

North Queensferry Community Council

North Queensferry Community Centre, Brock Street, North Queensferry

9th March 2015

The Chief Executive,
Fife Council,
Fife House,
North Street,
Glenrothes KY7 5LT

Dear Sir,

Public Consultation on Proposal for a Pontoon at Town Pier, North Queensferry.

I refer to the proposal for the installation of a Pontoon at the Town Pier in North Queensferry, which was the subject of a drop-in Consultation organised by Fife Council at the North Queensferry Community Centre on 27th January, 2015.

North Queensferry Council, at its last meeting, expressed strong criticism of the Consultation process. I, as Chairman of the Community Council, write on behalf of the Council to express in forceful terms the Community Council's criticism of the adequacy of that Consultation.

You will be aware of the particular sensitivity at the moment of proposals concerning developments in North Queensferry, especially against the background of the pending application for World Heritage Status, and the proposal of Network rail to create a Forth Bridge Visitor Centre. The latter is a matter upon which North Queensferry Community Council is yet to reach a view, as a detailed planning application is awaited, but the present concern of the Council is to ensure that the fullest possible consultation is held on any matter affecting the village which is, or might potentially be, controversial. It is of the nature of such proposals that, whatever the outcome, there will be residents who may be unhappy with that outcome, and this makes it more than ever important that consultations which are held are full and genuine, so that residents (whatever their view) feel that their opinions are important, that they matter, and that they are taken into account (whether or not ultimately accepted) in the making of the final decision. The Community Council places a high value on an open and transparent consultation process.

The Community Council is not satisfied that the Pontoon consultation process satisfied to those indispensable minimum standards of transparency.

In particular, there are three levels on which Consultation might properly be engaged: the principle of installing a pontoon; its location and its detailed design. So far as the first was concerned, an application for funding for the pontoon had already been made without prior consultation with the community and, indeed, the funding had been granted the day before the drop-in event. This inevitably gave the event the status of a post-decision presentation of information regarding what was, in effect, a *fait accompli*, and not a pre-decision consultation. Furthermore, the Community Council was concerned at the failure of Fife Council to assist properly in providing advance notice, details and materials so that the Community Council might, with its limited resources, be able to give the event wide publicity. In particular, the promise of provision of printed flyers (which the Community Council was willing to distribute to all households in the village) was made very late in the

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day, and then not honoured.

So far as the matter of location is concerned, there are, of course, two piers in North Queensferry, but Fife Council had not either consulted with residents on which might be the more appropriate location, nor does it appear to have itself carried out any kind of comparative exercise. It may or may not be that such a consultation and comparison would have led to the same result, but the cause for concern is that this exercise was not undertaken.

So far as the third aspect is concerned, we are aware that a number of residents made detailed comments on aspects of the design to the Consulting Engineer, who was present. In the normal course, one might expect that these comments would be considered and, if judged appropriate, acted upon. However, such was the superficiality of the rest of the consultation process, that the Community Council considers it appropriate to seek reassurance that due regard will be had to these comments.

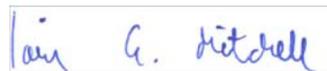
Indeed, such is the extent to which the Community Council considers that the "consultation" process was flawed, that it resolved to request that a fresh, properly-constructed consultation now be held at which the views of the residents on the matters referred to above will be solicited and given due weight prior to the making of any final decisions on the three issues of principle, location and design of the proposed pontoon.

This request is made not in any way to put a spanner in the works, but, rather, in recognition of the importance of a proper and transparent consultation process leading to a decision which is robust and evidence-based (whatever that decision might ultimately be).

It is worth drawing the attention of Fife Council to the consultation process being undertaken by Network Rail in relation to its proposed visitor centre, potentially a considerably more contentious matter than the pontoon and a matter upon which residents hold a variety of strong, and often contradictory opinions. There was recently a pre-consultation meeting amongst representatives of Network Rail, the Community Council and members of HONQ which led to the formulation of a plan for a detailed and meaningful consultation which has the support of all parties. When the decision comes to be made, it will (whatever it is) inevitably disappoint a part of the community, but there is presently confidence in the process of consultation which will be undertaken in the reaching of the final decision.

It is extraordinarily unfortunate that the same confidence does not reside in the consultation process undertaken by Fife Council in the matter of the Pontoon.

Yours faithfully,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Iain G. Mitchell".

Iain G. Mitchell QC
Chairman.