

The Auld Toon News

It's FREE!



Issue 22 - November 2015

The newsletter of the
Old Aberdeen
Community Council
mail@oacc.org.uk



Special issue: HMO Consultation, It's time to have your say!

After several years of prevarication, Aberdeen City Council have agreed to *consider* putting in place a limit to the density of 'Houses in Multiple Occupation' around Aberdeen. This issue of The Auld Toon News has been rushed out to ensure all residents have the opportunity to make their opinions heard on this consultation.

Turn to page 3 and 4 for more details and how to make your opinion heard.

All replies must be received by **25th November**; please do submit your views - it is really important for the whole community!

Also inside:

- Seaton Park going from strength to strength
- Bedford Road - no way to go
- Proposed major development on the south side of St Peter's Street
- Introduction to the Puffin (no, we're not turning all naturalist)

Do you find this newsletter hard to read? Drop a line to webadmin@oldaberdeen.org.uk for a large print edition.

Bedford Road - a 'no through road'

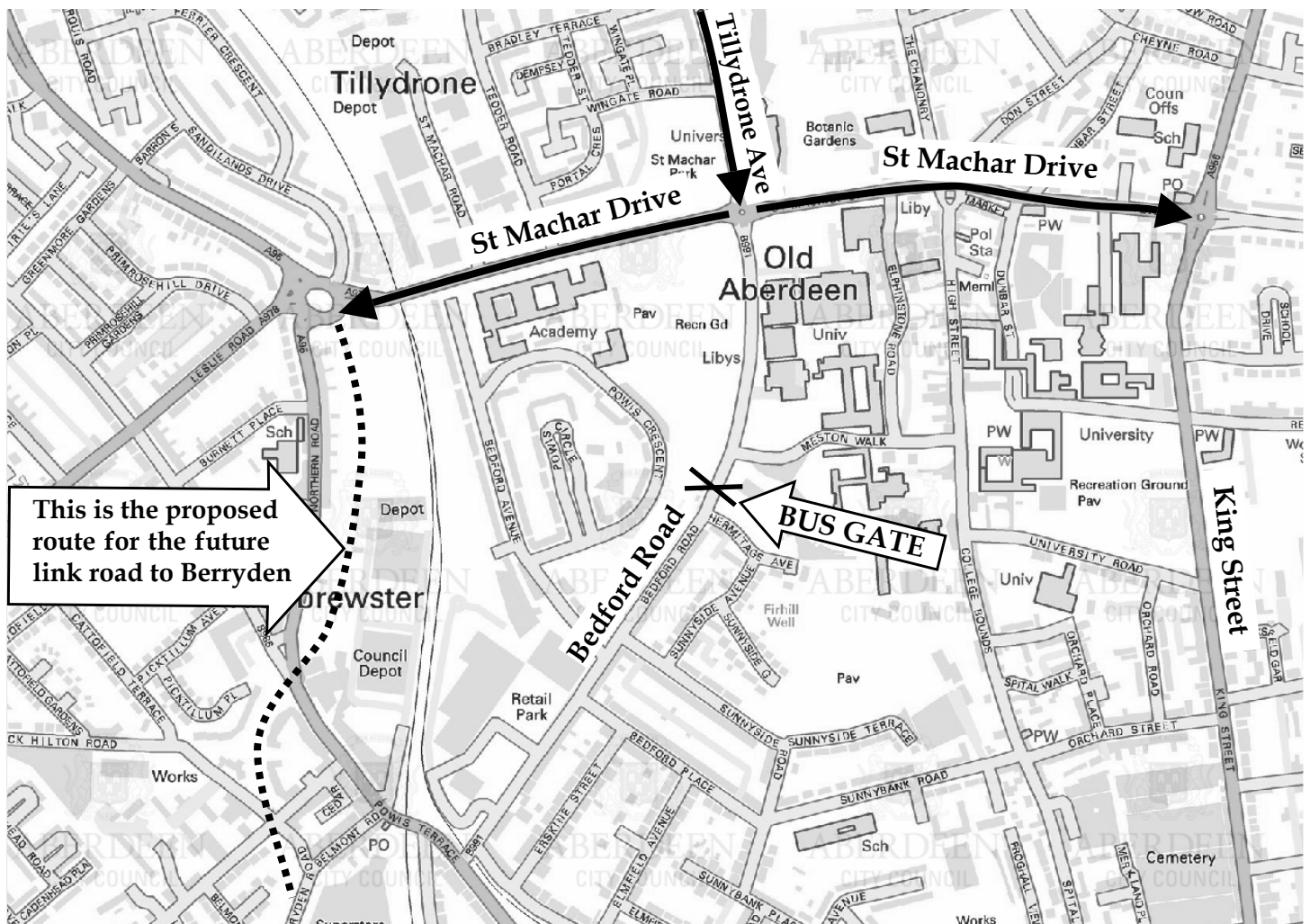
You may not be aware of this, but you will soon be unable to drive along Bedford Road and expect to get anywhere. As part of the 'Road to Nowhere' third Don Crossing development, the Council were concerned that all the extra traffic dumped on Tillydrone Road - Tillydrone Avenue would have nowhere to go, as the tie-up to the Berryden link road was a long way off, and still is. So, the traffic, having whizzed along the Bridge of Don Parkway, then tooted across the shiny new bridge, will be dumped onto the heavily congested St Machar Drive.

