



**MOUNT BLAIR COMMUNITY  
ACTION PLAN**

**STAKEHOLDER VIEWS  
REPORT**

**August 2012**



**AWARDS  
FOR ALL  
SCOTLAND**

**LOTTERY FUNDED**

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The stakeholder interviews were carried out using the templates and guidelines provided by the Small Town and Rural Development Group as part of their Community Futures Programme.

<b>1. Introduction</b>
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**Background**

1.1 This report summarises the findings of the *Stakeholder Meetings* carried out in Mount Blair in May, June and July 2012.

1.2 The meetings were carried out as part of the participatory process that will help to inform the preparation of the Mount Blair Community Action Plan.

1.3 To complete the Plan, additional consultation has been carried out including a Community Views Survey to all households in the area. Feedback on the survey and the stakeholder meetings will be provided at an Open Day to be held in mid September.

1.4 The preparation of the Plan is being led by the Mount Blair Community Development Trust and they have established an Action Plan Steering Group to manage the consultation process. Funding for the consultation has come from the Lottery Awards for All Programme.

**Stakeholder Meetings**

1.5 An initial list of key people and organizations to meet with was prepared by the Mount Blair Action Plan Steering Group.

1.6 Meetings and interviews were then organized and carried out by Colin Roxburgh from the STAR Development Group.

1.7 STAR met and listened to the views of representatives from; the farming community, estate owners and workers, tourism associations and hospitality sector, the school, the Session House, the village halls, volunteer fire service, youth club, Community Council, Community Development Trust, mothers and toddlers, Kirkmichael Village Shop, Perth and Kinross Councillors, Perth and Kinross Community Learning and Development, Strathardle Agricultural Show and Gathering.

1.8 This report summarises the findings of these meetings.

## 2. Mount Blair - Stakeholder Views

### Population and Community

2.1 People talked about the community in terms of it being a small population scattered over a large area '600 houses over 40 square miles'. They saw it as a fragile community that had seen its population decline and become proportionately more elderly.

*'There is now only one child in Ballintuim'*  
*'Enochdu used to be a recognizable village'*  
*'Population in 1850s was around 10,000'*  
*'Need more families and businesses'*

2.2 The decline in agriculture and land based activity as a source of employment over the last 40 years was noted as a factor in contributing to the changes in population. Older longer term residents noted that in the past everyone had a common bond through working on the land and through related 'neighbouring' and community activities and events. They felt this had changed in the last 10 - 15 years with more new people moving into the area and then not necessarily staying for long.

2.3 With a greater mix of people in the area now it was felt by some that the community was not as integrated as it had been and did not always come together for shared community activity.

2.4 On a positive note stakeholders noted the improvements to Kirkmichael (school, population, housing, hotels and in particular the shop) saying that *'it was on its knees between 1994 and 2000 with threatened school closure, and shop and hotels all under threat'*.

### Housing and Planning

2.5 New housing in Kirkmichael (14 housing association houses) and a more relaxed attitude from the planning department to house building in Glenshee (leading to 2 new houses near the Blackwater Village Hall) were noted as recent positives in helping to address what was seen as a need for more housing and housing choice in the area.

2.6 More affordable housing was thought to be desirable by many and in particular was mentioned in Bridge of Cally.

2.7 A proposal for further housing in Enochdu was mentioned which could lead to a small mixed housing development that if progressed might hopefully include affordable housing and the possibility of workshop facilities.

2.8 Other issues identified by respondents included the growing number of holiday homes and second homes in the area and the historically high level of tied accommodation linked to the estates. It was also noted that *'a lot of people rent small cottages on the estate'*.

2.9 It was suggested that the competition for existing housing and the limited range of housing had driven prices up so that local people - often elderly - have had to move to Blairgowrie.

### Local Economy

2.10 In general the feeling was that the local economy was fragile and needed support and innovation. The local economy was described as providing some employment in hotels, farms,

estates, shops and the quarry (1 job). Other than that people needed to be self employment or to commute out of the area.

