Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill Local Community Led Plan

2005
Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill Action Plan

This Local Community Action Plan is a result of an initiative by Communities Scotland, and has been supported by South Lanarkshire Rural Partnership Leader+. It is one of 15 pilot demonstration projects across Scotland, each of which is testing new ways of involving local people in Community Planning - a process through which local authorities and the main public sector agencies work together to establish a bottom-up approach to plan, prioritise, and deliver better public services with the involvement and assistance of local communities.

The project has presented an opportunity for local residents to:
- become involved and contribute to the preparation of a community focused local plan
- better understand, participate in and influence Statutory Community Planning
- make known their priorities for the villages
- support Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill in organising and taking forward some local initiatives by itself.

The Plan itself is a tool through which the community of Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill can enter into dialogue with providers of services and examine how improvements might be made. Moreover, it has identified a range of actions which the community itself can undertake through Sustainable Voluntary Action.

At the heart of this process has been an understanding that in the 21st Century, as public sector finances become ever more tightly focused - it will be the organised and realistic community - with a clear idea of it’s future, a commitment to helping itself, and a spirit of local responsibility - which will flourish.

The community of Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill prepared this Community Action Plan with the assistance of ALVO (Association of Local Voluntary Organisations).

The plan summarises community views about:
- Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill now
- The issues that matter most to the local people
- The community’s vision for the future
- Priorities for action.

The plan outlines clearly the type of place Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill aims to be and what needs to be done. It will be used to highlight the communities needs and aspirations in discussion with public agencies and other partners, and as evidence of community support for priority projects.

“Visioning Day”
Blackwood Hall
5th March 2005
This plan was prepared following extensive collaboration from the community, which included:

- A community survey delivered to every household and business in the area
- A separate children’s survey issued to every primary school child in the area
- A series of six focus groups/workshops to capture the views and priorities of the over 50’s, women, children, youth, those out of work, and local businesses
- A community “Visioning Event” to ‘reality-proof’ the findings from the surveys and the focus groups and to finalise the priorities for inclusion in this Action Plan.

At every stage of the process it was emphasised that:

- An opportunity to participate and feed into a community focused Local Action Plan prepared by local residents
  - An opportunity to understand, participate in, and influence Statutory Community Planning
  - An opportunity to highlight the priorities for Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill
  - An opportunity to define what can be actioned by the community and what needs to be developed in partnership with other organisations
  - An opportunity to organise and progress some local initiatives by the community itself.

The Local Community Led Plan was not......

- A Local Authority Scheme
- A wish list of things that should but may never happen
- A promise of substantial additional funding coming into the area
- A temporary unsupported project with no future.

The plan was facilitated by a member of the community, Angela Lavery, and was supported and delivered with the assistance of ALVO.

423 or 26% of 1600 households completed the 106 question survey.

163 or 40% of the 407 children’s surveys were returned.

98 people attended the Focus Groups and “Visioning Day”
Many views, facts and figures were gathered about our community now, some of which are included in this Plan. Additional materials will be included in a follow-up statistical document which will be available on www.theGuidlife.net.

Summarised below are some of the key findings from the community surveys and children’s surveys.

### What we like....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we like</th>
<th>What we don’t like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to motorway and accessibility</td>
<td>The litter and vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The countryside location</td>
<td>The amount of loitering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The good schools and nursery</td>
<td>The lack of amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The friendly people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s quiet and safe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has a village feel</td>
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*“It’s a good area to live in. Handy for schools, handy for churches”*

*“Good primary education and nursery. Rural area. Good community spirit”*

*“Semi rural location. Close to M74 Motorway. Peaceful location”*

*“It’s friendly people. It’s quietness and the fact that it is away from towns.”*

*“It’s easy to commute to other places”*

### What we don’t like....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we don’t like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Thornton Rd area including the shops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poor roads and pavements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poor public transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thornton Rd shops are a shocking eyesore, roads are in very poor condition</td>
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<tr>
<td>No parks with flowers to sit in on nice days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lots of groups of young people hanging around street corners causing trouble</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant heavy goods traffic damaging roads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some areas feel run down &amp; neglected. Particularly shopping area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing to do socially. Drug &amp; drink situation. Poor public transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The complete state of the area which was once one of the nicest and cleanest wee villages in Lanarkshire.</td>
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</tbody>
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*“Visioning Day” Group Discussions*
Community Profile

Population

The current population of 3717 is expected to increase due to increased housing provision within the area. Currently over 20% of the local population are under 16 (higher than South Lanarkshire at 19.3%), with the majority (64%) of residents aged between 16 and retirement age. Just under 16% of local people are elderly, lower than South Lanarkshire’s 19%, and slightly below the national average.