The Council are, however, concerned that the heavy traffic from the new bridge would keep going south along Bedford Road and completely snarl up the junction at Powis Terrace. So - they are going to close the road!

At the point where the big electricity transformer is located, there will be a bus gate and only buses, bicycles and emergency vehicles will be allowed through. This will force all traffic to go east onto the busy King Street, or west past St Machar Academy to meet the traffic coming from Haudagain.

Now, the traffic department's wonderful traffic modelling computer program assures us that the traffic will actually flow smoother with Bedford Road closed and computers are never wrong, so that should be fine.

Won't it?



The long awaited "Berryden Corridor" dual carriageway, to link the "Magic Roundabout" (at the top of St. Machar Drive) with the Woolmanhill dual carriageway, has now been approved for detailed design. There is as yet however no confirmed start date and its projected construction of between 2016 and 2018 will most likely slip back when it comes to finding the finance, so we can look forward to traffic chaos for many years to come.

HMO Consultation Survey 2015

On 27th August 2015, the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee of Aberdeen City Council gave instructions for a public consultation to be held on the possibility of introducing a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) over-provision policy for Aberdeen.

The proposal is to limit the local concentration of HMOs by setting an agreed limit as a percentage of the total number of properties in a given area. The concept of limiting the numbers of HMOs in any one area is an issue that the Old Aberdeen Community Council has fought for since the Scottish Government created legislation that in 2011 that gave local authorities control over-provision, so this is a big step forward, but we still have a long way to go before this can become a reality.

There are three issues to address:

- Are HMO limitations necessary?
- Is 15% of the properties in a given area an appropriate figure?
- Is the proposal to use Census Output Areas as the means of defining each area suitable?

Let's tell you a bit more about all these issues:-

Are HMO limitations necessary?

Putting it baldly, most long term residents will want to limit the concentration of HMOs while landlords will not want anything that limits their ability to buy and extend properties they consider financially attractive, irrespective of the impact upon the community. If lots of landlords respond to this questionnaire saying this limitation is not needed and not in the interest of supply and demand, and no-one writes in to argue otherwise - then the Council will listen to the landlords again. That happened in 2013 when 78% of the responses were from HMO licence holders, agents or landlords. Whatever your thoughts on this, we need as many residents to respond as possible to make their opinion known to the City Council.

How will this effect students?

Well, it will not limit the number of HMOs in Aberdeen; there are only two community councils with a high number of HMOs; Old Aberdeen and Garthdee, though Sunnybank is under growing pressure. If this policy was put into place it would simply mean that in the localities with the highest number of existing HMOs that no further houses should be converted into HMOs.

- It would not force any existing HMOs to close
- It would not halt further conversion of domestic properties into HMOs in Old Aberdeen except in those areas already overprovided with HMO properties
- It would not result in a shortage of rental property
- It would not restrict the building of purpose built student accommodation
- It would help to maintain diversity in our neighbourhood

Is 15% an appropriate percentage?

