lines to suggest new pedestrian routes that avoid the underpasses They are linked by a new footway running along the north west side of Woodburn Way, from the bus stop by the Ashfield Road surgery to the Station Road car park. This footway leads to pedestrian crossings on all four sides of the traffic lights. (Note that when the Gavin's Mill Road crossing is activated, traffic in all directions stops). The surface of this square could be given a different treatment, reflecting the precinct.

The three underpasses could also be physically improved and/or made more inviting, especially the one at the Main Street end which is very steep. Engineering works to reduce its gradient would allow its use by a wider range of people. The forbidding dark concrete over the entrances could be covered with attractive signage, indicating Lennox Park and Gavin's Mill on one side and the Precinct on the other.

The underpass beside the river is part of the Allander Way, and itself has much potential for enhancement. But an alternative is needed for those unable to use the underpass and for when the river floods. We suggest that where it begins to slope, this path could be divided, with a parallel path continuing along the level at the edge of the M&S car park. It would meet the suggested Woodburn Way footway, leading to the crossing at the traffic lights.




**Woodburn Way**
**shared with pedestrians and cyclists**

**Key:**
red dashed line
- NEW pedestrian links

Existing pedestrian crossi

blue line - 2-lane cycleway

green line - avenue trees

orange - widening of road opposite church

G - Gateways to Town Centre
TH - Town Hall
BS - Bus Stop
M - Main Street underpass

L1 - Lennox Park gateway from Main Street
L2 - Lennox Park gateway by Gavin's Mill

**b) Provision for cyclists.**
Currently the speed of traffic on the over-engineered dual carriageway is a deterrent for many cyclists, and they are required to dismount within the precinct. Therefore a safe cycleway along Woodburn Way is required.

We note that, in summer of 2016, EDC's Submission for a Sustrans competition included a design for a protected cycleway on Woodburn Way. This design could have been disastrous because it reduced northbound traffic to a single lane, trapping it between the raised central reservation and a line of trees. (We suspect the consultant worked from maps rather than "on the ground"). Any break down or accident would have brought northbound traffic, including emergency vehicles, to a standstill until it could be cleared. At least on Bears Way 1 emergency vehicles have the option of getting past on the wrong side of the road, so are not held up indefinitely.

It would be possible to provide a cycleway *without* compromising safety if the central reservation, which appears to be at least 3m wide, is completely or partly removed. Several layouts are possible.

The layout shown in the attached plan has a bi-directional cycleway running along the north west side of the entire length of Woodburn Way. This is divided from the motor traffic by a line of distinctive trees, changing the character from by-pass to avenue and giving a sense of arrival at the town centre. Gateway features could also be added at both ends.

The plan shows three wide lanes for the use of motorised transport on Woodburn Way. The removal of the hard central reservation allows for flexibility in their use, particularly important in the case of road works or breakdowns. In the southern part, the southbound traffic requires an extra lane for turning right at Park Road, whilst towards the north and east there is a need for northbound traffic to be able to pass stationary buses or a build-up of cars queuing to get into the M&S car park (The Sustrans Submission consultant did not seem to be aware of the bus stop or these queues).

It would also be possible to provide a bi-directional cycleway whilst retaining two lanes in each direction with a narrowed central reservation. This would mean omitting the green strip with trees, and probably the footway described above along the north west edge of Woodburn Way

**c) Dislocation of Station Road by the by-pass**
The construction of Woodburn Way has dislocated the east end of Station Road, including the Town Hall and Lillie Art Gallery, from the west end which lies within the precinct. Where the by-pass merges into Station Road, the pedestrian connection narrows down to 1.5m in front of an active church. This feels like walking along a motorway bridge rather than through a historic town centre.

Where Woodburn Way joins with the narrow Station Road, it might be possible to widen the road on its southern edge, as indicated on the map. This could allow for a widened footway and continuation of the bi-directional cycleway described above. A platform crossing of Buchanan Street is suggested for easier access to the town hall and art gallery.

Consideration should also be given to ways of improving the connection from the visual standpoint, and making the intervening space more attractive. Moreover events in the Town Hall, and exhibitions at the Lillie, should be prominently promoted within the precinct.

**d) Improving signage.**
The current signage within the town centre is tasteful and very suitable for a conservation area, but it is wholly inadequate. Some of the signs are too high up to be noticeable, or are hidden behind branches of trees, and directions to some important facilities, such as the Library/Community Education Centre, seem to have been omitted altogether.

