

Sixty new homes and big cash boost for Lochyside

SIXTY new homes in Lochyside will come with a £ 60,000 boost which could be used for a new indoor training and community centre.

The Lochyside development was approved at the Highland Council's south planning committee when it met on Tuesday.

It could see the building of a new indoor training and community centre next to Lochaber High School - thanks to developer contributions, which the council seeks for new developments of four or more houses where appropriate.

A contribution of £1,000 per house towards community facilities will be given in this instance, meaning £60,000 will be secured towards a community project.

Ben Thompson, Caol and Mallaig councillor, told the

Lochaber Times after the meeting that careful consideration needed to be given to what the money was spent on.

'When this development was being looked at, the council identified what there was a shortage of in Lochaber and at that time huge efforts had been made to get funding for an indoor facility,' he said. 'However, that plan was written about five or six years ago, and we are in the process of getting a new one written, plus we have new councillors now, so I tried to stress to the council that plans for these funds should not be too specific, because things change.'

Andrew Baxter, Fort William and Ardnamurchan councillor, also stressed that should the plans for an indoor sports facility not go ahead, the community would still have the money to be spent elsewhere.

The accessibility of the 60 homes was also discussed. Earlier this year, Lochaber Disability Access Panel told the Lochaber

Times it had formally objected to the application and has emphasised its disappointment that no representatives from the agents, Bracewell Stirling, had come to meet members of the panel.

Planning officer Susan MacMillan told the meeting on Tuesday that, while the panel has not formally removed its objection, members have since met with the agents, who said as many properties as possible will be wheelchair accessible.

Ms MacMillan said they will be flexible to meet the needs of the people who are living there, once the homes have been allocated.

Mr Baxter said he thought the buildings were 'very grey' and lacked a bit of colour.

He said: 'Did the architects lose their crayons when drawing up the plans because it's very grey? I don't know if that was to blend in with the rain and weather of Lochaber though.'

Ms MacMillan responded by saying the homes are a mixture of white and beige. 'We have a condition in the planning to agree and finalise the colour and I am sure they [the architects] would be happy to look at some colour.'

Mr Thompson said the development would have been 'better with more three-bedroom houses'. He said: 'In the report, it says the mix of units has been informed by the Highland Council housing register. I think it assumes people are moving out of three- and four-bedroom homes into two-bedroom ones, but that doesn't happen as quickly as we would like it to.'

John Gillespie, vice chairman of Caol Community Council, told the Lochaber Times: 'We are pleased to see that the development has been passed, especially with many of the changes which were made on the feedback from local residents.'

'Hopefully, this level of communication will continue as the development progresses.'

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