Well, other cities are looking at or are already using percentages varying from 5% to 12% - not one is considering 15%. The Old Aberdeen Community Council considers 10% to be a more reasonable limit. What this means is that in a single area of, say 100 households, then up to 10 of them can be HMOs.

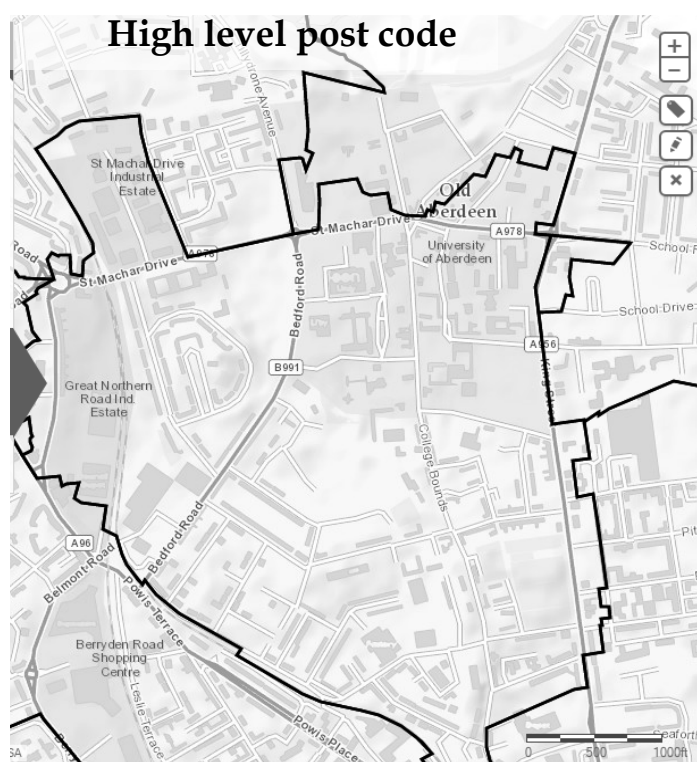
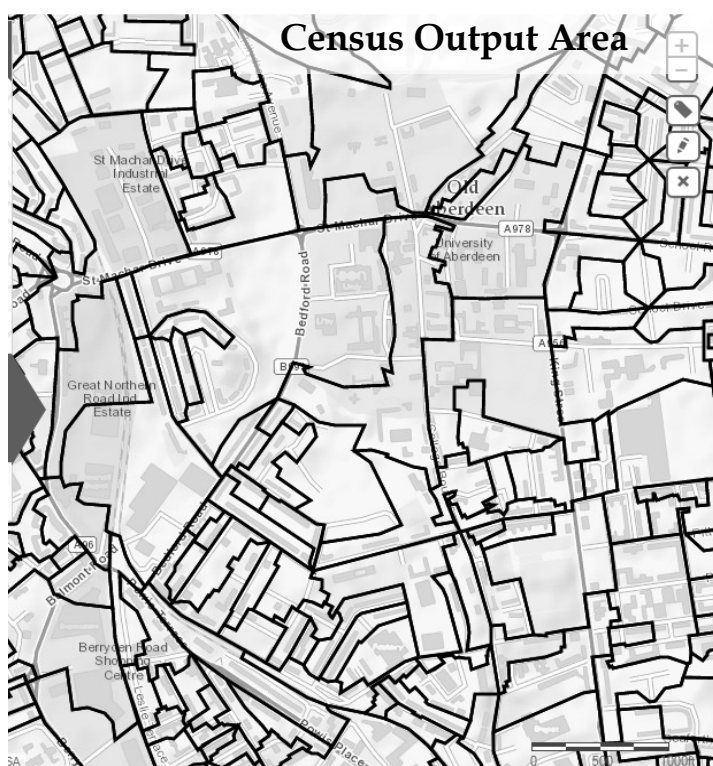
Do remember that this does not include all the other rented accommodation. A small tenement flat with one or two bedrooms is not an HMO, so this 10% or 15% is over and above all the smaller properties and will have no affect upon the number of smaller properties that are to let.

Is a Census Output Area a suitable measure?

Percentage HMO by Census Output Area. The idea of a Census Output area is that each one contains around 125 households. Around Old Aberdeen the Census Output Areas look like the map below left. You will see that there is quite a lot of variation in size; this is due to the differing density of occupation.