Signage therefore requires to be reviewed. Particularly useful would be a large map, in the centre and at the station, showing the main green spaces around with clear directions on how to get to each on foot or bike. This would include the Milngavie Reservoirs (via Commissioners' Walk), Lennox Park, Allander Park, Dougalston and Mugdock Country Park. It could also include nearby community projects such as the Woodland play area and Milngavie Primary School orchard.

**e) Access to green spaces around.**
The southern boundary of the designated Milngavie Town Centre adjoins Lennox Park, but people are hardly aware that it is there. A sub-group of Milngavie Community Development Trust is working on the development of a masterplan for Lennox Park. The group suggests that points of access could be cleared of vegetation, would allow views into the park making it appear more inviting, and that better signage is also needed. At the north east access, close to the railway line behind Tesco, the path is steep and muddy but Tesco may be willing to improve this. (This point on the map is hidden by the key).

Allander Park may be accessed from the centre via the West Highland Way, passing the Library and Community Education Centre. Again, the MCDT are looking at ways to improve the start of the WHW, including a circular route for all abilities between the obelisk and the Iron Bridge (off Clober Road).

## 3. The challenge to make more of Milngavie's location at the start of the West Highland Way and other walks, and its potential as a day-trip destination for walkers of all abilities and for cultural and fun events.

There are significant economic opportunities for Milngavie Town Centre, because the West Highland Way has been described as one of the top ten walks in the WORLD. Besides receiving visitors from all parts of the globe, its location at the end of a railway line from Glasgow and Edinburgh makes it highly accessible for a large proportion of Scotland's population.

Scotland has several long distance walks, however the WHW is the most famous. Yet other councils and villages at the start and end of Scotland's walks provide a Welcome Centre with full information, maps, guidance and some supplies of outdoor goods. Milngavie currently lacks even basic facilities visitors as well as for local shoppers. A few years ago we at least had toilets and a small information centre, but the way the Kirkintilloch-focussed Council mis-managed this issue is quite astonishing.

There is now a plan to provide toilets and information at the Youth Centre, though in the longer term it would be better to have a first-class Welcome Centre to provide a true Scottish Welcome, with purpose-built facilities including showers and more extensive information. It could provide include full information on the short and medium distance as

well as the long distance walks, with interpretation of the wildlife, geology and history of the land around them.

The Welcome Centre could also provide information on Milngavie itself, its heritage and what it has to offer today. The Bearsden and Milngavie Ramblers have produced a leaflet describing 8 walks around Milngavie; this could be built on in collaboration with local groups with a series of more specialised walks, such as for less able people or for the industrial heritage along the river or at the Milngavie Reservoirs.

An MCC member who worked in the former Milngavie Tourist Information Office noted a severe lack of outdoor goods on sale for the walkers starting in Milngavie. People come from all over the world and sometimes get things confiscated on flights, so are looking to buy supplies and gear as well as souvenirs. Moreover many local residents have settled here and in surrounding villages because they enjoy walking and other outdoor activities, and would appreciate not having to travel to obtain their needs. Other members consider that there is a shortage of low-cost overnight accommodation. We wonder if the Council's Economic Development department is able to do anything about these requirements for goods or services.

Milngavie should be promoted more widely as a day-trip destination, with leaflets distributed to information centres in Glasgow and other towns, and at train stations.

## 4. The challenge to make more of Milngavie's iconic river

Milngavie has been described as “the child of the Allander”, yet within the town centre the Allander Water is hardly visible even though it flows right through the middle. There is much potential for raising awareness of the river’s biodiversity and for bringing its industrial heritage to life, so that it becomes a valuable educational resource and splendid tourist attraction.

In connection with the Greenspace Strategy consultation EDC were conducting in 2012, local community groups met with a greenspace officer to discuss the above issues. Within the precinct the river is hidden by a solid stone wall at the bridge, and by a dense growth of laurel on the banks. The officer suggested lowering a part of the wall (with replacement railings) to allow views down the river, while the stone could be used for a plinth beside the adjacent play area, with interpretation of the wildlife for the children.

The Allander Way runs south eastwards alongside the river from the obelisk that marks the start of the West Highland Way. So this regionally important route, links the West Highland Way with Glasgow and the Clyde Way via the Kelvin Way. Yet many people think that it is just the path to the M&S car park! There is a major opportunity to promote it, with better signage and information on what may be seen along the Way and where it leads to. Ideally the unattractive railings could be replaced with ones that use the heron emblem (which elsewhere is used to denote the Allander Way), or there could an arch over the Way where it passes the Fraser Centre, reflecting that over the WHW.

