

Report from: Kirkintilloch Community Council

Report to: East Dunbartonshire Council

Date: 28th March 2018

Subject: Kirkintilloch Town Centre community-led consultation

Background

Following the approval of the Kirkintilloch Town Centre masterplan in 2013, there has been a number of improvement projects in the town centre.

Alongside this the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 has been developed, aimed at building capacity within the community to lead activity which promotes, supports, regenerates and strengthens town centres.

To promote this, in August 2017, East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC) approached Kirkintilloch Community Council (KCC) to host a programme of community led engagement. This would have a specific focus on allowing the local community to reflect and discuss how they now use the town centre, what they want from it, and how they would like to use it in the future.

Conversations in the programme also sought suggestions for solutions and responses to issues and opportunities identified, with consideration as to how the local community can become more involved in the design, delivery and ownership of these potential future solutions.

With funding and support from EDC, KCC engaged a consultant (Kevin Murray Associates) to help deliver this, albeit the process throughout was very much led by KCC. A full report on this work can be found in the attached (Executive Summary pages 3 to 6).

High-level success

The delivery of the consultation was seen as widely very successful. Through a variety of methods the views of over 1,500 people in Kirkintilloch and surroundings were captured. Delivery was predominantly through a questionnaire; open public engagement sessions in various formats and locations e.g. drop-ins, pop up sessions, structured meetings; and, consultation sessions with specific interest groups e.g. school, elderly forums, disability forums.

The breakdown of this is as follows:

- Online questionnaire – 819 completions. This gives a very high confidence level that it represents. By consultation standards this is an excellent return.
- Open public engagement – 492 people
- Specific interest groups – 243 people

A full evaluation of the process can be found in the full report attached (pages 19 to 23)

The Challenge

The consultation has successfully delivered part of what it set out to achieve – namely leading a programme of community engagement which captures the full range of views and addresses barriers of exclusion. In particular there now exists a comprehensive list of opportunities and solutions that the community would like to see happen. To that end the programme is now complete.

What remains is the question of how the community can be more involved in the design, delivery and ownership of these potential future solutions. There was significant general feedback about lack of consultation, involvement and ownership with the community. The result of this was a pervasive feeling that there is no point in getting involved as no-one listens and/or responds, and that decisions are made and implemented on the community, rather than worked through with a shared ownership and understanding. A new model of partnership is required to drive change forward.

A new model of partnership

Having delivered a successful consultation there exists an appetite within the community to become more engaged in future processes. Being realistic though at present there is a practical limit to the ability of the community to become involved without a clearly coordinated and supported approach. The sheer scale of the response and the opportunity in itself presents a challenge.

That said, the scale of the challenge should not negate a change in approach. Transparency of decision making, involvement in processes, developing a shared understanding of the future and clearly managing everyone's expectations, should all be central to developing a new model of partnership and development. There is a responsibility in all aspects of this which lies with all sectors if a new way of working is to be successful.

To develop this further Kirkintilloch Community Council propose:

- To continue to meet with representatives of EDC and develop a new model of engagement and delivery. In particular the notion of a flexible partnership approach should be explored with representation from a variety of sources. The aim of this partnership should be to form an action plan which would ultimately seek ways to meet the aspirations of the community outlined in the consultation.
- To continue to support the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) in Kirkintilloch to keep local businesses at the heart of development in the Town Centre.
- To publicise the findings from the consultation back to the community, and to discuss with Community Planning Partners, the Voluntary Sector and other groups to turn ideas into actions.
- To hold a capacity building day in conjunction with the Summer Gala on 9th June, to develop support for the ideas coming out of the consultation and promote community engagement in a new partnership approach to improve the town and its spaces. Early discussion around a "Love Kirky" branding for this has begun.
- To explore building based options for developing a number of ideas within the consultation such as a community hub, youth café and pop up cinema. Particular reference has been highlighted in the report to the former Lairdsland Primary School in Kerr Street in this respect.
- To work with the public sector, and in particular EDC, to develop a Town Charter outlining commitments to a new approach to engagement, involvement, planning and delivery of services. This should build on the capacity and community support created from the summer event and the development of the "Love Kirky" theme.