

# Long-running Park of Keir saga heads for agreement

The application has been rumbling on since 2015, with representatives from the local community fighting against the development.

Park of Keir developers and Stirling Council officials appear to have reached agreement following prolonged discussions on the controversial project.

The council was tasked with ironing out conditions attached to planning permission granted after Scottish Ministers called in the plans. A ninth extension to the talks between the local authority planners and Park of Keir Partners, who include Judy Murray, was granted by Ministers earlier this year.

The Scottish Government conditionally approved the plans for a tennis centre and housing between Dunblane and Bridge of Allan two years ago after Scottish Ministers called it in. This was despite an independent Scottish Government appointed reporter having turned down the application on appeal, supporting Stirling Council planning panel's 2015 decision.

At a virtual council meeting on Tuesday, while responding to a question from local Green councillor Alasdair Tollemache, the council's planning convener Councillor Alasdair Macpherson confirmed that the terms of the draft Section 75 agreement had now all been agreed, and the applicant was concluding appraisal work prior to signing the document.

He added: "Given this position, only a limited amount of officer time has been required on this in recent months.

"The Scottish Ministers' extension of time to conclude negotiations on this Section 75 agreement expired on June 23, 2020. The applicant has requested a further three month time extension from the Scottish Ministers, to September 23.

"The last time an extension sought by the applicant was in March 2020, and the applicant has pointed out difficulties involved in concluding matters during the Covid-19 situation between March and June. In light of the exceptional circumstances, the council representation to the Scottish Ministers has agreed to the further extension period. In the meantime, legal advice has been sought on future steps.

"When the agreement is concluded, a paper will be taken to planning and regulation panel to give the opportunity for scrutiny prior to it going to Ministers, in line with the agreed motion at Stirling Council on March 15, 2018."

Councillor Tollemache said later: "Six years on from this misguided proposal first coming to light communities are angry and need to see a transparent and accountable decision making process.

"If the developers are trying to change the goal posts by making major changes to their business case then that information needs to be in the public domain just as it was at the public inquiry. The developers must not be allowed to morph their proposal into something else by the backdoor."

Green MSP Mark Ruskell added: "The SNP planning minister has let this saga drag on for three years bringing uncertainty and concern to the communities of Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. Park of Keir remains the jewel in the crown of our greenbelt and communities have fought to protect against development here for over three decades.

"Given the fresh financial crisis and the dubious economic figures presented at the public inquiry, it's hard to see how the proposal will meet the original conditions."

A spokesperson for Park of Keir Partners told the Observer: "Like many organisations, we've been affected by the wider effort to restrict the spread of Covid-19, however, we are pleased to have agreed the Section 75 with Stirling Council and are now finalising our plans. We look forward to bringing those to life in the form of an exciting multi-sport community facility."