Housing

70% of housing in the area is privately owned, 26% local authority rented, and the remainder made up of Registered Social Landlords and others. Local property is more affordable than in some other areas of South Lanarkshire.

Employment

Opportunities for local employment have decreased in recent times with the closure of Atlas, HiScot and DAKS, six miles to the north in Larkhall, but a central location and close proximity to the M74 make the area attractive to commuters. The unemployment rate of 4.49% is higher than the national average. Access to job markets in East Kilbride and Glasgow are hindered by indirect public transport routes.

Environment & Heritage

In the late 18th century both Kirkmuirhill and Blackwood were important coaching halts on the main route from Glasgow to London. The Blackwood Arms—located at Kirkmuirhill Cross—is an old coaching in with historical links. These ‘strategic’ locations led to the growth of the two settlements.

Blackwood Village took it’s name from Blackwood Estate, the largest estate in Lesmahagow Parish—home to the powerful Hope-Vere Family—the Scottish branch of “The Royal House of Vere”

Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill sits in picturesque countryside on the southern edge of the Clyde Valley. The surrounding land is mainly agricultural, while the valley is traditionally known for fruit growing.

The villages are situated close to Craignethan Castle, built on the banks of the river Nethan in 1532 by Sir James Hamilton - the last fortified castle to be built in Scotland, and reputedly the inspiration for Tillietudlem Castle in Old Mortality by Sir Walter Scott—a name by which it is known locally.

Blackwood was served by the Victorian rail network—until 1965 when Blackwood station was closed.

The two villages of Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill have now merged, but retain their own distinctive character.
In Our Control

Priority 1   Improve Access To Local Information

With the purpose of dramatically improving access to local information such as planned developments, initiatives, and events, as well as regular information relating to local clubs and businesses. Over 70% of residents feel that current information is inadequate and are supportive of the establishment of a community newsletter.

MAIN ACTIONS

• Establish a regular local newsletter.
• Establish a Local website on “theGuidLife”.

Priority 2   Improve the Appearance of the Area

Only 7% of local people think that the appearance of the area is good. The main concerns are in relation to vandalism, graffiti, litter and dog fouling.

MAIN ACTIONS

• To establish a system for local clean up through the formation of an environmental group
• Establish local landscaping and “Village in Bloom” programmes in collaboration with South Lanarkshire Council, Blackwood Horticultural Society and Scottish Natural Heritage
• Initiate anti litter/anti vandalism/anti dog fouling campaigns
• Encourage the use of dog fouling bags
• Liaise with South Lanarkshire Council to increase cleaning of roads and pavements
• Seek the provision of more litter bins/dog bins.

Priority 3   Increase Local Activities for all Ages

There is strong agreement that current activities in the area are inadequate with particular regard to youth, elderly and special needs. 49% of local people consulted said that they would like to swim more often if access barriers can be overcome.

MAIN ACTIONS

• Support the Target Community Centre in the provision of additional organised clubs for youth and elderly
• Explore the potential for increased cross generation activities and events
• Establish sports coaching/advice sessions for youth in conjunction with other organisations
• Develop a locally owned budget stream for bringing in organised activities, training and events
• Develop activities to meet the needs of people in the villages with special needs.

“Johnny Walkers” Walking Club
In Our Control

Priority 4  Encourage Spirit of Local Responsibility

There is recognition within the community of the potential benefits for everyone if personal responsibility and pride in our area is increased.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Establish a campaign for “Responsible Citizenship”
- Encourage increased parental responsibility, particularly for youth
- Investigate the set up of a “Walking Bus” for local school children to cut down traffic and parking congestion at school drop off and pick up times
- Initiative to encourage people to use cars less and park more responsibly.