Percentage HMO by postcode can be equally variable.

A large scale postcode division is to the last number – e.g. AB24 2, AB24 3 etc. This division looks like the image to on the right. Each area is obviously too big. Yet if we go to the smallest area of post code, such as AB24 3EN, this can refer to as little as one or two properties or as many as 65 on part of Don Street. So an area with the last letter dropped off such as AB24 1W or AB24 3E *may* be practicable, but we have not seen any data of what this look like.



Percentage HMO by street - There is a logic in this, but think of the bigger streets; like King Street. That is far too long to make a suitable area, so some sort of sub-division will be needed, but what? - By 100 metre stretch? By 100 house numbers? The process starts to get more complicated.

Percentage HMO by radius

The area division that would perhaps most closely match residents' wishes might be by radius. Consider an HMO application for a property. For this property, a radius of (perhaps 100m?) is drawn around it. An application would likely be refused if a licence for this property would increase the number of HMO properties within a 100 metre radius of that property if that would exceed the agreed limit. With this division it does mean that each application would have to be worked out individually.

SO. What to do...

The Council has posted a questionnaire on their website:

www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/housing/private_housing/hmo/HMO_Consultation.asp. Here you will find a link to the consultation and also a link to some further information regarding the consultation. But if you would rather submit a paper copy, we've included it on the next couple of pages - just pull them out, fill them in and the address is at the back of the pull-out.

Remember it must be in by 25th November

While it appears to be optional, we recommend that you fully validate your submission by including your name and address which will be kept confidential by the Council.

HMO Consultation Survey 2015

1. Please advise if you are responding as :

- An individual
- A current HMO licence holder/applicant
- Landlord
- Letting Agent
- Student
- HMO neighbour
- Other (please specify below)

2. It is proposed that Census Output Areas (COAs) are used as the locality for the proposed HMO Overprovision Policy.

Do you agree that a COA is an appropriate locality?

- Yes No

3. If you answered no, what alternative would you propose?

4. It is proposed that a HMO Overprovision threshold is set at 15% of properties being HMOs in a COA.

Is 15% is an appropriate overprovision threshold?

- Yes No

5. If no, please tell us what you think an appropriate overprovision threshold would be and why.

- 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%
100% Other (please describe below)

6. It is proposed to exempt certain property uses from the policy. Please indicate below whether you agree or disagree that each of the below should be exempted from the policy.

- i) New-build, purpose-built HMO accommodation such as students residences and developments covered by Section 75 agreements under the Town & Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997) which restricts their use to HMO.

Agree Disagree

- ii) Non mainstream accommodation e.g. supported housing

Agree Disagree

- iii) Competent renewals of existing licences

Agree Disagree

- iv) Existing licensed properties which change ownership and have a competent application lodged within one month of the change in ownership

Agree Disagree

7. Please use the space below for any other comments on the draft policy as a whole.

Need for HMO Accommodation

The legislation and guidance refers to “the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation is required to meet that need”.

There is no recognised way of measuring need for HMOs. Normally the need for HMOs is identified by market forces with the need not necessarily being delivered at a census output area but at a larger geographic area.

If you have any views on how we might measure HMO need within a locality, please use the comment box below.

We may need to get in touch with you for clarification around your answers. Please supply your contact details below.

Name

Address
.....
.....
.....

Email Address

Please send completed paper replies to:

HMO Consultation
Business Hub 11
Second Floor West
Marischal College
Aberdeen City Council
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1AB

Or alternatively email to: HMOConsultations@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Seaton Park Progress

The natural beauty and allure of Aberdeen's Seaton Park continues to be spotlighted at national level and, very importantly, is also attracting significant funding which will be spent on enhancing the Park.

Following on from its major role in Aberdeen's gold award in the 'Royal Horticulture Society Britain in Bloom Awards' in 2014, there was more national recognition this summer when the Park won the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society Award for the prime open space in the Keep Scotland Beautiful contest. Overall, Aberdeen won seven trophies in this round of awards.