2.11 Key concerns were:

- The decline in land based employment - *'there is only 1 farmer in Glenshee when there used to be 5 and only two farming in the 22 miles between the Glen and Braemar'* *'Downturn in farming is a downturn in the Glen'*
- Invercauld Estate perceived not to be encouraging tenant farmers on their property
- The decline in tourism linked to skiing
- The closure of a number of hotels in the Blackwater, Glenshee area - (and with it a loss of a local pub as a place to gather and socialize).
- The difficulty of other hotels, shops etc in running viable businesses with the limited population, and low visitor numbers.
- The decline in numbers using the A93 to visit Royal Deeside and the lack of places for people to stop and engage with the area along and off the A93.
- The area was not on any significant known 'through' transport routes (in particular this being thought to be more true of Strathardle)
- The loss of a number of businesses from the area (joiners and builders).
- Costs of fuel, feed, etc. and its effect on business costs.

2.12 Positive forces were seen as:

- In general - the assets of the area for outdoor recreation and country sports
- The fact that there are still people employed on the land - *'around 8 gamekeepers and around 8 farmers still employed in the Glen'* (Strathardle)
- The good hotels still in the area and the growth of other forms of accommodation and hospitality - self catering, B&B's, bunkhouse, eco-huts etc.
- The development of the Visitor Centre in Glenshee
- The work and projects of the two tourism associations BEPTA (Love to Eat, Jampionships etc) and GTA.
- Existing web sites e.g. [visiteastperthshire](#) - and newsletters
- The development and increasing use and promotion of the Catearan Trail - and the development of other paths (e.g. Sophies Path).
- The initiative being taken by the community to operate and manage the Village Shop and Garage in Kirkmichael
- The work of estates like Pitcarmick in developing commercial activity linked to country sports, outdoor recreation and local produce.
- The continuing Strathardle Agricultural Show and Highland Gathering in August - *'the biggest show of prime lambs and commercial cattle in Scotland'* - and other local events.

2.13 Specific proposals made to improve the local economy included:

- The development of a wider local paths network - including strategic connections to Pitlochry and Dunkeld that link into other long distance path networks.
- The designation and development of Kindrogan Forest as a recreational area - for walking and mountain biking.
- The use of Blackcraig Forest for horse riding
- The development and promotion of activities and events linked to outdoor recreation
- Better promotional packages of information and greater availability of this information in Blairgowrie and especially Pitlochry
- Better road signage of the area - particularly from Pitlochry - and its through routes
- Developing more stopping places and places/businesses/activities of interest along the A93
- The development of small workshops and arts and crafts based activity
- The need to improve broadband reception for self employed
- Estates and landowners doing the most they can to encourage new entrants
- Estates and landowners like Pitcarmick developing and promoting outdoor activities and country sports and working closely with the local hospitality sector

- Estates and farmers developing and promoting local produce (e.g. venison and beef) and working with local hotels and shops to make these available locally
- The need to encourage local people to use local shops and services
- The need to see wood fuel from local sources as an option and alternative to oil.

## Education and Childcare

2.14 There is no childcare available in the area and this was something that young parents would like addressed. The nearest provision was in Blairgowrie but travel distances and cost meant that this was not an effective or affordable option. There are however real difficulties noted by the school in offering after school care activities as the children disperse after school and rely on transport services to take them home.

2.15 Schools at Straloch (mothballed) and Strone of Cally (closed and for sale) have closed in recent years and the one remaining school is at Kirkmichael - which has 30 in the school and 13 in the nursery. It is seen as a vital service in the area and is well thought of by parents and the wider community - although the new nursery and P1 - 3 building is not thought to be great. The school has eco school and health promoting status.

2.16 Secondary schooling is mainly at Blairgowrie High but it was noted that some parents particularly from Kirkmichael will often send their children to the High School in Pitlochry out of choice.

## Community facilities and activities

### Village Halls

2.16 The halls are seen as key facilities in the community providing the opportunity for people to get together and socialize.

