

DRAFT MINUTES OF TORRY COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 16/01/2025 @ GREYHOPE COMMUNITY HUB, TORRY, ABERDEEN.

OPENING REMARKS

The meeting commenced promptly at 7:00 pm, with the Chair's welcome address to TCC members and community attendees.

A presentation was given for the Day of Stories at the Tullos Community Center on 25th January 2025

APOLOGIES:

Audrey Nicoll (represented by Alex Nicoll)

Miranda Radley (ACC Housing Convener)

Joanita DSOUZA

1. PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES (20/11/2024)

Issue was raised with the previous minutes that matters arising had not been included the documented minutes, it was also requested that the minutes be published on Facebook. It was agreed at the TCC councilors meeting in December that meeting minutes will be published on Facebook and TCC is looking into archiving minutes for public viewing.

The matters discussed but not included in November's minutes will be emailed as matters arising to be added to draft minutes.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Weather

The recent cold spell raised several complaints about lack of gritting leaving some roads impassable, in particular in Torry. However, it was recognized that roads in other areas of the city were left untreated and presented general hazards to road users.

Christian Allard the council's leaders response was that the council were somewhat hampered by the combination of ice and snow on roads making gritting challenging. The council's priority was main roads and bus routes as per usual gritting procedures

Complaints were raised about untreated pavements resulting in injuries, pedestrians needing to walk on roads, and people feeling they were back in lockdown due to being unable to go outside for fear of injury. A lot of complaints were raised about lack of salt/sand/grit bins as well as the position of bins. Several members of the community complained that some grit bins were empty or filled with rubbish instead of grit.

Christian Allard stated that the community should register empty bins on the council website. Feedback on the location or lack of locations should also be raised using this method. Cllr Allard did state he had personally checked grit bins and found them to be at least half full. He did not state what locations he checked and was unable to comment on appropriateness of location of grit bins.

Victor asked community members to email him to report bins with unsuitable locations for details of any locations where grit bins were located but have since been removed.

Some people including council employees had difficulty accessing the place of work due to ice on pavements. In some cases, employees purchase salt to treat pavements outside place of work, shops etc. in the community.

Cllr Allard stated that residents can request salt directly from the council however this is dependent on the requestor having sufficient space to store it.

It was generally agreed that the council should have been better prepared and should take action to improve gritting on road and pavements. Cllr Allard agreed and stated if we record our comments, the council will undertake to make improvements where practical noting that the council has limited budget therefore cannot be expected to be able to resolve all weather related issues in all areas.

The general comment from the meeting attendees is that improvements should be looked at sooner rather than wait until next year. Further cold weather has been forecast in the coming month, improvements should be sought before then.

In general there was concern about increased strain on NHS resources due ice related incidents, Cllr Allard reported that NHS A&E statistics had recorded less incidents than in previous years. It was not stated that as winter is not over, would this invalidate such statistics being given.

It was reported that council workers re redirected to grit duty when bad weather prevents them from performing their normal duties. Grit lorries priorities key routes due to the expense of running the vehicles.

It was mentioned that the ward walk being carried out by an engaged security firm should perhaps include observation of Grit bins in the Balnagask area.

Lighting

In the Balnagask area there are still street lights out making is hazardous to walk especially in ice conditions. There is an online service available for reporting this including provision of maps to locate individual lampposts.

The lights on Victoria Bridge have not been repaired, this was mentioned back at November's meeting but other than the placement of some traffic cones, nothing has been done. Several lights are now broken, work should be done before all lights are out. There has also been complaints about the state of cobbles on the road

Cllr Allard stated that it takes at least 3 months to plan and works on Vitoria Bridge. This has to be carefully planned and prepared for due to this being part of of the main routes from Torry.

Training

The council have offered training on the use of their on-line tools for reporting problems with roads, bins, lighting and issues with any other council maintained assets. This will be arranged for the next TCC meeting. Anyone who does not have internet access can use the library or can contact TCC chairman to report to the council

3. ST FITTICKS PARK UPDATE

The Scottish Government response to the Torry Community's please for support for reversing the decision to turn St. Fitticks Park an industrial site for ETZ was that this was a council decision and the Scottish Government cannot get involved this is a an Aberdeen City Council matter. A disappointing but not unexpected response bearing in mind the Scottish Government's support for the ETZ.