The judges described Seaton Park as a "jewel" in Aberdeen's parks portfolio and singled out The Cathedral Walk for its high standard of design. They added: "The lawns are maintained to an exceptional high standard showing a great degree of skill and knowledge by the small team who are ably supported by a dedicated Friends of Seaton Park who work in close co-operation."

Seaton Park's head gardener is Derek McKay who is assisted by Kat Myslek and a rotating team of assistants.

Aberdeen City Council's Communities, Housing and Infrastructure vice-convenor Councillor Jean Morrison said: "Congratulations to everyone who was involved – it's a fantastic achievement and is an accolade to all the hard work put in by all."

Praising the city council's parks, rangers and events team staff members for a "huge effort to ensure our green spaces are fun and accessible places" Councillor Morrison added: "The community groups also have to be congratulated for the amount of work and effort put in by them to help make this happen and they are a very important part of ensuring our beautiful city has green spaces and flower beds we can be proud of." Seaton Park has also earned a glowing report in the Keep Scotland Beautiful It's Your Neighbourhood assessment – scoring 85 points out of 100.

There was also praise from Angela Scott, chief executive of Aberdeen City Council. In a message to FOSP secretary Hamish Mackay, she said: "I am sorry I missed Seaton ParkFest. I visited the Park soon after with Steven Shaw and he was

saying the rain on the day didn't dampen the spirit of the Friends. On my return visit, the Park was certainly in full bloom and the new playpark was great. Thank you and all the Friends of Seaton Park for the fantastic work you put into the Park and for the support you give my team."

This will all help in FOSP's bid next year, in conjunction with Aberdeen City Council, for the Green Flag Award, considered to be one of the top park and public space awards. Duthie Park earned its Green Flag in 2013. The award is administered through Keep Scotland Beautiful and is judged on eight criteria including cleanliness, conservation and high levels of maintenance.

One immediate sequel to the major Scottish award was that FOSP management committee members have been invited to address garden clubs and rotary clubs in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, and chair Sheila Gordon and secretary Hamish Mackay were interviewed by STV.



The fountain was fired up for the occasion. Presently it has a leak, but sorting this is on the 'Friends' list of essential park improvements

By Hamish Mackay

Another major development - student flats - St Peter Street/King's Crescent

In 2013 the Scottish Government issued a Planning Circular on Development Management Procedures which sought to explain the reasons behind the Pre-application Consultation Phase of any major planning development:

2.1 The Government is seeking to encourage improved trust and more open, positive working relationships from the earliest stages in the planning process and to provide, where possible, an early opportunity for community views to be reflected. New statutory requirements have been introduced to ensure that communities are made aware of, and have an opportunity to comment on, certain types of development proposals before a planning application has been made.

And so, Montagu Evans representing Ardmuir Developments, publicised a Pre-Application Public Event on Thursday 8th October to be held in St Mary's Parish Church, King Street. This was to inform local residents about their proposed development of student accommodation blocks on the site of First Bus's employee parking at the corner of St Peter Street and King's Crescent.

Leafletting was sparse and very few residents in the neighbourhood received any notification. Legally, the developers are required to submit a description in general terms of the development to be carried out, the postal address of the development site, a plan showing the outline of the site and details of how the prospective applicant may be contacted. All of this was complied with but the event was still a complete waste of time for anyone seeking more information than just the red outline on the map. Surely a developer interested in explaining the development to the public in an effort to secure their approval, or at least to alleviate their worst fears, would have gone beyond the bare minimum and certainly produced more than four totally inadequate small display boards.