2.17 Positive features included:

- The ongoing work of the volunteers and committees
- The recent improvements to insulation and other ongoing improvements
- The ability of some of the halls e.g. Blackwater Hall - to offer accommodation (up to 34 people in separate male and female dorms).
- The events and activities that the halls provide.
- Access to Drumderg Wind Farm Fund for improvement costs.

2.18 Negative aspects included:

- Concerns about low participation in some events
- The odd occasion when there was a lack of communication between the halls about putting events on.
- Cost of heating and need for ongoing refurbishment and development
- Need for new hall at Kirkmichael no longer seen as fit for purpose and with major structural problems.

2.19 Proposed upgrades include:

- Kirkmichael Hall - a new hall - which has been designed and costed (around £1.5M) and for which funding applications are soon to be made.
- Ballintuim Hall - upgrade to parking and plans to retarmac in front of the hall, they also need a new kitchen and better heating (e.g. air source heat pump)
- Blackwater Hall - ongoing upgrades with new toilets about to be developed. It was suggested that the toilets could perhaps be designed in such a way that they could be open to the public and charges/donations being part of the fundraising for the hall.
- Bridge of Cally Hall - improvements to heating.

### The Session House

2.20 There was unanimous support and liking for the Session House and the activities that it organizes.

### Activities

2.21 Activities mentioned by stakeholders included:

- Kirmichael Hall - Youth Club (30 on the books and meets on Fridays), Coffee Tots (Meets Monday 10 -12 and has around 5 families attending but this will go up in number soon)
- Blackwater Hall - Xmas Dance, Burns Supper, Quiz Night, BBQ, Concerts, Weddings, Whist Drive, Keep Fit - and then use of the accommodation by Perthshire Brass Band and Bikers Groups.
- Ballintuim - 3 whist drives a year, country dances once a month.
- Bridge of Cally - Keep fit class, SWRI - to be reorganized and rebranded as Relaxed Rural, Cally Crafters (meet weekly with 20 or more people involved in knitting, weaving, textiles).

### **Roads, Traffic and Parking**

2.22 The issue raised most frequently was that of speeding motorbikes on the A93 - and the concerns over safety and noise. This was seen as an issue that adversely affected local people's quality of life and tourists driving through the area. Suggestions for dealing with this issue included speed cameras on the A93 and more policing.

2.23 Respondents also noted positive developments with Perth and Kinross taking action to lower speed limits in and around settlements and carrying out improvements on the Glenisla Road near the junction to the A93.

2.24 There was a desire to see the new speed signs in Ballintuim moved out to beyond the caravan park.

### **Services and Public Transport**

2.25 Comments from respondents included:

- Disappointment at the loss of the Heather Hopper Service offered through the Cairngorms National Park
- The need for better transport connections to Pitlochry
- The infrequent service to Blairgowrie from Glenshee.

2.26 Respondents in general noted that connections were better through to Blairgowrie than they were to Pitlochry. There was a desire to see better transport connections with Pitlochry for a variety of reasons. These included the increasing use of schools in Pitlochry, the desire to connect with inter city trains, and access to services offered in Pitlochry.

2.27 It was suggested by a number of respondents that a Community Mini Bus would be a good additional resource for the community to have to address some of the problems faced by a remote community and to facilitate access to services, facilities and activities outwith the area by local groups.

## Parks and Open Spaces

2.28 The main formal park mentioned by stakeholders was the Bannerfield in Kirkmichael - although it was noted that this was owned privately and leased to Perth and Kinross Council. It is used by the school, and by the Gathering and Games.

2.29 There is also a small play area in Kirkmichael that stakeholders would like to see improved and increased in size.

2.30 Kirkmichael School has an old 'all weather pitch' that the school would like to see upgraded and more widely used by the community and visitors to the area e.g. for tennis in the summer.

2.31 It was felt that there was a need for a more up to date all weather pitch (3G) that could be used for football and other sports - and that this could potentially be a further development linked to the proposed new Village Hall.

