

## Planning Application 12/0150/IC: St Columba's School

Kilmacolm Community Council (KCC) has now considered this application and has given it particularly close attention in recognition of its importance for the future of the village. At the meeting held on 29 May, **KCC decided not to submit a formal objection**. Our decision was reached by a decisive majority of members, but was not unanimous. At the same time, KCC decided to offer a number of observations concerning the application and to suggest a number of conditions that Inverclyde Council may wish to consider if they are minded to grant the application.

The application has divided opinion within the community. There are those who draw attention to the breach of the Green Belt that it would represent and who believe that it might facilitate further development there. It would mean building in part of one of the "Green Wedges" that contribute to the character of the settlement. They point out that a much loved and well used footpath would, in part, become a road. There are also a number of important issues to do with pedestrians and traffic making use of Lochwinnoch Road, and to these I will return later. On the other side, attention has been drawn to the importance of St Columba's both as a successful school and as much the largest employer in the village. It is severely constrained by its present cramped premises and its previous plan to expand into two neighbouring house plots failed to gain planning approval. Expansion into the area now being proposed is the only remaining practical option for the school, and without it their long-term outlook would be damaged. It is also noted that the development would make a contribution to reducing traffic and parking congestion in the village centre area by including a substantial number of staff and public parking spaces.

The debate has engaged many local people, and the meeting of KCC at which our decision was reached was attended by well over 100 members of the public, an unprecedented number. The division of opinion amongst those present appeared, within a fairly wide margin of estimation, to be roughly equal. It was KCC's final considered view however that, while the potential detriments of the project were, in some cases, genuine drawbacks and deserved to be recognised, they were outweighed by the potential benefits to Kilmacolm and that the Community Council should therefore not make an objection to the outline application.

It was also KCC's view that the application raised a number of issues, mostly concerning pedestrian and vehicle traffic, which require to be considered and some of which would best be addressed through formal conditions attached to any planning consent.

- ⤴ The access road to the new buildings will join Lochwinnoch Road where it (Lochwinnoch Road) forms part of the Safe Route to School for Kilmacolm Primary School pupils. It will be important to ensure a safe crossing for these children across the new access road and also for St Columba's children crossing Lochwinnoch Road at that point in order to reach school by way of the new access road. KCC believes that a condition should be imposed requiring a crossing attendant to be employed there at school opening and closing times.
- ⤴ Furthermore, it would not be safe to have builders' vehicles using the access road at opening and closing times during the construction phase. In KCC's view, St Columba's should be required to draw up, and have approved by Inverclyde Council, a time schedule for construction traffic. They should consult, and have regard to, the views of Kilmacolm Primary School parents and staff as well as local residents.
- ⤴ In the documents that accompanied the planning application, mention was made that the school would continue to use the existing campus as the place for dropping pupils off and collecting them. In KCC's view the arrangements to ensure this happens, and that the access road to the new campus is not used for the purpose, should be clarified. Again, KCC would wish to see a condition requiring a plan that is to be approved by Inverclyde Council.
- ⤴ It is not clear from the documents available whether the solum of the new access road will be the property of the school, remain with Duchal Estates, or be offered for adoption by

Inverclyde Council. Whichever it is, it will remain an important access route for walkers. A condition should be required ensuring that it continues to be available for this purpose.

- ⤴ KCC would hope that, if and when St Columba's is granted planning approval, it takes early steps to restore to residential use the two houses on Gryffe Road which occupy the site of their earlier application. If this point could properly be made into a formal condition KCC would see some advantages from doing so.

In addition to these points that appear to KCC to be suitable subjects for formal conditions, there are two additional observations that KCC would wish to be brought to the attention of the planning Board in their consideration of the case.

- ⤴ The KCC is not objecting to this proposal to use a specific part of the Green Belt for the specific purpose of extending St Columba's school. We recognise the practical constraints facing the school and its importance to the vitality of the community. However, it is of great importance to KCC that no false inference is drawn about our attitude to any other possible development of the Green Belt that may in future be proposed. As our responses to the Main Issues Report make clear, we would generally start from a presumption of opposition to any application for such a project.
- ⤴ Some of the traffic for the new campus would turn left from Gryffe Road into Lochwinnoch Road. This is already an extremely awkward junction with poor sight lines and a bridge abutment that requires cars to swing wide into Lochwinnoch Road. KCC considers that Inverclyde Council should re-examine this junction with an eye to improving it.

I hope that these points are useful to the Planning Board in their consideration of a case that is important for Kilmacolm and for Inverclyde more widely.

Stephen Hampson  
Chair, Kilmacolm Community Council