Questions were raised During first ministers question time, raise by Maggie Chapman, Liam Kerr and Audry Nicoll. Maggie Chapman has been a direct supporter of the campaign to save St Fitticks. The response was this is planning and the Scottish Government cannot do anything about it.

It was noted the Governments Reporter has approved the planning application for this development to proceed regardless of a strong objection raised by SEPA, the government environment agency. SEPA main complaint is the risk of flooding should this development proceed as a large area of this park is marshland. The reported has stated that they did not intend to take action on the complaint.

The Reporter is a government department but does not report of take instructions from the government or councils.

To appeal against The Reporters decision requires a court action.

Councilors cannot directly support the campaign to save St Fitticks as the planning application is in progress, to provide support would prejudice impartiality when the council members are asked to vote on the decision.

Cllr Nicoll and Cllr Watson both agreed that the final decision on what should happen to the park should be done by the full council. Currently a committee is involved in this. As the land is under the trusteeship of the council, all council members should be involved and vote on the decision as to whether the land should be sold, leased or remain undeveloped.

ETZ cannot legally enforce the council to allow the development to progress nor allow the land passed to ETZ.

Cllr Allard stated that land is owned by the council therefore it can, under the recommendations of council officers decide sell, lease or retain St Fitticks. Meeting attendees were reminded that Cllr Allard is the council's

representative on ETZ as well as the council leader. ETZ is supported both by ACC and the Scottish Government.

Members of the community implored Cllr Allard, the council leader and council representative on ETZ to consider residents and the community rather than the business involved in ETZ. It would appear that precedence is being given to ETZ

Harbour Involvement with Torry land

A point was raised regarding the Harbour Authority's involvement with land around the St Fittick's and Balnagask area. The authority have instead that they have no involvement with land in this area. Cllr Nicoll stated that the Harbour Authority hold lease on land in several areas around Girdleness Area. The exact locations he was unsure of but it should be possible to obtain this information.

4. Update on RAAC

Planning Application Submission

The demolition plans for RAAC impacted houses has been submitted on 19 Dec 2024 to ACC Planning and building for an Environmental Impact Assessment EIA Assessment. The Decision Notice was published on 8th January, 8 working days after submission. As this is an assessment, no public comments are permitted. Cllrs Watson and Nicoll were somewhat stunned that this has been done and will report back to the council as to why, bearing in mind the extent and impact of this, the submission of this was not discussed at any councilor meetings. Cllr Allard did not comment or make any statement on this submission.

This was submitted by Ryden Aberdeen, engaged via AtkinsRealis. <https://publicaccess.aberdeencity.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=SOQOMKBZ01700>

The Councilors (excepting cllr Allard), community councilors and community members were outraged at the timing of this submission as well as the surprisingly short time to make a decision that EIA is not required. This decision was taken by Daniel Lewis, Development Management Manager, the report on the decision appears to contain insufficient and inaccurate information regarding the state and condition of buildings to have made such an assessment. It makes no mention of buildings that are to remain but are surrounded by these buildings nor any reference as to why specific environmental concerns would not be raised. This would have appeared to have taken the work of the inaccurate reports issued to them as gospel without carrying any actual checks or involvement of SEPA.

Cllr Watson noted that the council can be asked and can make EIA decisions. They have not been involved in this case which considering the impact of it was somewhat bewildering to all in attendance.

Cllr Watson also asked why this had not gone to Community Housing and Protection.

The speed of this decision and submission has raised several concerns:

Transparency and conflict of Interest

- The council acting as both the proposer and planning authority confidence in the process further exacerbated by the speed of the "decision"
- An independent body such as SEPA should have conducted the screening
- Proper challenges should have been allowed as to the accuracy of statements contained in the supporting statement

Community Impact Ignored

- Concerns about the significant social, economic and environmental effects of the project were not addressed
- No opportunity for meaningful public consultation, especially for affected residents in the area

Timeline Criticism

- Any possibility of resident taking action on this submission were limited due to this being submitted during the festive season.

