

# Laurencekirk development Trust.(LDT)

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## Report on public meeting held at Mearns Campus on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

The meeting was promoted in the press, via the community website, on Facebook, with posters, and by email to a wide range of clubs, organisations and to the general public. Local schools were contacted via the parent teacher committees.

Council officers, councillors and community council members were also invited as well as the membership of Laurencekirk Development Trust.

Approximately 90 people attended the meeting.

The agenda covered the following issues:

**Setting the scene** - persistent public demand for a swimming pool for decades, failure of Aberdeenshire council to include one in the new Mearns Academy Community Campus, and currently no plans to provide alternative facilities in the Laurencekirk District.

Research has been carried out by LDT into the most economic models currently available. They have identified the Atlantis Leisure Centre in Oban as one which serves a similar population to Mearns and which is a leader in its field. Serving a population of about 10,000 it has a footfall of 16,000 per month. It provides an ever increasing number of options for the residents, training its own staff of 22 to very high levels and attracting 50 volunteers from the community to turn it into **the** social centre of Oban.

What **evidence** do we have that we should prioritise sport and fitness?

The health status of Scotland is declining. Only 13% of children in the 5 to 11 age group in this country achieve one hour of physical activity daily. 65% of residents of Aberdeenshire are overweight. Life expectancy is predicted to decline. 65% of the NHS budget is spent on caring for diabetic patients, most of who suffer from type II diabetes.

By creating a much stronger health and fitness ethos we would dramatically reduce demands on the costly NHS and be the healthy happy folk which we aspire to be.

Retention of the former playing field will provide the potential for an athletics track, archery venue and rugby pitch – all of which we lack at present.

Current problems in accessing sports facilities were identified by several members of the audience. They included the absolute lack of specific facilities, shortage of swimming space in the existing pools, the distance from the nearest facilities, the time taken travelling, the high percentage of

commuters who already have very limited free time and the very busy and dangerous roads to arrive at your destination. The new Mearns Academy is probably the least well situated Academy in Aberdeenshire in terms of its remoteness from a swimming pool.

### **Location and land acquisition.**

LDT and the Mearns Community have presented a long term vision for the development of Laurencekirk over the next 30 to 50 years. This includes locations for a range of developments identified by the residents of Laurencekirk at a series of public consultations. They include the playing field and swimming pool, school expansion as well as a service station, hotel, retail, commercial and industrial sites as well as additional cycle and footpaths.

The location, nominated by the community, is adjacent to the new campus and will allow expansion of the facility over time. This unique opportunity will be lost if the land is used for other purposes. With plans for at least 855 new homes the population of Laurencekirk is likely to increase by 195%. The community's wish to have integrated development of the town is not in doubt. Failure to do so is already causing hardship and unnecessary problems.

Land acquisition is already on the cards; the area is part of the current M1 site and has already been nominated for commercial, retail and some housing developments. It is proposed to form a consortium to progress this aspiration. Community funding is available through a number of sources and the forthcoming Community Empowerment Bill will facilitate projects such as the one under consideration. Fund raising was initiated many years ago to replace the temporary pool in the former academy and this community fund will be a vital part of the community's commitment to the scheme.

### **Scope of the project.**

Swimming pools operated in isolation from other community facilities are particularly expensive to run. By creating a multifaceted community centre and sports hub and by fully involving all the settlements in the Mearns we can create a genuine centre of excellence which would bring real benefits to the Mearns. Now is the time for local sport and community groups to become involved and bring all their ideas to bear on the project.

In addition to swimming, athletics, rugby and archery this gives us a unique chance to consider both other sports or fitness disciplines as well as other community facilities such as child care, senior citizen social centre and facilities for special needs groups. Now is the time for residents to submit their ideas.

### **Stakeholders Group.**

This project has a very long list of potential stakeholders. The steering group will address this at an early stage in the process.

### **Funding.**

This is always a challenge but with a sound plan and 10,000 potential beneficiaries we already have an excellent case to proceed.

This project has a huge opportunity to pay massive dividends for individuals, communities, local government, employment and local economy and the National Health Service. It is difficult to think of a better return on any investment.

### **Steering Group.**

Recruiting sufficient volunteers to support both the campaign and the running of a community pool are vital elements in the government's plans for community empowerment. LDT are confident that there is real community commitment to this proposal.

Suggestions to establish specific online presence e.g. a Facebook page was accepted as a vital part in maintaining communication across the communities.

LDT will arrange a steering group meeting following its monthly meeting in May. Meanwhile it will follow up several of the excellent suggestions and offers of help given at Tuesday's meeting.

The organisers would like to thank all those who took part including those who send their apologies and their support, those who attended and the Aberdeenshire Council staff, Councillors and Community Council all of whom made significant contributions to the discussions.