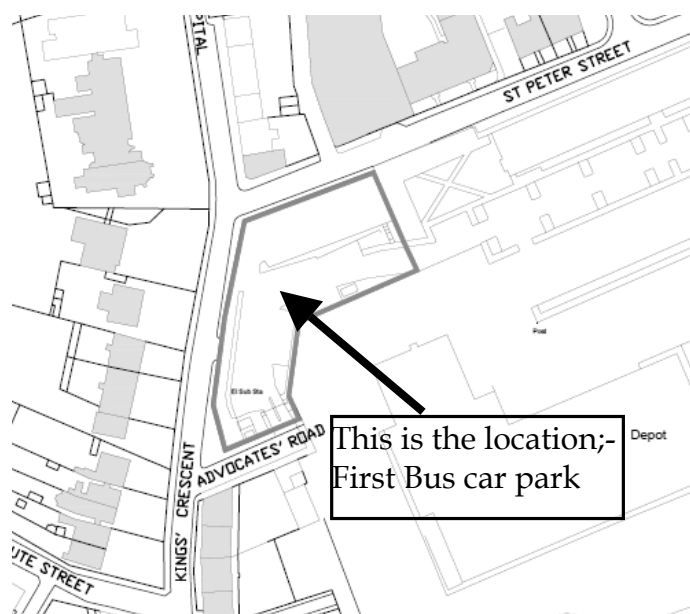
This is a major development with huge accommodation blocks but there was no indication of the structure's height, mass, volume, or the shadow effect it would have on the environment. No attempt was made to give residents any feel for what effect massed blocks of that size will have on surrounding properties and the amenity of the neighbourhood. The representatives were unable to offer clear answers on the number of beds, the number of students, the number of parking spaces.

It all seemed like a rushed job on just another student block in some backwater street. Yet this is a major development on land adjoining and overlooking Aberdeen's prime historic Conservation Area - our residents and our community deserve better.

We have contacted Kevin Sewart MSP about the need for amendments to the legislation to include requirements for greater visual representation of a major development requiring a Pre-Application Consultation. We have also just discovered the Scottish Government has set up an independent panel 'to carry out a game-changing review of Scotland's planning system' and they would be open to representations until the end of November. Watch this space.

Ardmuir Developments have now offered to give a short presentation to the Community Council at the meeting on Tuesday November 17th so, if you're going to be affected, please do come along and let them know your views.

By C.B.



Conservation or Commerce??

Local residents were recently heartened by the Scottish Government Reporter's decision to uphold the decision by the Council's Planning Committee to refuse planning permission for alterations to a local house as part of works during which it was converted into an HMO. The proposed alterations included the creation of a driveway instead of a front garden, demolition of a chimney, the replacement of traditional windows and doors with uPVC and alterations to other architectural features. All these alterations were recommended for approval by Council Planners, despite the house being within the conservation area and a number of the changes being in breach of the Council's own policies.

Unfortunately, the developers had already started work on the alterations and this was only stopped by the Council's enforcement officers when they were alerted to the illegal works. A combined effort by OACC, Old Aberdeen Heritage Society and residents, with the support of our local councillors, was able to save the traditional doors and windows and, we hope, that the garden will now be reinstated.

The Scottish Government Reporter fully supported the residents' assertions that the alterations would be detrimental to the appearance and amenity of the area and even went so far as to ensure that traditional features, not seen from the front, have to be preserved.

This victory for common sense comes after earlier planning decisions against excessive developments for multiple occupancy and demonstrates that residents, working together, can be heard and can reduce the severe effects on the amenity of Old Aberdeen which result from these developments.

Puffing at the Puffin

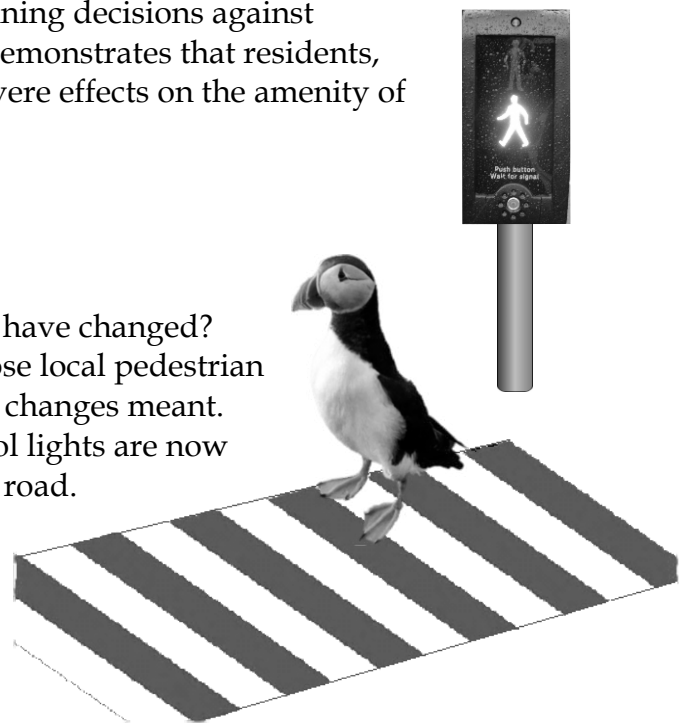
Have you noticed that pedestrian crossings in the area have changed? I noticed the recent upgrades, but didn't know that those local pedestrian crossings are now PUFFIN crossings and just what the changes meant. The first thing you notice is that the pedestrian's control lights are now on your side of the road and not on the post across the road.