Almost half of all people consulted were in favour of joining a neighbourhood watch scheme.

Priority 5  Re-introduce Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

MAIN ACTION

- Re-establish/extend a local neighbourhood watch scheme.

Although 77% of people feel safe living in Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill, 60% of people see a reduction in crime as one of the best ways to increase quality of life in the area.

Priority 6  Greater Community Co-operation with the Police

There appears to be a genuine reluctance to report crime, especially in relation to drug abuse, under age drinking and vandalism. The main barrier to reporting crime is preservation of anonymity.

MAIN ACTION

- Encourage residents to report crime more often using methods that maintain anonymity like “Crimestoppers”.

Blackwood Primary & Nursery
Shared Control

Priority 1  Encourage Enterprise & Training

It is recognised that local employment opportunities have declined in recent years and there is a strong need to encourage new businesses into the area whilst fully supporting existing businesses. Local employment training, especially for young people is needed.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Establish a local service and information directory to encourage support and use of existing businesses and organisations.
- Raise awareness of local employment training opportunities.
- Investigate ways to encourage the development of new local enterprises in collaboration with Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire and Business Gateway.
- Examine the potential to set up a local food co-operative to grow, source and provide affordable high quality organic food for the area.

Priority 2  Improved Childcare

There is a recognised shortage of affordable childcare available locally. There are few childminders and 32% of people are supportive of the establishment of a private nursery. Although there are some very good holiday play schemes in operation, none of them run for the duration of the business day or the holiday period. After school and breakfast clubs are also needed.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Investigate the scope for establishing full time childcare during the school holidays.
- Establish a local private nursery.
- Work with South Lanarkshire Council to identify potential solutions to meet the growing demand for places at Blackwood Nursery.

Priority 3  Reduce Drug & Alcohol Misuse

- Set up an introductory training session to encourage new childminders.
- Explore potential for a breakfast club to be set up locally.

Almost 80% of people feel that there is a serious problem in Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill with drug and alcohol abuse. The effects of this are evident throughout the area and steps need to be taken to reduce this.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Investigate best practice in reducing the effects of drugs and alcohol on communities.
- Encourage greater parental responsibility with regard to underage drinking.
- Encourage trader’s to insist on production of ID prior to alcohol sales.
- Work with Strathclyde Police and Lanarkshire Health Board to define a local strategy to address this problem.
Outwith Our Control

Priority 1  Redevelopment of Thornton Road

There are many problems associated with Thornton Rd. 65% of people avoid this area after dark and this is fast becoming a “No Go” area due to loitering, drug and alcohol abuse. It is identified as the biggest local problem area.

MAIN ACTIONS

Work with Community Planning Partners to define a co-ordinated strategy to seek the following improvements to this area;

• The introduction of CCTV to reduce loitering, drug and alcohol abuse
• Higher policing levels
• Improved street lighting
• Improvements in the appearance and range of shops available
• Improved car parking
• Re-examine traffic calming measures
• Improve roads and pavements
• Possible introduction of a Pelican Crossing
• Replacement strategy for Leisuredome.

Priority 2  Improved Roads & Pavements

97% of local people think that the roads and pavements are in a poor state of repair, with 83% identifying this as a serious problem. Quarry traffic and HGV’s have a big impact on road surfaces, with most major and minor local roads in a dangerous state due to pot holes.

MAIN ACTION

• Liaise with South Lanarkshire Council and lobby the Scottish Executive to provide investment for road and pavement repairs throughout the villages.

Priority 3  Increased Road Safety

84% of people identified speeding traffic as a serious problem in the area, coupled with increased traffic volumes, especially in relation to heavy vehicles. Safer roads was the biggest priority of local primary children in relation to improving the area. The main danger spots were identified as Vere Rd, Carlisle Rd and Thornton Rd, with 75% of people stating that current traffic calming is ineffective.

