



Balmerino – Kirkton of Balmerino – Bottomcraig

Survey Summary

January 2018

Survey Aim

To establish what the communities feel are the strengths and weaknesses, needs and values that will contribute to the on-going development of the wellbeing and evolution of the places in which they live.

25% of homes across the three communities participated in the survey interviews. While emphasis may vary across the three communities, a degree of commonality exists, and differences are highlighted.

Feedback is most welcomed on this summary.

This survey is an initial stage in the development of a pilot Local Place Plan, an initiative being encouraged by the Government in the Planning System review, and will be used in discussions with Fife Council.

The Communities

The communities of Balmerino, Kirkton of Balmerino and Bottomcraig are small attractive settlements on the south bank of the river Tay, situated in a beautiful part of North East Fife. They consist of 90 properties with their own sizeable gardens, in the majority of cases. The communities date back, in some areas hundreds of years, with ruins of an abbey dating from 1229, and have evolved gently over time to their current state. These communities complement and enhance each other, as well as the beauty of the area as a whole.



Views and Concerns

The communities' residents rate the places they live in very highly. Their overriding feeling is that of mainly friendly, welcoming and supportive communities, made up of people from all walks of life. They feel that the size of the communities make it easy for individuals to meet and participate in local activities, as well as watching over each other in times of need. A sense of safety, security, peacefulness and quietness underpins what are considered wonderful places to grow up in as a child, and to live in at all ages. The quiriness of the old and the new building styles side by side, the charm and character of some old homes and local features, coupled with quaint narrow roads, limited traffic, low density housing with decent size gardens, and again tranquillity, are seen as adding to the physical attractiveness.

All this is located within a variety and richness of wildlife and plants, trees and landscapes, extensive historic bluebell woods, a great variety of walks on the doorstep, and amazing views of the river Tay constantly changing with the seasons, weather and light. These hamlets, and not villages, linked together with strong historical roots and depth of character, are considered by some to be "the best place they have ever lived in".



However, even rated so positively, there are concerns and issues relating to the protection and enhancement of the wellbeing, quality and character of the communities. The question of road repairs, clearing of ditches, the prevention of road surface water and flooding, gritting of roads in winter, trimming of verges and hedges, are cited frequently. Concern exists about bus services and the maintenance of the flexi taxi service, due to council cost cuts, as is the wish to have good recycling facilities, the collection of garden rubbish and high quality broadband / Wi-Fi service. These issues tend to raise the question as to whether the

services received are good value for the council tax paid. Lack of neighbourly sensitivity with respect to excessive vegetation blocking views is an issue raised delicately but clearly and often. Other issues such as dog fouling and mess collected in plastic bags and hung on fences, is a never-ending source of annoyance.

As for the future, the following are the main concerns listed with varying degrees of feeling: the possibility of radio masts and wind turbines, increased tourism and visitor numbers in some areas, loss of balance between the natural and the manicured environment, the risk to woodlands and pathways, increased numbers of cars and delivery vans, speeding in the narrow country roads, and an increased number of holiday homes affecting the communities' cohesion. The issue of strongest concern in Kirkton of Balmerino and Balmerino is the question of development and the strain on the limited utilities and facilities such as water, sewage and roads. There is a constant fear that the character and quality of the communities can easily be spoilt in the longer term by inappropriate and excessive development, the subdivision of plots and the building of properties out of character with the communities. Progress and evolution is acknowledged as part of life, but it is the loss of control that is feared. The difficulty of locating addresses, especially by emergency services, is a concern, and also a frustration for delivery drivers.



Considerations and Actions

The following are some of the main considerations, actions and guidelines put forward by individuals who thought they might help protect and enhance the character, qualities and values of the communities:

To have an agreed understanding of the qualities and values shared within the communities, with some practical guidelines to help protect and enhance them.

The communities to have a greater say on the services provided by the local authorities, especially in terms of their quality, and allocation of community budgets e.g. on roads, verges, hedges and ditches being maintained correctly.

To have a greater say on developments within, and surrounding the communities, with the help of guidelines such as:

- appropriate division of existing plots
- size of new property in relation to plot sizes
- the impact of any development on the neighbours' privacy
- the design and style of any development to be in keeping with the character of the community

Maintain an awareness and sensitivity to the blocking of views and light by avoidable excessive vegetation.

Ensure that good quality broadband or Wi-Fi is available to all properties.

Ensure that emergency services such as fire and ambulance have up to date address locating data, as well as easily located water hydrants or water supplies in cases of fire.

Encourage and nurture community involvement and activities.

Maintain some form of information, reminding campers and visitors to respect the environment.

Finally, there is an overall agreement that some form of Place Plan would be a useful document for communities' residents, Fife Council, public bodies and developers. It is thought this document would help improve awareness, understanding, appreciation and relationships.

This exercise was initiated by the BGKL Community Councils and co-authored by Community Councillors Chris Dawes, Wolfgang Jabs and Sandra Nutley.