

Dear Sir or Madam

**I am writing on behalf of Waterside Community Council to object to and condemn the proposal to build a school on the Waterside playing fields.**

While we understand and support the need to build a new ASN school in a suitable location (preferably on a brownfield site, thus promoting regeneration and the re-use of previously developed land – see Section 38 of the Scottish Planning Policy on location of new developments), we believe the proposal to build the school on Waterside playing fields, an area designated as both **Open Space (Policy 7)** and **Green Belt (Policy 3)** on the Local Development Plan, is short-sighted, misguided, and would be unacceptably damaging to our village and to the neighbouring community.

We note that under Section 153 of the Scottish Planning Policy, it states that “only where there is strong justification should open space be developed either partly or fully for a purpose unrelated to use as open space”. Waterside Community Council does not believe this strong justification exists for building on the playing fields. Five other sites scored higher in the council’s own options appraisal, and we know of other potential sites that appear not to have been considered.

Those responsible for this proposal must be well aware that building here would contravene numerous Scottish Planning Policies and Local Development Plan Policies that are designed to protect the Scottish population and the environment. We should like to point out that the cost to our population and to the environment of building here would be unacceptably high.

**The loss of this valued and much-used field and football pitch would have the following consequences:**

1. Waterside children would lose the only large grassed area where they can (and do) play safely unsupervised in the village.
2. Gartconner Primary School would lose access to a grassed area they currently use for cross-country training.
3. Rosebank United Football Club might have to close as there’s only one other grass pitch in Kirkintilloch, and the hire fees for artificial pitches/school facilities are prohibitive for such a group. NB there is nowhere else in Waterside to put a pitch of equal or better standard (a requirement when taking away sporting facilities of this kind).
4. £100,000 was spent upgrading the football pitch some six years ago. This investment of public money would be wasted.
5. Since there is no other large community space available, the community would never again be able to hold a gala, have a funfair or engage in other community-wide outdoor activity in the village (despite having many aspirations in this regard largely thanks to our very active events committee and a growing can-do spirit in the village over the last couple of years or so).
6. Walkers within the community would lose a space they use. Older people are some of those who currently walk around this field: it’s something of a meeting place for dog walkers and others. Such people would not be able to make use of any 5-aside or 7-aside artificial pitch at the school that the council might try to offer as a substitute. Even if the council did manage to incorporate in the school design some (smaller and poorer) substitute for the facilities we have now, during construction work there would be nowhere for existing users to go.

Please note that, ironically, teams using grass pitches at Tintock (which are currently also being assessed for development) were last year advised by the council to use Waterside pitch.

7. There would be too little green open space remaining in the village. All the green spaces around here are gradually making way for development (Woodilee, Fauldhead, Braes o' Yetts...); however, green open spaces are important for mental health, and this space has a role in physical fitness too.

According to the Scottish Government

(<http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/physicalactivity>):

*Increasing the proportion of the population meeting physical activity levels is a key legacy aspiration for the Commonwealth Games. There is also a strong health benefit as increases equate to addressing the impact on sedentary lifestyles which can lead to reductions in health issues such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and blood pressure.*

*There is also emerging evidence that physical activity delivers better outcomes for mild depression than prescribed medication.*

It beggars belief that the council can contemplate taking away a place where people are physically active in this time of ever greater obesity and problems with diabetes and heart disease.

Exposure to real grass and mud also has a role in building up children's immune systems; artificial surfaces are no substitute.

The above points indicate to us that building on the Waterside playing fields would contravene **Policy 7: Community Facilities and Open Space.**

Community, leisure and sport facilities, including open spaces, make a significant contribution to the health, well-being, social cohesion and learning of the communities and people living in Waterside. The removal of the playing fields is contrary to the principles outlined within this proposal.

Building on the playing fields would also contravene **Policy 7: Protection of existing facilities:**

*Proposals that would result in the loss or reduction of existing community facilities and/or outdoor sports facilities and/or useable open space, directly or indirectly, will be resisted except in the following circumstances, where:*

- A. *In the case of proposals affecting outdoor sports facilities the proposed development is ancillary to the principal use of the site as an outdoor sports facility; or the proposed development involves only a minor part of the outdoor sports facility and would not affect its use and potential for sport and training; and that the site would be developed without detriment to the overall quality of provision.*

**[WCC comment: The playing fields are not a minor part of the facility, and a development would very much affect their potential for sport and training as they would be removed.]**

- B. *Suitable replacement and/or enhanced facilities are provided in a location that is convenient for users.*

**[WCC comment: No comparable and fully accessible replacement facility is being proposed. Council officers have mentioned possible access to school facilities (perhaps 5-aside and 7-aside artificial pitches). However these would not serve the needs of the whole community, would not be freely accessible (unlike the existing playing fields**

**except when matches are on), would not serve all user groups, and would doubtless involve expensive hire fees.]**

- C. *There is significant demonstrable community gain as part of the development being proposed (not applicable to sports facilities)*

**[WCC comment: There is no community gain as an important facility would be lost if the field were developed.]**

- D. *The relevant strategies covering corporate assets, open space, green networks and culture, leisure and sport (including sports pitches), and in the case of proposals affecting outdoor sports facilities consultation with Sport Scotland, demonstrate that there is a clear excess of provision to meet current and anticipated demand in the area.*

**[WCC comment: There is no excess of provision as it is the only outdoor recreational area left in the village after the removal of the swing park. Amateur football teams already complain of insufficient grass football pitches in the wider area.]**

Points 1 to 7 above also indicate to us that this building proposal would be contrary to **Design and Placemaking Policy 2A**, by virtue of removing the only village sporting and outdoor recreational amenity.