2.32 There is a local Village in Bloom Group in Kirkmichael that keep the area looking good and planted with flowers throughout the summer. There was thought to be a need for more volunteers to take part in this activity.

2.33 The car park in Kirkmichael over the bridge was seen as a great asset for the community - enabling people to stop and use the shop and hotel and enjoy the area.

## Environment

2.34 The environment in general is seen as the major asset in the area - its rivers, forests, farmland, moors and lochs - with many stakeholders talking about the beauty of the area and its tranquility and a desire not to see that ever lost.

*'the Glen is quiet and away from everyone and benefits from dark skies at night'.*

2.35 The main opportunity for improving the local economy and the fortunes of the community is seen as making best use of this asset - for walking, riding, cycling, stalking, fishing, shooting, geocaching, orienteering, photography, wildlife viewing and quality local produce.

2.36 In particular there was much discussion about the local forests and the feeling that more could be made of them for recreation and also as a source of local wood fuel. It is understood that the Community Trust with the support of the local councilors has put in a note of interest to purchase Kindrogan Forest with a view to realizing its potential as an asset for the community.

2.37 The development of the CATERAN Trail was seen as a positive by many and the opportunity was identified to develop further path networks and links to e.g. Rob Roy Way at Pitlochry.

2.38 The big picture view - was to see the area as a HUB for a range of outdoor recreation and sport - both within the area and through the ability to connect to other areas (Blair Atholl, Linn of Dee, Glen Tilt). A possible 'brand' and niche for the area was thought to be 'gentler outdoor activity' compared to the more adrenalin fueled branding of Fort William - and there was seen to be an opportunity to tap into Perth and Kinross Councils aim to develop Perth and Kinross as a place renown for adventure tourism and outdoor recreation.

2.39 Craighall Gorge near Blairgowrie was also seen as having real potential as a visitor attraction for the area. It is the second deepest gorge in the UK after Cheddar Gorge. It was



noted that this would have to be carefully managed as it is a SSSI and would have to resolve real safety issues.

### **Heritage**

2.40 Stakeholders felt that more could be done in the area to celebrate and make visible the local heritage and history of the area. They thought that the proposed Archive Project by the Trust was a good idea, and also noted the importance of the archaeological dig in Glenshee. It was thought that a Glen Museum would be a good idea. A particular strength is thought to be the areas connection to cattle droving.....and this has recently been capitalized on with the Drovers Event held in the area.

### **Infrastructure and Utilities**

2.41 There is no mains gas in the area - with most people dependent on oil for fuel. There was support for the Trust's proposed approach to collective purchasing of oil and people were keen to see this progressed.

2.42 The need for toilets along A93 was also mentioned as a specific by several stakeholders e.g. *'wonder if the Blackwater Village Hall proposed new toilets could be made open to the public and help generate some income for the hall?'*

### **Communication**

2.43 Poor broadband and mobile phone reception was raised by almost all the stakeholders we talked to and is seen as a real weakness in the area.