Just downstream from the precinct there are dramatic falls (due to past industry) with a fish ladder constructed some 20 years ago for enabling salmon to get past to the upper reaches of the river where they spawn. But there is nothing eye-catching in the precinct to inform people about what is a unique feature to find within a town centre. The biodiversity officer suggested that panels depicting the wild creatures to be seen could be inserted into the railings between path and river – heron, dipper, salmon, otter etc –

to lead children down from the play area. Milngavie in Bloom have done much to improve the space beside the falls, and there is further scope for interpretation here. Where the river winds around the Tesco car park there is much potential for enhancement and MiB have been conferring with Tesco with regard to this.

Gavin's Mill, which lies beside the river in the south west of the town centre, is iconic for Milngavie, and probably gave Milngavie its name. There has been a corn mill here since the 12th century and the current building was still in use for this purpose until the 1950s. Later it became a restaurant, though has lain empty for several years. For an old mill to survive within a town centre is believed to be unique in Scotland.

There is now a plan by East Dunbartonshire Fairtrade group, together with some local community groups, to take over the mill as a community resource. This would be based on the Balmore Coach House enterprise which is now closing. Projects include a Fairtrade shop and café/restaurant, with a healthy food shop selling locally grown produce. Aspirations for the future include extending at the rear to provide a heritage centre with exhibitions, and a working mill wheel to generate electricity for the building. It is very much hoped that the Council will give their fullest support to this project.

Just beside the mill a bridge crosses into Lennox Park (outwith the designated town centre). Here, with careful pruning of the vegetation, there is an opportunity to make a feature of the river and of the park. A map of the park, including its relationship with the river, would be very useful here.

Unfortunately there are two recurring problems along the river. One is litter, which is something MiB tries to tackle with help from other community groups and Tesco. The other is the invasive species that are so readily distributed by the water – skunk cabbage, japanese knotweed and himalayan balsam. EDC has held work parties, but the invaders seem to be getting the upper hand.

## 5. The requirement to address the lack of parking spaces at the station

Unfortunately this is inhibiting the use of this excellent public transport option, and resulting in congestion on arterial roads and parking on residential roads in and around the town centre. The car parks intended to serve the town hall and art gallery, which do not have parking charges, are full from early morning and are therefore unavailable for visits to these venues during working hours.

The provision of tiered parking at the station, as some residents have suggested, would not be possible without severely compromising the visual amenity of the listed Victorian station and the surrounding civic buildings, which form an attractive gateway to the town centre.
A rail halt beside the Allander Leisure Centre has been a Council and community aspiration ever since the Allander was built. For the ED Local Plan 1, planners devised a scheme for releasing green belt land for development at Kilmardinny to pay for it, together with land for park and ride. Besides enabling residents, especially children, to access the Allander sustainably, it would ease the pressure of commuter parking in various parts of Milngavie and Bearsden.

Today, with increased awareness of the implications of global warming, such a facility seems more important than ever. It is therefore impossible to understand why the Council now appears to be dragging its feet.

### 6. The requirement to cater for the high proportion of elderly residents, as well as young families, in Milngavie

Milngavie may well have the highest proportion of elderly people in Scotland. The precinct is a safe and relaxing environment, allowing older people to get out to shop and socialise, or just to sit and watch the children at play and the world go by. This may be why several sheltered housing complexes and flats for downsizing have been built around its periphery.

The Council needs to ensure that the precinct is maintained as a place that is safe for the elderly and frail, with strict control of cycling and surfaces that are smooth and kept free of ice or leaves. It should continue its support for the Fraser Centre, and further facilities may be needed.

The inter-denominational Friendship House and Cafe, run jointly by Milngavie's seven churches, also lies within the town centre. Such enterprises should be supported and encouraged by the Council.

Last year (or was it 2014?) the Sunday Times included Milngavie as one of the top ten best places in the UK for bringing up a family. For this reason, and to keep a balance, the Council needs to ensure that there is sufficient housing at reasonable cost to allow children of existing residents to remain in the area if they wish. Developers however try to get away with building as many very expensive 4 and 5 bedroom houses as possible.

MCC considers that the requirement for affordable housing should be at least 50%, as in Strathblane, which is classed as a ‘pressured area’. We are disappointed that EDC did not respond to our representations to the Main Issues Report and draft Local Development plan on this issue, in particular with regard to the disposal of Council properties within or close to the town centre.

## Q10. Do you have a vision for what Milngavie town centre should look like in the future?

“A vibrant, welcoming, all-inclusive community centre with full amenities for the local population and visitors alike.”

Finally we would like to emphasis that much might be achieved by partnership working. Community groups need to work together and with the Council, rather than in isolation. This may help with outside funding. Milngavie Community council is a member of the Milngavie Town Centre Steering Group, which has achieved a great deal, but there is potential for much more.