The siting of a development on the Waterside playing fields would also be contrary to **Design and Placemaking Policy 2G** as the field currently provides a safe environment for play. Even children of primary age currently make their own way to the field unsupervised as parents know they don't have to cross major roads to get there, and are fenced in once they are on the field. Being allowed to go to the playing fields unaccompanied is a rite of passage, a part of growing up and gaining independence for village youngsters.

Building on Waterside playing fields would be contrary to **Design and Placemaking Policy 2H**, since removing the freely accessible playing fields is hardly promoting healthy and active lifestyles.

Building on Waterside playing fields would be contrary to **The Active Scotland Outcomes Framework (2014)**, which outlines the Scottish Government's ambitions for sport and physical activity by encouraging and enabling the inactive to be more active and the active to stay more active throughout life. It also seeks to develop physical confidence and competence from the earliest age and support well-being in communities through physical activity and sport. These all link to national outcomes that the Scottish Government wishes to achieve: people living longer and healthier lives where they can access services and amenities they need. Also, that they value and enjoy their built and natural environment and protect and enhance these for future generations.

Waterside Community Council notes that in September 2017 – at a time when staff and parents at the existing ASN schools (but not the Waterside community) were already being told about the Waterside school proposal – Gordon Low (Council Leader, East Dunbartonshire Council) and Gerry Cornes (Chef Executive, East Dunbartonshire Council) signed the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) declaration committing East Dunbartonshire Council to following the CSGN principles. These include “creating an environment which supports healthy lifestyles and good physical and mental well-being”, where “more people use and enjoy outdoor spaces”, “creating attractive, safe and well-maintained green space or accessible countryside within easy access of every home in Central Scotland”.

Removing our playing fields is not in keeping with this commitment.

**Further consequences of building on Waterside playing fields would be the following:**

8. Our village would effectively merge with Kirkintilloch, something that would be likely to lead to a loss of community identity and spirit.
9. The look of this village that villagers care so deeply about would be spoiled. Waterside has aspirations to encourage in walkers on the Heritage Trail, and longer-term, to provide facilities for such visitors. Spoiling the green gateway into our village could jeopardize this.

Points 8 and 9 above indicate to us that building on the Waterside playing fields would be contrary to **Design and Placemaking Policies 2A** and **2F** as it would impact and fail to safeguard or enhance the character and distinctiveness of the village by effectively joining it to Rosebank and destroying the symmetrical green entrance to the village. It has been suggested that trees could be planted to suggest a boundary between the village of Waterside and the surrounding area, but we believe this strategy would be just as ineffective as it is elsewhere.

**Building an ASN school on the playing fields would have a negative impact on traffic and air quality in and around Waterside:**

10. There would be more traffic, since all children attending such schools arrive by bus or taxi. There is only one road in and out of the village (Bankhead Rd). It is already congested at rush hour and has three coach companies operating out of the village. During construction work, villagers and the three coach companies would be likely to be particularly inconvenienced, as they would not be able to avoid the one route in and out of the village. Should this road become jammed with traffic either during construction or once any school was operational, this could well have implications for speed of access by emergency vehicles.
11. Because of the extra traffic, air quality in the area would deteriorate. The field already borders a main access road (Waterside Road), a road that will soon be even busier because of the new housing development at Braes o' Yetts. The children certainly would not be located in the fresh green landscape they and their parents may be expecting. Once any school was built, there would probably no longer be a reason to keep the green belt in the adjacent field (currently owned by a developer). We imagine housing would therefore be built there.
12. Parking in the village would be likely to become even more difficult than it is now. People already complain about cars on pavements and parked cars blocking visibility. We know there would not be enough parking spaces for all staff who may want them at the school because of policies designed to promote car sharing. If staff members at the school were unable to park there, they might well try to find spaces in the village (a similar problem arises in areas adjacent to hospitals, for instance).

**Building on Waterside playing fields would affect community plans to enhance the environment:**

13. Waterside Community Council and environmental group Luggiewatch would not be able to follow through with plans for adult and child volunteers to plant wild flowers and fruit trees round the periphery of the playing fields to support biodiversity and add to the attractiveness of the entrance to the village (aims that fitted in with East Dunbartonshire's Green Network Strategy).

**Building on Waterside playing fields despite near unanimous community wishes would be likely to have the following result:**

- 14.** People would become utterly disaffected – there has already been a feeling that those in authority do not listen – the council failed to ensure that Waterside’s swing park was adequately replaced when the land was taken over for housing (now Taig Gardens).

Waterside is a very strong community with a very strong and healthy sense of its own identity. We do not have many amenities (only the playing fields, the village shop and the Miners Club), but we value our environment (the playing field, the old weavers’ cottages, the Luggie Water, the “Horse’s Field”), our history as a mining village, and our sense of community and belonging.

Waterside Community Council is committed to helping community members improve our village and the environment here for our population, for our neighbours and for visitors. We believe the playing fields are a vital amenity for our community, for Rosebank and others, and that they also help preserve our identity as a separate village. This in turn is important for preserving our sense of community.

Villagers and local residents made it very clear at the consultation meeting on 12 June 2018 that they do not believe that a school could ever be appropriate on our football field. There are no facilities that could be offered at a school that would make up for the losses and damage to our environment and village that building it on the Waterside playing fields would involve. Waterside Community Council shares this view.

We ask East Dunbartonshire Council to listen to our community and our objections and to look for another site to build on that will not damage the community around it or leave it with the bitter sense of injustice and disempowerment that building here would generate.

Yours faithfully