

Carnoustie and Monifieth Men's Shed – Request for Review (30 April 2019)

1. Our first observation refers to the period, following submission of our application, during which representations could be made. Sections 9.9 and 9.15 of the guidance mention representations having to be put online and also copied to the community transfer body with information as to how to respond to them. We only became aware, on receipt of the documents for the April 4 meeting, that such a representation had been made, as noted in paragraph 5.2 of the report to the Policy and Resources Committee. We have since revisited our application as posted and can find no record of the material in question, nor have we received any communication from the Council about it. As a result we were unable to make timely response to the issues raised.

2. The most salient issue driving the need for a review is the obscurity surrounding the manner in which the Community Asset Transfer team have 'scored' our application against the housing proposal. There has been a severe lack of transparency in failing in the first instance to make known to us in advance the method by which our application would be assessed, and subsequently failing to provide us with the detailed workings that led to the decision.

3. It was only when, following the publication of the reports for 4 April, someone informed us of the widespread use of the Forestry Commission's 'scoring matrix' that we were able to track down report 105/18 submitted to Angus Council on 22 March 2018, in which the proposed use of this assessment model is discussed. (section 6). However the relevant appendix was not with the report and further searching was needed to find it.

4. Further, this method, having been approved by the Council, was to have been 'added to the existing Council Guidance for CAT applicants.' (Report 105/18, 22 March 2018, section 6.2). In no version of the Council Guidance that we have seen has it been included. We feel the Council should have been proactive in furnishing us with the above information, and not left it to us painstakingly to ferret it out; we have been severely disadvantaged by these deficiencies in communication and the provision of essential information.

5. The reality is that 'best value' really means 'best value for money'. (sections 4.4 and 5.3 of report 105/18). The ultimate criterion in the whole process is financial. A community project, in this case the Shed, has to measure up economically against house building; it is not the house building that has to prove its case by demonstrating its **community value**. There is an assumption that building houses is good (not disputed) but beyond that what hard evidence is provided of its contribution to community cohesion, health, welfare, confidence self-esteem, etc? It is contended that 'A transformation delivering a host of positive outcomes can be achieved in Monifieth under the housing option' (101/19 6.4) but no evidence is produced as to what these outcomes are and why they are contingent on having to develop the site 'in its entirety.'

6. Following from this, another unsatisfactory aspect of the scoring matrix is its pretensions to objectivity. Such scoring systems have become prevalent in recent years, notably in the context of interviewing candidates for employment. These procedures give the impression of standardisation and freedom from bias but they can never be so. A strong element of subjectivity will always be present and needs to be acknowledged. In our own case, in our reference to the 'scoring system' in the context of the Social Return on Investment

document devised by the Westhill Men's Shed, we accept that the values given to the different dimensions will always have a certain subjective loading. Likewise the Personal Social Services Research Unit findings in Think Local, Act Personal: Building Community Capacity. (<https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/Building-Community-Capacity/>)

The point is not that we can further refine such scoring systems to achieve 100% objectivity, but exactly the opposite, that we need more fully to sharpen and utilise our human sensibilities in making judgements and decisions on relational rather than rigidly economic grounds.

7. A further concern about the manner in which the application has been assessed has to do with the Local Outcome Implementation Plan. In formulating our application, we made our case in meeting local objectives with reference to the Carnoustie, Monifieth and Sidlaw Locality Plan Discussion Document April-July 2017. We were not aware that this had been upgraded to Locality Plan dated September 2017, nor do we know when the name Local Outcome Improvement Plan, mentioned within the document, assumed prominence as the lead title, confronting people with the disconcerting acronym LOIP. Perhaps we should have known these things, (we have researched a large number of relevant documents) but again the Community Asset Transfer guidance suggests relevant authorities might demonstrate a degree of helpfulness in providing essential information, rather than putting the onus on Community Transfer Bodies to have to dig it all out themselves. (Incidentally we are sorry to see that the very inappropriate graphics classing all older people as disabled and relying on walking sticks has been retained in the Plan, despite representations regarding its offensiveness).

8. The dominant influence of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan in shaping the scoring matrix raises serious issues. We were not advised this would be the benchmark in the way it appears to have been used; again only through Council archive archaeology is it possible to turn up, for example, the statement at paragraph 5.7 of report 183/17 which **adds** Best Value to 12 local outcomes. In the guidance there are 7 best value categories and these subsequently become 10 in the council assessment procedure; the inclusion of the first one, economic regeneration, is going to be biased against a small project **unless it is judged proportionately**. We did not know of this enlarged list and consider that we had given a full account of how we measured up to both local and national criteria in our application. The proliferation of lists of criteria, as different sets of standards are either set alongside or replace others, presents huge obstacles to those who approach the task uninitiated in the fine details of the evolution of official policies and procedures.