This means that the visually impaired can now see the "green person" better and all pedestrians are encouraged to look up the road and monitor oncoming traffic. It also means that you can see the green figure when a vehicle is held up and blocks the crossing, which doesn't help you cross, but at least you know the crossing is working.

For those with hearing loss, buzzers on different crossings could be confusing when they were close together. These have now been replaced by tactile knobs under the control panel which warn when you can cross, so leave a space at the post to allow those who need it to use this button.

The most important difference is that to prevent traffic being held up unnecessarily, a detector is now fitted to monitor that the pedestrian is still waiting to cross (look up at the post and you will see a black box with a small red light). You must stand on the dimpled paving area under the post, or the control will believe that you have crossed without waiting for the lights or that someone (and its not just kids) has pressed the button and then walked on.

With the number of recent pedestrian/vehicle road incidents in Aberdeen, please use the crossing and be patient.



By George Wood

A new Community Council for Old Aberdeen

The community councils are re-elected every three years and this summer was the event (hope you didn't miss all the excitement?).

There have been some changes and we must say goodbye to Simon Barker and George Wood, who have each decided to make more time for other issues. Thank you both for your support over the years.

We must particularly thank George for a robust management of the planning role, in which he has kept serious pressure on the Planning Department regarding all manner of loose ends and anomalies.

And we welcome Paul Foy from the Orchard and Lorraine Grant from Don Street as new members of the Community Council.

Meet the Old Aberdeen Community Council: -

Isobel Aitken, Chair

1 High Street, Old Aberdeen AB24 3EE

Trevor Stack, Secretary

76A Dunbar Street, Old Aberdeen AB24 3UJ

Gordon Mutch, Vice Chair, Treasurer

5 The Chanonry, Old Aberdeen AB24 1RP

Dewi Morgan Web Admin

107 High Street, Old Aberdeen AB24 3EN

Christine Burgess

6 St Machar Place, Old Aberdeen AB24 3SF

Lekky Shepherd

509 King St, Aberdeen AB24 3BT

Paul Foy

AB24 3DT

Lorraine Grant

AB24 1UY

The roles noted above are only valid into November as we will need to re-elect all positions at our November meeting.

Your Aberdeen Councillors

The Councillors for the Tillydrone, Seaton and Old Aberdeen ward and who represent the north end of Old Aberdeen are: -

Councillor Ross Grant

Councillor Ramsay Milne

Councillor Jim Noble

The George Street and Harbour ward serves the Spital end of our area and is represented by:

Councillor Michael Hutchison

Councillor Jean Morrison

Councillor Nathan Morrison

See Aberdeen Council website for contact details:
www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/

Your MSP

Aberdeen Central Constituency MSP:

Kevin Stewart

Kevin.Stewart.msp@scottish.parliament.uk

Your MP is Kirsty Blackman

kirsty.blackman.mp@parliament.uk

Anti-social behaviour problem? Don't put up with it, report it:

City Wardens 01224 627800

Council's Antisocial behaviour unit: 01224 219450 / 0845 606 6548

The Old Aberdeen Community Council

The Community Council meets (usually) on the third Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m., usually on the top floor of the Old Aberdeen Townhouse but occasionally in Dunbar Street Hall:

Our next meetings will be: 17th November, 15th December, 19th January, 16th February, 15th March, 19th April, 17th May, 21st June.

We will post the details on our web site, but if you are not sure, just drop us a line or talk to one of the OACC members. These are always public meetings and you will be very welcome, whether it is to raise a specific issue, or just to see what is going on.

Don't forget to check out our web-site at www.oldaberdeen.org.uk