

Representatives of Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group and the Landowners

Note of meeting Wednesday 12 September 2018 Victoria Hall Helensburgh

Present: Mrs Marjory Osborne, Mr Thomas Paterson, Mr Jamie Osborne
Representing Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group (HCWG):
Mr David Adams, Mr Gordon Greig, Mrs Kathleen Siddle
Chair: Very Rev John C Christie

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that Mr Adams, on behalf of HCWG, would begin with some opening remarks in advance of the discussion to take place. The Chair said that he would prepare a draft Note of Meeting to allow both parties to comment on it prior to the agreement of a final Note.

Mr Adams opened the meeting with some introductory comments.

He said that it was good to get round the table. The make-up of HCWG had changed significantly from the formation of the Group. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since then. He expressed the hope that a start could be made from where we are at and get to a position to work together. He hoped that by the end of the meeting there would be some understanding of where we are coming from.

He offered 3 points to see if it would be possible to move forward recognising that two of the four original areas had housing on them and 2 areas remained undeveloped.

HCWG is prepared to pay for the unbuilt areas with support of the Scottish Land Fund at whatever the land is worth. He said that HCWG recognise that owners had skills which HCWG did not have and proposed that by working together something worthwhile for Helensburgh could be achieved.

To clinch a deal HCWG is willing to discuss recognition for the owners in terms of a long term name for the future and putting everything behind them to achieve two areas of natural woodlands.

Mr Adams concluded by asking whether or not the owners would be interested in such a proposal.

Mr Paterson replied that he was not interested and that he did not live in Helensburgh nor was he interested in the current open market value of the site.

He said that what they, as Owners, had offered was a part development and a free gift of 5 acres of land. He continued saying that the market value of the land is not equated with existing use value and that he'd had a verbal offer for it.

Mr Adams responded that HCWG would pay open market value, not existing use value, but can't pay more than market value as SLF would not support more than that.

Mr Paterson replied that the value depends on the use of the land.

Mr Osborne said that reality is that the key is whether there is no development or part development. We should try and seek the middle ground.

Mr Adams responded that whether there is development or not is a Planning Matter. He suggested that a good compromise would be that 2 sites had been built on and 2 remained as woodland. Mrs Osborne said that the sites already developed should be excluded from the discussion as it had already been stated that we were going forward.

Mr Adams asked if HCWG offer was being rejected.

Mr Paterson said that it was possible for Mrs Osborne and himself to transfer ownership of the land to their respective families. Planners and permissions could change, citing the example of the former St Bride's Church which had, eventually been demolished. There could be no compromise. There was potential offer for the land.

Mr Adams said that he was thinking about Castle Woods being on the Scottish Natural Heritage Register of Semi-Natural Ancient Woodlands.

Mr Paterson responded that the outstanding Cumberland Avenue planning application for one house and Woodland was conjoined with proposed development at Castle Woods'. This was one house on Cumberland with 36 affordable homes in Castle Woods. This application was six years ago The present application is 18 affordable homes in Castle Woods with 3 market homes in Cumberland Avenue.

There was some further discussion about the legal situation in relation to the Scottish Land Reform Act. Mr Adams said that the woodland, should the Government agree, would be subject of a compulsory, community buy-out. Any appeal would require taking the Scottish Government to Court.

The Community Right to Buy depends on a successful secret ballot which would involve everyone living in the area and he concluded by outlining the relevant legislation, affirming that if no agreement can be reached HCWG will pursue the right to buy. He expressed surprise that the owners had not sought legal advice on Land Reform legislation.

Mr Osborne mentioned again the gift of the 5 acres. Mrs Osborne asked about how people felt about the offer of the gift of 5 acres of Land. There followed a discussion about the ground in question. Particularly mention was made of a well-used pathway at Cumberland Avenue. Mr Paterson pointed out that this had not been a right of way.

Asked by Mr Paterson what the members of HCWG thought of the offer, Mr Adams replied that offer had remained confidential to the HCWG Committee at this stage. The owners expressed surprise and Mr Adams said that the Committee thought that they were honouring commercial confidentiality and apologised for the misunderstanding.

HCWG members would know of the offer on 17 September. Mr Paterson suggested that the meeting of which this is a Note was premature.

Some discussion about the use or otherwise of the woodlands began. Castle Woods was perceived as not being used on the one hand but on the other both woodlands had been heavily used.

Mr Adams concluded the discussion by saying that the back stop is the Community right to buy and that if HCWG won the ballot HCWG would progress that. Any appeal would need to be on the grounds that the Minister had not followed due process.

Mrs Osborne asked about the new legislation versus affordable housing. Mr Adams responded with various facts and figures which generated a discussion about affordable housing in the area which began to draw the meeting to a close.

Parties would be in touch following the decision of the HCWG membership regarding the offer made by the owners.

Very Rev John C Christie