9. Most importantly, however, given that the scoring matrix purports to provide 'a method of fairly and transparently assessing CAT applications' (section 6.2), it is hard to accept the disparity in the community benefit scores that have emerged, 46.2 as opposed to 75.8 out of 90. We feel that probably our community benefit score should realistically stand at around 70, in the light of which the overall picture needs substantial readjustment.

10. The Local Outcome Improvement Plan makes much of participation and partnership, and places strong emphasis on doing things together: the word 'together' occurs about 30 times in the document. Given this repeated emphasis, the Shed committee has expressed concern there should have been some opportunity for a live encounter with the Council officials carrying out the assessment. The six month period following the submission of our application took the form of a big black hole during which no contact whatsoever was made by the Council until a request was received for an extension to the 22 March deadline. Nor has any relevant Council official, other than a Clerk of Works and the Communities Officers, been to see the Shed at first hand. This reduces the whole process to an abstract paper exercise, from which

even the pictures of the Shed activities which we submitted, have been excised. These at least offer a window into the live reality, as does our Business Plan for 2019-2022, which was submitted with our application, but was not posted online as section 9.9 of the guidance requires.

11. We believe it is important to maintain a perspective on 'community as quality of relationship' as well as 'community as locality' on the basis that meaning in people's lives is not secured by externalities of mere buildings but by the way in which physical structures are enabling and facilitating of the social fabric. We agree that providing suitable houses for people is one basic element of material provision in a locality, but we return to the statement we made previously: **'people need houses but they need more than houses'**. This is why our wish to remain in our current location should not, as it has, be taken in opposition to the housing project, but complementary to it. The facility of the Men's Shed side by side with people's homes is both a real and a symbolic statement of the importance of residence and recreation in providing people with opportunities to live as full a life together as possible. Local people did indeed indicate a wish for more affordable housing but even more strongly than that did they point to the lack of community facilities. The Men's Shed is not of course in any way a complete answers to that demand, but it a significant component and represents the kind of small social enterprise that should be not just endorsed verbally but supported in substance.

12. In our submission we made several references to the Shed's value in promoting health and well-being. It was, and is, our wish neither to overplay or underplay this. On the one hand, we do not want to be seen as a para-medical facility to which people are directed to be 'cured'; on the other we have seen the proven effect of the strong Shed ethos of stimulating new qualities of relationship, offering support and encouragement to men dealing with some of the issues (physical, emotional and relational) which arise in later life. We do not know what value was given to this dimension in the assessment, but given our low overall evaluation, we feel sure justice has not been done here.

We made reference to the term 'asset' also being a feature of the Shed and one document which we researched (but did not actually cite) was What Makes us Healthy? The Asset Approach in Practice, by Jane Foot: (<http://janefoot.com/downloads/files/healthy%20FINAL%20FINAL.pdf>). This has a powerful message of mobilising 'all the resources in an area to promote and protect sustainable health and well-being' and puts a positive value on these in terms of self confidence and resilience. While we believe we had brought these points out in our application, the outcome of the scoring suggests that it has in the process been undervalued and we wish to request it be revisited from this perspective.

13. A further consideration in respect of the adversarial contest between the value of the Shed and that of Council Housing is the complexity of the technical economics which again is an issue that would better have been dealt with in the context of consultations together. The details could have been more clearly explained to us and we would have been in a better position to debate them. As it is, the case has been loaded against us when we have been offered by way of explanation of best value that 'The General Fund would benefit from a £370,000 capital receipt (full market value), as well as revenue savings from releasing for example maintenance liabilities to the HRA'. We have to trust that such figures are accurate, but retain our suspicions that they may not be, given that the valuation of the Invertay complex at £375,000 was superseded a year ago by the lower one of £250,000.

14. In this connection, concern is being expressed at the national level in the Men's Shed movement about the excessive use of jargon constituting 'almost impossible hurdles for community groups to jump through.' Financial and verbal obscurities are a huge barrier to Shedders. A currently ongoing study at the Glasgow Caledonian University indicates that Sheds can struggle to cope with the tasks of administration, as opposed to the more practical skills required to run a Shed: <file:///C:/Users/Men's%20Shed/Downloads/Mens-Sheds-Sustainability-Briefing-Report-March-2019.pdf>

15. In sum we do not feel our application has been treated with an appropriate degree of fairness, transparency and participation – those principles central to the Community Asset Transfer process. We now request Angus Council to meet with us to engage in addressing the concerns set out in the above paragraphs.