Pavements will be narrowed; parking restricted

SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT FASTLINK

Govan Community Council has written to SPT and the City Council to express its concern at some aspects of the Fastlink proposals unveiled this June. While the Community Council supports the concept of fast transport between the City Centre and the new Southern hospital, it is worried about the route through Govan and the reduction in parking. This, it fears, will have adverse consequences for shops along Govan Road and the new offices at the Fairfield site. However, the Council welcomes the planners offer of further discussions.

Workspace Director Pat Cassidy, who has led the redevelopment of Fairfield, is seriously concerned about the consequences. “Thirty years ago planners drove the new Golspie Street bypass through Central Govan despite opposition by residents and shopkeepers. Historic streetscapes were lost. Housing demolished. Three decades later today’s planners recognise it was folly. And yet there’s a danger history is about to repeat itself. Clearing Govan Road of parking and turning it into a freeway will undermine years of regeneration work and be damaging to Govan’s hard-won conservation status.” Councillor Stephen Dornan comments: “Fastlink will destroy Govan. It is a dedicated bus lane, no other bus can use this lane and shops and businesses will be under threat of closure as passing trade disappears”.

Bailie Fariha Thomas says “the initial proposals caused some consternation among businesses and residents of certain parts of the area. I have been working hard to ensure that alternative proposals addressing these issues are drawn up and hope that the final scheme will work to the benefit of all and contribute to local regeneration.”

Current plans would turn this into a three-lane highway

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Govan Community Council elections take place this September. Nominations close on Friday 13 September. Copies of the nomination form are available from the current Secretary Esme Clark (425 1318) and the current Chair Dick Carabine (440 2358).

Dick Carabine comments: “we very much hope some new faces will appear. The Community Council has a statutory responsibility to represent the views of everyone living in the area and has the right to make representations on matters of planning. Meetings are monthly – on the first Monday evening and take place in Elderpark Workspace in Elderpark Street.”

“Govan Community Council wants to be a campaigning community council that can take up issues and improve Govan. But to do that we need greater numbers – young people in particular. It’s not a great sacrifice of time. Members can do as much or as little as they want. The Community Council covers the area between the river and the motorway – bordered on the east by Broomloan Road and on the west by Elder Park and Ardshiel Road.”

2013 Govan Fair a great success

Taking place in brilliant sunshine, this year’s procession was one on the best for years. Govan’s streets were thronged. Our picture shows members of the Reminiscence Group enjoying themselves on the top of a Corporation bus.
A new system for the paying of benefits will be phased in from this October. Called Universal Credit, it will eventually replace Housing Benefit, Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

Budgetary and Crisis Loans—deleted below. Other benefits will continue to be paid separately as before.

To start with, from October 2013, it will apply only to new claimants. From April 2014 it will apply to all those in work who apply for tax credits. Between April 2014 and October 2017 it will be phased in for all other claimants. A separate system applies for those of pension age who seek additional assistance through pension credit or saving credit.

The new credit will be paid monthly, not weekly, and in arrears. It will be transferred directly into bank accounts. All applications will have to be made on-line by computer.

A cap will apply which limits the total credit paid to any individual to £350 a week and for couples or lone parents with children to £500. Assistance with mortgage payments will only be available for those not in paid work.

**Social Fund Abolished**

The Social Fund has also been abolished, meaning Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants are now administered by the local authority instead of the DWP. Crisis Loans are now grants, which means that they do not have to be repaid. Budgeting Loans are still processed by the DWP.

The government argues that the new system will simplify the payment system and help people on low incomes who move in and out of work by reducing the problems caused by benefits stopping and starting.

Critics argue that it will place greater burdens on claimants. Many will have difficulty in making on-line applications and managing bank accounts.

It will also, they say, create significant difficulties for households having to budget across the month at a time when the real value of all benefits is declining and some are being cut.

**Expenditure Cut by £3.7 billion**

Last Autumn’s budget statement imposed a 1 per cent cap on the annual increase in Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance and from next year on Child Benefit at a time when the Retail Price Index is increasing by over 4 per cent a year. The government claims that the changes will cut its expenditure by £3.7 billion.

For local housing associations, also grappling with the cuts to housing benefit, the changes are creating considerable difficulties.

