

Councillor Barnacle Blairingone Primary School

Copy of a letter send to Sheena Devlin,
Executive Director (Education & Children's
Services), Perth & Kinross Council,
3 October 2018.



Dear Sheena

BLAIRINGONE PRIMARY SCHOOL CONSULTATION ON CLOSURE & CATCHMENT CHANGES

I write as one of the four elected members for the Kinross-shire Ward, having served my community continuously since 1999. During that time I have always campaigned for Blairingone School to be kept open and possibly its facilities enhanced. I remain opposed to closure at this time, believing the proposal to be premature and also wish to put forward an alternative option for consideration.

The proposal paper continually refers to static projections for pupil numbers at both Blairingone and Fossoway schools, although as we know such projections are not an exact science. Housebuilding proposed for the Fossoway Parish & Community Council area has been disregarded, seemingly based on past trends. This is not borne out by the facts as I know them.

Developer interest in Blairingone, Crook of Devon and Powmill is significant and our Local Development Plan 2, recently unanimously approved by PKC, contains phased zoning for up to 133 houses in these settlements, including an enhanced affordable housing element in Crook of Devon at 50%. Although Tayplan policy concentrates development to tiered settlements rather than rural villages, I believe it goes too far and results in a lack of sustainable development in smaller villages, particularly in relation to affordable houses. This is why local members in Kinross-shire have supported the above zonings and in the case of Blairingone would like to see more development within the phased period than that stated. This is also the view of the community in Blairingone following a public consultation exercise in February 2017 that I was heavily involved with, resulting in support for a masterplan approach in Blairingone that includes provision of sports facilities adjacent to the current school. I am aware that developers are in discussion with PKC's planning department regarding such, noting that the zoned site of 5.5 hectares has a median capacity range of up to 95 houses that there is definite developer interest in.

I made reference to this developer interest in my representations to the Education Committee but administration members had closed minds on the subject

and seemed intent on delivering a budgetary saving as a priority. Our planning department have singularly failed to state the correct position on developer interest, although they knew about it.

It is important to note that Blairingone School is the only community facility remaining in the village and I am totally opposed to its closure. The village has lost a number of facilities over the years and now requires regeneration, not regression. The local community council use the school building and other public meetings can be held there. The proposal suggests that most residents of Blairingone travel outwith the village for services and therefore closure of the school would not make that much difference; I disagree strongly with this statement and believe that PKC should be promoting the sustainability of rural communities; not the reverse.

I believe school closure is predicated on budgetary pressures to realise a capital receipt for the buildings on the open market.

I note that the Schools Consultation Scotland Act 2010 clearly states a presumption to keep rural schools open and this proposal runs counter to government policy.

I note that 4 out of 5 children in Blairingone walk to school, which is excellent. I am not in support of transporting primary school children to their place of education, if it can be avoided. This proposal does not do that and instead proposes transport along the A977 to Fossoway School. It should be borne in mind that this road carries the highest number of heavy goods vehicles of any within the PKC area that we are responsible for and they are increasing, not forgetting to mention the state of this road in wintry conditions west of Rumbling Bridge, acknowledged by our roads superintendent. I note that the catchment area of Cleish Primary School does not seem to have been taken into account, when it is as close as the Fossoway catchment; why not?

The Independent Group of Councillors at PKC would like to see nursery provision at all rural schools, which would assist in bolstering primary school rolls with continuity and I believe this is supported by Scottish Government policy on improving provision. A recent closure of a private nursery in Powmill, for reasons I am unaware of, supports the need for enhanced provision and Blairingone School could accommodate same. I cannot comment on the educational benefits advocated in the proposal but I have received a number of emails from Blairingone parents and residents praising their school.

For all the above reasons, I oppose closure at this time and would like to see the outcome of the planning consultation locally on the masterplan for the village concluded before such a decision is made.

In my opening remarks, reference was made to an alternative option for consideration. I had not mentioned this prior to the statutory consultation because I have only recently been appraised of it through council colleagues and the media. I suggest the option of 'a shared headship' for Blairingone and Fossoway that would keep the school buildings used and also provide potential for enhancement, once the masterplan has been produced. I understand this model operates elsewhere in both PKC and Britain as a whole; it should be explored here.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Michael Barnacle
Independent Councillor for Kinross-shire