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Dear Gordon

2022/0157/PPP – LOMOND BANKS PLANNING APPLICATION

I am responding to the consultation regarding the proposed development of West Riverside by Lomond Banks.

As you will be aware, opinion is divided in the local community, and I therefore decided to carry out a paper and online survey of local residents to establish their views. Copies of the survey were distributed to almost 3,200 households covering Balloch, Haldane, Tullichewan, Levenvale and Jamestown. This generated 377 responses with 31% in favour of the development, 68% against and 1% failed to indicate a preference.

Annex A sets out the analysis of the responses and I will forward the actual responses once personal data is removed to meet GDPR requirements.

The development is therefore not supported by the majority of the local community.

Whilst I am not opposed to development per se, I believe that the key question is whether this is the right development for the area.

The application differs from that submitted over 3 years ago in that the focus of the development has moved away from Drumkinnon Wood. However the density of the development remains largely the same. I would be grateful if the planning committee would consider whether the density of the proposed development is appropriate.

I have set out the views of the local residents who have approached me or completed the survey below. Some of these views might not be directly relevant as a planning consideration but nevertheless form the context for the development for local people.

A. ROADS AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

The major concern for residents, both for those that supported the development and those opposed to it, was the inevitable increase in traffic on local roads. This was the view of 70% of local people.

Already there are major queues on local routes during good weather. That is something which local residents have experience of over many years and the addition of 127 lodges and two hotels, together with a quantity of day visitors, will only exacerbate this problem.

The road adjacent to McDonald's is already incredibly busy and causes tailbacks on to the roundabout and up to the Stonymollan roundabout at the A82. This will be the same access route for the development at Woodbank House and surrounding lodges. There is insufficient capacity on the roads to cope with such an increased volume of traffic without mitigation.

Whilst I understand that people would be coming and going at different times of the day, the sheer volume, will be unmanageable with the current road layout.

It is my firm belief that both Transport Scotland and West Dunbartonshire Council need to work with the developer to address the problem and come up with a solution that will reduce the impact of the traffic before planning permission is considered.

There is also an impact on car parking. Although car parking provision is made in the planning application, I think this may be an underestimate of likely demand. I do not believe that those using the self-catering accommodation are likely to arrive by public transport. I equally think that the number of day visitors is likely to be significant. When events have taken place previously, Balloch itself had been effectively gridlocked. Little has been done to address the lack of capacity and this application will exacerbate the problem unless there is significant mitigation. Again this should be considered further before the application is determined.

B. JOBS AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Jobs are very much welcomed but there is a concern that the positions being offered by Lomond Banks may be low-paid, the majority are part time and some are likely to be seasonal. I am pleased that the developer plans to pay the Scottish Living Wage and that they intend to provide opportunities for career progression. Emphasis should be on recruiting from the local area so people in the community are benefiting from the economic opportunity. There are however currently problems with recruiting staff within the hospitality industry and therefore people I surveyed believe this would also be a problem for Lomond Banks.

There is more positivity over the increased customer footfall in Balloch and how this may filter through to other businesses however there remains a concern that people who come to Lomond Banks will spend all of their time within the facility rather than moving around elsewhere to local shops, restaurants and bars. Lomond Banks will need to actively form partnerships with local businesses and procure locally to maximise the economic benefit to the area.

That said, only 34% believed that the development would have a positive impact on local businesses and 31% believed that the benefit from the additional jobs would outweigh any disadvantages.

Should the applicant wish to proceed, it might be useful to set out in terms the economic benefit to the area and the guarantees they would provide for employment, local procurement supply chains, and partnership working with other local businesses in the tourism sector.

C. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

During recent years, anti-social behaviour has increased within the Balloch area due to a huge influx of day-trippers together with the influence of over-consumption of alcohol. Approximately 59 % of local people surveyed believe that there would be a worsening of anti-social behaviour. Others did not believe there would be much difference. Some suggested that the development on currently underused land, which may have previously been used by young people for drinking alcohol and socialising, will now have a purpose and the greater presence of people will be a deterrent on those who wish to cause trouble. There is however a generally shared local view that a greater police presence will be required to alleviate disorder.

D. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

1. SEWERAGE SYSTEM

There are concerns about the existing capacity of the sewerage system being able to cope with the number of people and properties in the area, particularly at and around Woodbank House, where additional accommodation units are planned. There are already issues with flooding when it rains. It is anticipated that, unless a major upgrade is carried out, this will only worsen if the Lomond Banks development is allowed to go ahead causing pollution within the National Park.

The planning committee will want to ensure that sufficient capacity is planned.

2. DRUMKINNON WOOD

The first planning application some years ago specified development at Drumkinnon Wood. As an area of ancient and mature woodland, this was a key concern for many people in the local community. Although this is the most significant change, there is a suggestion made to me by constituents that there is actually some development in the woodland area. Consequently, there remain concerns over the impact these plans will have on wildlife and the natural environment of the area. Irrespective of whether people are supportive of the project or not, the concern for any development of or near Drumkinnon Wood is widely shared.

3. NOISE POLLUTION & BUILDING WORK

In addition, local people are worried about noise pollution during the construction phase with the impact of construction traffic on the area as well as the noise associated with building activity.

One of the survey responses noted that damage was sustained to their home during the building of Loch Lomond Shores. There are worries that this could happen again.

In conclusion, I believe that whilst many people do welcome some development of the area, they remain unconvinced that this is the right development on the right scale for Balloch and West Riverside.

There are improvements that could be made to the application before the National Park, most notably in relation to the road infrastructure, jobs and the local economy, and environmental concerns. These concerns were not exclusive to those opposed to the application but were also shared by those supportive of the application. It would undoubtedly be helpful if the developer would urgently address these concerns.

That said the public consultation which I undertook indicated that at this point in time, 68% of local people were against the development and 31% were in favour.

I would be grateful if this could be shared with the planning committee. I have copied this to Balloch & Haldane Community Council, Councillor Martin Rooney, Leader of West Dunbartonshire Council and Peter Hessett, Chief Executive of West Dunbartonshire Council.

Best wishes

Jackie Baillie MSP

Dumbarton Constituency