Lesley Johnston, Welfare Rights officer at Govan Housing Association, says: “Many of our tenants are worried about the introduction of Universal Credit and, over the last few months, staff have been out visiting as many people as possible to discuss their individual concerns. If we haven’t managed to speak to you yet, or you would like more information, I hold my surgeries here at 35 McKechnie Street on Tuesdays (all day) and Fridays (mornings only). To make an appointment, phone 0141-440 0308 or call into the office. There’s also a Drop In session on a Thursday morning from 9.30am till 12.30pm. If you’d prefer a home visit, call me directly on 0141-440 6682 and I’ll be happy to arrange this for you.

We appreciate that tenants who are used to budgeting on a weekly or fortnightly basis will find it extremely difficult to adjust to monthly payments. From our conversations, we also know that you do not want your Housing Benefit paid directly to yourself, and understand the additional pressure which this places on people. In addition, many people do not have bank accounts which they can use, although you will need to open one to have your Universal Credit paid into.

**Bank Accounts**

To help with this, we are delighted to announce that we will soon be introducing a new service in our office where our tenants can open basic bank accounts to have their Universal Credit (or existing benefits) paid into. Grand Central Savings Scheme will soon be operating from Govan Housing Association’s offices and anyone will be able to open an account with them. From this account, you will be able to Direct Debit your rent straight to Govan Housing Association which will remove the worry of falling into arrears. Also, unlike most high street banks, Grand Central do NOT apply bank charges, so you’ll never have to worry about these extra charges. More information will be available soon, but if you’d be interested in finding out more about Grand Central, contact me at this office. Although we cannot do anything to prevent the introduction of Universal Credit, the Association will do all we can to support tenants through these changes and would encourage you to contact us with any concerns.

Visit the Community Council website: http://www.communitycouncilsglasgow.org.uk/govan/

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**Allison Hunter: a big loss to Govan**

Govan’s much respected City Councillor, Allison Hunter, died on 23 July. She had attended Govan Community Council meetings up till shortly before her death. In his tribute Scotland’s First Minister Alex Salmond said: Allison will be sorely missed not just by all in the SNP but right across the political spectrum.

Allison was born in Govan in 1942 and grew up in Kinning Park attending primary school there. She qualified as a teacher at Jordanhill College and taught in both England and Scotland. She was Jim Sillar’s election agent when he won the Govan seat in the 1988 by-election. She herself was elected City Councillor for Govan in 2007 and subsequently became leader of the SNP group.

Secretary of the Community Council Esme Clark comments: “Allison was a constant source of quiet advice – and humour – and was relentless in following up the issues raised at the Community Council. She will be a great loss to Govan.”
Lord Freud replies to Govan petition on the Bedroom Tax

Last month the Minister responsible for Welfare Reform, Lord Freud, responded to the 1,300 signature petition from Govan residents. The petition pointed out the unfairness and contradictory character of the new tax on ‘spare’ bedrooms and called for its repeal.

In a letter to local MP Ian Davidson dated 2 August, Lord Freud ends by saying ‘our experience suggests that landlords and benefit claimants are adapting to Housing Benefit reforms. We have no plans to rescind these reforms’. He claims that the reforms will ease the housing shortage and cut the unsustainable cost of housing benefit.

“Not enough smaller houses”

His five page letter makes no mention of the main issue raised in the petition. This was that the number of people in ‘under-occupied’ houses is more than ten times bigger than the number of smaller housing association houses available to accommodate them. As a result many households will either suffer severe financial hardship or be forced into the private sector where rents are 30 per cent higher.

Chair of the Greater Govan Committee against Housing Benefit Cuts, Tom McMahon, says that the letter avoids all the difficult issues.

“Over the summer the Campaign was regularly out at Govan Cross distributing advice leaflets. We heard many heart-rending stories from local people who face losing houses they had improved over a lifetime and where moving to alternative accommodation will often mean leaving local communities where they have family support and friends.”

“Government under pressure”

However, says Tom, “the letter also reveals the pressure the government has been under - including the legal judgement at the end of July in which it was rebuked for not providing secondary legislation to uphold the right of disabled children to a separate bedroom. Lord Freud is now taking about working with local authorities to overcome this difficulty and making more money available – even though the amount is derisory.”

The Campaign is holding a public meeting on Friday 13 September at 7 p.m. in the Pearce Institute. Speakers will include Mike Dailly of the Govan Law Centre, Kenny MacLeod, Deputy Director of Linthouse Housing Association and Ian Davidson MP who will report from the public hearings on the tax being held by Parliament’s Scottish Select Committee.

