

NO MORE HOUSES!

- Ardentinnny says no to development

By AILEEN MACNICOL
aileen@dunoon-observer.co.uk

AROUND forty-five Ardentinnny residents attended a meeting in the village hall on Tuesday to hear National Park proposals for a housing development in the community - but despite a reduction to ten properties, villagers are still saying "we don't want more houses."

Last year, as part of its draft local plan process, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority had indicated that a development of 36 affordable homes could be built in the Loch Long village - and received over 80 objections to the proposals following a public meeting in February.

It has now suggested a reduced development of ten units as it prepares for its finalised draft local plan, due to be published in February.

Park planning bosses were invited by Ardentinnny Community Council to a special meeting on Tuesday where residents had the opportunity to hear more about the amended proposals - and also express their views.

Director of planning and rural development, Gordon Watson, told the meeting that the Park has to provide 75 new homes each year in order to meet assessed housing needs, working in conjunction with local authorities and housing associations.

He pointed out that there had been no formal objection from these partner agencies, although 81 objections had been received from the community. These were based on concerns about the infrastructure needed to support a development of this size, the lack of employment opportunities, biodiversity grounds, and the community being happy with the current size of the settlement.

There followed a lengthy - and lively - question and answer session where residents made their feelings plain in no uncertain terms.

In response to discussions over where to site the proposed housing, one resident said: "At the last meeting, we voted against housing - not against a specific site. We said we didn't want houses at all. Has that been overridden and now we have to choose where they go, because we're having them whether we like it or not?"



• Photo by ardentinnny.org

Another man pointed out: "In a conservation area where there is no possibility of industry or jobs coming in, surely there is no logic in siting affordable housing there?"

Mr Watson's suggestion that additional housing in the village would help to sustain essential facilities such as schools and shops was met with much laughter: "We don't have any of those anyway!" said one woman.

Community councillor Dennis Gower pointed out that the community council had written to the authority raising a number of points, but had received no response. "Had we had a reply, you might be getting a more favourable reception tonight," he commented.

Residents also expressed their fears that any affordable homes built may ultimately have the same fate as many existing properties in the village - holiday homes which remain empty for much of the time.

Responding to this and the concern that a development would be forced through regardless of community wishes, Mr Watson said: "The government's pending change on right to buy is a key issue for the Park. Nevertheless, we do have a responsibility to provide housing in the Park and to work with other agencies to identify needs. We have been tasked with finding sites.

"There is still a further consultation stage at this point objections can be made, and all your views will be taken to the Park board when it considers the final plan. It is not the case that we will force through a development."

However, this did not abate the anger of residents: "Why

are you continuing to spend public money on this idea when you received over 80 objections? Does democracy not work for you?" demanded one man.

"We changed the plan in response to the community's wishes," replied Mr Watson.

"We went for a smaller development and will take your concerns on board. However, people have expressed concern about lack of jobs. I would point out that if there are no people, there are no jobs."

Prospective parliamentary candidate and Argyll and Bute councillor Gary Mulvaney was also present and asked what had driven the need for affordable housing specifically in Ardentinnny. Mr Watson advised that, working in partnership with the other agencies, a general need for housing in Cowal had been established - and the sites in Ardentinnny identified as particularly attractive for achieving the same due to the fact that they can be acquired easily and more economically from Forestry Commission Scotland.

Fellow councillor Bruce Marshall was also present and spoke of the need to revitalise the village: "This used to be a young, vibrant village - yes there are some things happening, but basically it's dying on its feet."

His comments were met with fury from the floor, with several residents refuting this: "I object to being referred to as old and as living in a dying village when my day is full," said one woman. "Ardentinnny is full of talented people. Yes, there are several retired people, but they all have money. We are not old, we are not dying, we are very vibrant."

A poll was taken on whether

the community wished to see additional housing in the village, with 27 people voting for no houses at all and five indicating that a few on a different site might be acceptable. Some present indicated that they had abstained because they felt they needed more information - but the overwhelming feeling of the meeting was that Ardentinnny just doesn't want any more houses at the moment.

Speaking after the meeting, Cllr Marshall told the *Standard*: "I was very disappointed in the attitude of the bulk of the Ardentinnny residents at the meeting.

"Some of the comments were extremely biased. The Park planners have gone out of their way over a two year period to explain the process and to involve communities in workshops throughout the area. Gordon Watson explained in very simple terms how we have got to where we are.

"I am aware that the workshop held in Ardentinnny in 2008 showed that there was considerable enthusiasm for some more houses to be built in Ardentinnny."

He concluded: "My own statement still holds in that I believe the community has lost much of its vibrancy in recent years with the loss of the post office cum shop, the tearoom and the village school which has resulted in an aging community."

The last stage of consultation on the Park's finalised local draft plan begins on Friday February 19 and closes on Tuesday April 6. More details, including information about the plan itself, are available at the National Park's website at www.lochlomond-trossachs.org