

Holmehill Ltd

Annual General Meeting: August 31st 2011

Chairman's Report

I should begin by apologising that as your Chairman, I am unable to be at the AGM this year – work and personal family commitments mean I leave you in the capable hands of the previous chairperson and would like to thank Caroline for standing in. It feels in some ways as if this last year has been a relatively quiet one, but in reality the timing of last year's AGM at the end of August meant that I was able then not just to report on the "company" year (April to April), but to bring everyone up to date with all the various important activities that had occurred between April and August 2010 – some of which should in effect be reported again as they occurred in this company year.

The most important of these was the detailed work the Committee and members put in reviewing the various elements of the new Stirling Local Development Plan, and in particular analysing the Main Issues Report to see what implications it had for the future of Holmehill. We were able to see the full extent of the development wishes of Allan Water Development for the hill, and also the Council's own proposals relating to that part of the hill adjacent to Bogside. Challenging these proposals was the main thrust and focus of our work therefore for much of that spring and summer, though in challenging we also emphasised that we were keen to see the hill developed – but developed *for the community to enjoy as open space*, not as exclusive or affordable housing, gradually eroding the heart of Dunblane, cutting in piecemeal from every side.

We also responded to Stirling Council's Open Space Strategy, again stressing that the whole of Holmehill, including Bogside should be protected and developed for the community as an open space. In doing so, we have remained true to our core long-term aims for the hill - to ensure it is protected and to encourage sustainable development and use by the local community, as well as by visitors to Dunblane.

We now await the next steps in the development plan process, as the Council progresses from the publication of the Main Issues Report (approved by Council on 22 April 2010) to the Proposed Local Development Plan itself, which will be published in October of this year, and outlines the main results of the consultation over this last year.

With the "official" period of consultation over, we have not ignored the need to continue to promote the sustainable development of the Hill and to explore any new avenues for ensuring its long-term future. We thus had a meeting, facilitated by our local Councillor Graham Houston with Allan Water Development in January 2011- the Chairman, Secretary and Council member David Prescott going to meet David Stirling, the Managing Director at the Council offices.

The aim of the meeting, the first time current Council members and David Stirling had met, was to introduce the new Committee officers and to let him know that the Group was still active and retained an active interest in Holmehill, and also to ensure

that he had a contact in the Holmehill team. We were also keen to find out about Allan Water Development's long-term plans, and to see what may be possible in the shorter term in respect of improving the day to day maintenance and use of the hill - the ecological and community value of parts of which are beginning to deteriorate badly through lack of management and decay.

It is clear from our conversations, which were polite and constructive in as far as they went, that Allan Water Developments see Holmehill as a site ready for development. Reference was made to an earlier letter to the Group from his father, and the suggestion that the offer then made, is still on the table, with some 8.5 out of 14 acres available to be given to a suitable "Trust" with an endowment for maintenance "in perpetuity". However, he also stressed that he still has the opportunity to develop the site of the demolished house for offices, which he stated could provide for his own office accommodation, and that the more land the community wanted retained as open space, the less money would be available for supporting the open space.

None of the present Committee have seen this letter, and despite promising to send a copy and the Chairman sending him a reminder, we still have not seen it. What is clear though is that the proposals would cut in to the hill from every angle, destroying the integrity of any open space for community enjoyment and seriously damaging the ecological potential. Unfortunately, Mr Stirling did not appear ready to negotiate any further access or "rights" for us to do anything positive to improve the facilities and environment of the hill for community use in the meantime, but suggested such an approach might be acceptable if we opened up meaningful discussions with him about what he considered as a realistic way forward.

Last year saw a rush of new publications from the Group - the new *Dunblane green spaces Walks leaflet*, our second *Holmehill calendar* and the *Memories of Holmehill* booklet. This year we haven't done any further publications, but these have been very much welcomed, and along with a new range of cards, ready for the Christmas period have kept us in the local eye. The cards featured a range of views and we are currently exploring some further ideas for cards and our third calendar.

Beyond regular meetings to discuss the Local Development Plan and updates to the membership on this and other issues, our other main external communication remains the website (www.holmehill.org) and the blog (www.holmehillblog.org). Both have been updated in July of this year, and thanks are again due to Grant and Steve for their help, and to Libby and Chris for regular contributions.

As ever, we have also been active in and around the hill itself this year. As we explained to the current owners, we remain concerned as to the deterioration of the hill and the deliberate lack of management. With the strong winds and very heavy snows over winter, a lot of heavy branches came crashing down. These largely remained where they fell and, like the areas of meadow and other trees and shrubs are being ignored. We did though ourselves spend a day collecting litter on the Hill in April, removing several large sacks of bottles, cans, boxes and other rubbish. The paths signs though that the members helped erect at the entrance to the Hill from Perth Road and Ramoyle have survived well, and now attract many more people to use the core path across and round the Hill.

Once again we held our popular *Dawn chorus* event in early May– well, popular with insomniacs at least! This year despite awful weather some 20 folk joined the chairman and fellow local ornithologist, Douglas Kerr for a walk through the Laighills and Holmehill, before enjoying a superb cooked breakfast in the Braeport, once again served up by Libby, Debbie and Claire. Otherwise, Chris has continued his monthly bird surveys of the hill – new species this year included a Hooded crow in winter, joined in the snows by a couple of Pheasants, and then in Spring a Nuthatch was recorded for the first time – and has been a regular since. In June this year we also organised a “Flora Day”, with members being shown round the hill by local expert Steve Longster and Caroline Crawford, identifying some of the plants found growing in and around the hill.

We also continued with our other “regular” events and contributions to the local community. At the Dunblane and Doune Fling in late May, our tent featured some impressive carving and willow weaving to create two wonderful deer from local wood. Once more, Dave organised the annual Blues night in Dunblane. Not only do these and other such activities raise the profile and interest in the Hill and the Group’s work, they also help raise funds for our activities.

Finally then, before thanking the secretary, treasurer and other members of the Board and the wider membership for their continuing support for the work of the Group, I must pay tribute to one of our long-serving members, John Sneddon who sadly died in the summer. Whilst he represented the Development Trust on our Committee, he was also a fount of local wisdom and knowledge about the Hill and wider matters concerning Dunblane and he will be missed.

We are always looking for new members and for new ideas – so please feel free to come and along and get involved!

Professor Chris J Spray MBE
Chairman of Holmehill Ltd.

August 2011