The GOVAN STONES GO PUBLIC

This July the exhibition of the Govan Stones, located in the building of Govan Parish Church, was opened to the public. For the first four weeks free transport was provided on the ferry across the river from Partick. The 31 sculptured stones, dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries, were originally tombs for dignitaries, kings and nobles, from the kingdom of Strathclyde Britons. Originally ruled from its citadel at Dumbarton rock, it later moved higher up the river to Govan and Partick. The stones represent one of the finest collection of early medieval carving in the British Isles. Below a ‘hogback’ burial stone probably of Viking origin.

PROPOSED NEW PATHWAY FROM WATER ROW TO THE CHURCH

A meeting is being held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 10 September in the Pearce Institute to hear about an application to the Big Lottery for funds to build a pathway on the river-edge between Govan Old Church and Water Row.

The project team led by Pat Cassidy want to hear the views of local residents and organisations and to take on board any suggestions they might have regarding the plan.

Race Hate Incidents

At its June meeting the Community Council heard that race hate incidents in the area were among the highest in Glasgow. While these statistics may not be entirely accurate, the Community Council agreed that it should discuss with other local organisations, housing associations, churches, schools, youth groups and Hope not Hate, what action might be taken – particularly in terms of education.

Mary Barbour Committee

The secretary Isme Clark reports that after all the publicity in the press and television earlier this year, more and more people have been coming forward in support over the summer. This autumn the organising committee is planning to hold a major fund-raising event.

Sheila O'Halloran 1941-2013

Housing campaigner

Sheila O’Halloran, who died this June, was a leading figure in the battle to secure the modernisation of Govan’s historic tenements in the early 1970s. As Secretary of the Fairfield’s Residents Association she led the successful campaign to secure Glasgow City Council support. Raymond Young commented: ‘we owe Sheila a debt of gratitude for ensuring that these historic buildings remain’.
The New Café at the Cross

The new Café at Govan Cross opened on 15 June. By August it was doing a roaring trade.

Gayle Gawell (left) who runs the Cafe with her husband Sebastian, says they did not know what the response would be when they made the decision to take over the empty shop at the Cross. “We had previously been at 13 Elder Street, just opposite the gates of Fairfield shipyard, for two years. Although we did a good trade, it was quite quiet. The response at the Cross has been beyond our expectations. We are open all day and through into the evening. At lunchtimes we are often crowded out despite seating on the pavement and inside the cafe.”

Gayle, who lives in Ibrox, says that all types of people use the cafe, local residents, workers in the nearby offices and people who come into Govan to see the Govan Stones and the shipyard. The favourite purchases? Steak baguette and macaroni cheese – though there are also ‘specials’ every day.

Govan and Its Shipbuilding Heritage

Plans and designs for Fairfield’s new shipbuilding heritage space are complete and installation work will be carried out this October/November. The Heritage Development Officer Suki Mills (right) says that it will aim to reunite people in Govan with their shipbuilding heritage and to bring that heritage to the attention of the wider world.

“Our focus will be on the Fairfield yard itself. It will follow the yard’s history from its origins in the 1860s up to the present as it continues to build ships for BAE. With 8,000 workers at its peak, the yard’s expansion turned a small rural village into a major industrial centre with a population well over 80,000. Eventually we also hope to integrate the histories of at least two other local yards, Stephens and Harland and Wolff, into the exhibition. We are keen to ensure that the community is involved. There will be a room specially for local groups to meet and do research – and if anyone has any old photos or documents we would like to hear from you.”

Suki previously worked in the Scottish Maritime Museum and the Scottish Football Museum and also as community development worker in Govan. At Fairfield she is part of the Workspace team with Rosie Swords and Pat Cassidy and is advised by shipbuilding experts Ian Johnson and Professor John Hume. She has her own special favourites among the exhibits. One is the model of the PS Lahn built at Fairfields in 1887 for a German shipping line. It was an immense ship that took thousands of migrants from Germany to America. Another favourite is a montage of film showing the elaborate interiors of Fairfield passenger ships including the 1955 Empress of Britain built for the Canadian Pacific Railway Co.”

Suki hopes that the Museum will be able to capture the camaraderie and solidarity of those who have worked in the yards and which contributed so much to Govan as a community. And she has a word of advice about this year’s Open Doors at Fairfield: “you will be able to see the offices in all their restored splendour – but this year will be your last and only opportunity to see the upstairs sections as these will shortly become tenant spaces.”