MAIN ACTIONS

• Removal of “inappropriate” traffic calming on Vere Rd
• The introduction of Pelican crossings on main roads
• Introduction of flashing speed warnings on Carlisle Rd
• Measures taken to reduce the impact of quarry traffic.
Outwith Our Control

Priority 4 Improved Shops

Although 43% of people use the local shops every day, 80% do their main shopping elsewhere with the main reasons being, not enough or a poor choice of shops. High prices are also an issue.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Explore the potential for the introduction of a supermarket to the area supported by plans for increased housing
- Introduce a 24 hour cashline facility.

Priority 5 Increased Law Enforcement

With regard to policing in the area, 60% of people stated that they never or hardly ever saw the police in the area, with 87% stating that they want to see them more frequently.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Examine the possibility of a return to community policing in the area
- Pursue initiatives for the reduction of loitering, drug and alcohol abuse
- Explore the possibility of the introduction of community wardens.

With regard to local parks and play areas, 43% of people felt that they did not meet children’s needs, 60% feel that vandalism is a problem and 46% feel that they are unsafe. Only 10% feel that they are well maintained. Dog fouling is also highlighted as a problem. The local primary school children highlighted improved parks as their strongest preferred improvement to the area.

Priority 6 Improvements to Parks and Play Areas

MAIN ACTIONS

- Clean up Blackwood Park and remove graffiti
- Create more appropriate play area for toddlers within Blackwood Park
- Create more play areas throughout the village
- Introduce better play equipment within parks
- Introduce lighting
- Security fencing to prevent vandalism
- Upgrade the football pitches to include lighting and acceptable changing facilities
- The introduction of an area for the use of quad bikes
- Enhanced indoor play facilities.
Although the vast majority of local people have access to a car, 73% feel that provision of public transport is essential to our villages. The people most likely to use public transport are either the elderly or the young. Limitations in the current service have a significant effect on access to employment, with no direct routes to Glasgow and East Kilbride.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Review current bus routes through villages with a view to extending them
- Explore the introduction of direct bus routes to Glasgow and East Kilbride
- Review current bus timetable with a view to improving access to onward connections.

Priority 8  Introduce a Swimming pool

There is a strong desire within the community for the introduction of a local swimming pool. It is the most popular leisure activity within the community with 49% of people saying that they would like to do this more often, identifying lack of local facilities as the major barrier. At the Visioning Day local residents recognised that this was highly unlikely in the immediate to medium term and relegated its priority.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Seek the introduction of a local swimming pool.
- Investigate the set up of a regular afternoon/evening swim bus in liaison with Healthy Valleys.

Priority 9  Rationalise Health Services

74% of people feel that Blackwood/Kirkmuirhill is a healthy place to live. Although most people have no problems accessing Health services locally, the community would benefit from a single Health Centre with improved disabled facilities. The lack of local access to a female GP and dental services were also highlighted.

MAIN ACTIONS

- Introduction of a combined health centre for the area
- Increased local dental services.
Next Steps...

Establish a “Villages Co-ordination Group”

MAIN ACTION
Establish a Villages Co-ordination Group which is representative of the entire community. This group will be run by ordinary members of the community with the main purpose of achieving improvements to Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill by progressing the actions identified in this Plan.

Carrying Out These Actions

26 people came forward at the Visioning day to take part in a “Villages Co-ordination Group”. A committee of 10 has now been formed to lead in the delivery of this action plan. It will work closely with Community Planning Partners, existing local organisations and collaborate with neighbouring communities.

Main Contacts

If you would like further information with regard to either this plan or the “Villages Co-ordination Group” please contact the following people;

Angela Lavery 0784 927 8365 Convenor
Anne Connelly 01555 894170 Secretary

Supporting These Actions

Few of these actions an be achieved without the strong support and involvement of local people and collaborative working with other organisations. If you are interested in assisting with any of these priority projects, please contact us.

Reviewing The Action Plan

We will from time to time review our progress in implementing this plan, inviting all groups in the community to attend a meeting and assess the progress we are making in carrying out the actions set out in the Plan. A review meeting will be held 12 months after the launch of the Plan to take stock of our achievements and set goals for the year after.

Thanks are extended to all who took part in helping to prepare this Local Community Led Plan, to Communities Scotland, South Lanarkshire Rural Partnership Leader+ and ALVO

The “Villages Co-ordination Group” Committee