The TCC has agreed to write to the council to:

- The actions taken and timescales being forced have diminished all confidence residents have in this process being fairly carried out TCC along with community members are in agreement that this process must be halted until a **full UK public enquiry** is carried out and a common UK wide and fair solution to the RAAC

scandal reached as an outcome of this enquiry.

- The impact assessment decision reversed until a full and open assessment involving all agencies has been undertaken, after a full public enquiry has completed
- A fair process is followed with transparent and democratic practices that allow adequate time and opportunity for community engagement.

Point of Order

Cllr Allard was asked if he agreed that councilors handling the planning process for the demolition represented a conflict of interest.

His reply was:

Councillors don't sit on planning committees as councillors but as regulators and checkers of facts. This was not well received by community members attending the meeting.

RAAC Community and Council Engagements

Vice Chair of TCC gave an update on council engagements. Meeting were held on December 12 (Council executives) and 16 (Council leaders and Head of Estates). The purpose was to discuss alternative approaches to the RAAC Scandal to this being proposed by the council. It was note that the council's voluntary acquisitions process will offer homeowners significantly less than the value of their properties prior to the councils RAAC announcement. Options discussed were offering home owners a like for like swap for RAAC free accommodation by repairing ringfenced RAAC houses or offering homeowners an ownership swap into other council accommodation. Both options would be significantly less costly in the long term for the council and financial impact to homeowners would be minimized. The council listened and promise to report back on the feasibility of the proposal. The report was promised to be issued by mid to end of January 2025.

Voluntary Acquisitions

As mentioned, the voluntary acquisition process is underway. Some of those who agreed to participate have received the initial offer. In general offer have been £35,000 to £50,000 below the pre RAAC announcement valuations. The Torry Community RAAC Campaign (TCRC) are only aware of very few accepting these. For most homeowners, to accept the offer will leave them with significant mortgage payment to make on property they no longer own. For others acceptance would leave them facing homelessness due to age and the poor financial position this would leave them in.

Examples given were s one bedroom flat pre RAAC valuation £68,000. Voluntary acquisition value £20,000. Regardless of ill-advised statements form the housing minister, this is through no fault of the homeowners. In the case of ACC, there is sufficient merit is laying blame firmly at the door of ACC.

If the council reject the alternatives offered, for the vast majority of homeowners who have entered into the VA process will or have rejected the value offered. Those who did not enter into the process will not accept any offer given by the council. This will significantly delay the councils plans to redevelop the site. The TCRC chair stated he will refuse to move until the council offer a fair just and equitable settlement regardless of CPO submission.

The Scottish Government have so far refused to help fund a fair settlement as have Aberdeen City Council.

Cllrs Watson and Nicoll raised the point that the council have sufficient funds to provide and equitable deal to homeowners impacted by RAAC. This was submitted as an amendment to the council but was voted down by one vote. It was stated that Cllr Allard voted against the amendment.

It was also stated by Cllr Nicoll that as leader of the council Cllr Allard could apply for Fiscal flexibility to redirect money from other lower priority budgets to compensate RAAC homeowners.

The Last time Fiscal flexibility was applied for it was to pay redundancy to staff in order for the council to cut it wage bill.

Cllr Allard did not respond when asked why he is not looking into fiscal flexibility as a means to quicky and fairly.

5. ADJOURNEMENT & CLOSING:

The Vice-Chairman moved for adjournment, seconded by the Planning Officer. The meeting ended just after 9:00pm.

6. AOB

AOB was brief, Need confirmation that the treasurer has completed actions with the bank.

7. ATTENDANCE:

1. Victor ONYEMEJOR - Chair
2. John Meiklejohn – Vice Chair
3. David Fryer – Planning
4. Michal Debski
5. Richard Caie (Virtual)
6. Lesley-Ann Mulholland
7. Linda Harper
8. Lynne Restrup
9. Lynn Winstanly (TCRC)
10. Ian Lippe (TCRC)
11. Simon Watson – Councillor (Torry/Ferryhill)
12. Christian Allard - Councillor (Torry/Ferryhill)
13. Alex Nicoll - (Councillor (Kincorth, representing Audry Nicoll MSP)
14. 10 Torry Community Members
15. Eremina Cookey (Teams)
16. Okechukwu Umezuruike (Teams)
17. Rotimi Osibajo –Secretary (Teams)

25 in total were in attendance