### 3. Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><b>Community and housing</b> Very central and good location for visiting Perth, Royal Deeside, Pitlochry. Rejuvenation of Kirkmichael in last 10 years. New housing in Kirkmichael and in Glenshee</p> <p><b>Community facilities and activities</b> Good work of village halls and committees Work of the Session House to create a sense of community and run classes and activities Local groups, activities and events Access to Drumderg Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund.</p> <p><b>Local economy</b> The Village Shops and Post Offices Estates taking positive action to develop country sports, outdoor recreation, visitor attractions, local produce and other business activity The existing hotels, self catering, B&amp;Bs including new businesses. Visitor Centre, Kindrogan Field Centre BEPTA and GTA working with Perth and Kinross Council Cateran Trail bringing walkers in and related activities and events Strathardle Agricultural Show and Highland Games</p> <p><b>Environment and Outdoor Recreation</b> Attractive outdoor environment - local woods, rivers, lochs, forests, moor and wildlife ideal for outdoor recreation and country sports Skiing at Glenshee Development of the Cateran Trail and other local walks - and related activities and events (e.g. the YOMP) Dalmunzie Golf Course and access to 7 other nearby courses. Existing businesses that promote activities and provide facilities</p> <p><b>Roads and Parking</b> New traffic calming Work on junction between A93 and</p>	<p><b>Community and housing</b> Declining and ageing population - not enough young families High turnover in population Less cohesive than in the past Change in population adversely affecting existing groups (fire service, tug of war, hall committees) Growing number of second and holiday homes Recent spate of burglaries</p> <p><b>Community facilities and activities</b> Condition of Kirkmichael Hall Need for ongoing upgrade and improvements to most village halls All weather surface at school not fit for use Play area too small and not up to standard</p> <p><b>Local economy</b> Decline in agriculture/land based employment over the last 10 - 20 years Dependence on visitors income to sustain local shops and services throughout the year Decline in tourism linked to skiing Area of the 'beaten track' and decline in visitors to Royal Deeside Closure of hotels at Blackwater and Dalrulzion and Drumore( Blacklunans) Few places to stop in the area along the A93 Not enough promotion of the area Estate not encouraging new entrants or activity that would benefit the Glens</p> <p><b>Environment and Outdoor Recreation</b> Not developed and promoted as much as it could be Decline in skiing in recent years due to changes in the climate.</p> <p><b>Roads and traffic</b> Not a well known through route from A9 to Royal Deeside Motorbikes on the A93 Some of the new speed limit signs in wrong place Not enough places to stop (lay by/picnic sites/toilets/interpretation) along the A93.</p>

<p>Glenisla road</p> <p><b>Services and transport</b> The preschool nursery and the school Bus to Blairgowrie from Kirkmichael and Glenshee Volunteer Fire Service in both Glens Improved transport links to Blairgowrie</p> <p><b>Heritage</b> Remains of old settlements General Wade Road Ancient meeting place of the Clan MacThomas</p>	<p><b>Services and transport</b> Loss of primary schools Transport links to Pitlochry and onward Lack of childcare Volunteer fire service in Glenshee short of volunteers. Difficult to get access to services outwith the area without your own transport</p> <p><b>Heritage</b> Not enough done to display and promote local heritage.</p> <p><b>Infrastructure/utilities/communication</b> Poor Broadband Poor mobile phone reception Dependence on oil Recent study shows that area not particularly suitable for micro hydro schemes.</p>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p>
<p><b>Local economy</b> Development and promotion of the area as a HUB for outdoor recreation and country sports Promote existing businesses and activities and the area Redevelop Blackwater Inn in partnership with owners More promotion and signage of the area Develop workspace/workshops for local businesses Community Use of old schools for workshops/bunkhouses/tea room</p> <p><b>Environment</b> Develop partnership working between community and Forestry Commission Scotland/ Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust/ local landowners/ hospitality sector to develop and promote the assets of the area. Develop local paths network and links to other long distance networks Designate woods (e.g. Kindrogan) for recreational use and develop and promote More places to stop on A93 Develop access to Dalrulzion Woods and Blackwater Loch Craighall Gorge Visitor Attraction</p> <p><b>Community and housing</b> More affordable housing More support for new entrants to</p>	<p><b>Local Economy</b> Area continues to be by passed and not know about Continued climate change adversely affecting skiing Decline in tourism Fragile economy could loose more hotels, facilities, services.</p> <p><b>Community and housing</b> Decline in community cohesion People unable to make a living in the area - leaving Declining and ageing population Continuing increase in second/holiday/empty property</p> <p><b>Community Facilities and activities</b> Decline in community facilities, activities and events</p> <p><b>Service provision and transport</b> Cut backs and closures and loss of services.</p>

farming  
Community groups and areas to work together to improve the area as a whole and coordinate their activities.

**Community facilities**

Upgrade halls and new hall for Kirkmichael  
Develop outdoor play and sports areas  
Develop village caretaker role job to do a range of PKC jobs within Kirkmichael village.  
Access to Drumderg Windfarm community benefit funds and possible future funds from any other developments.

**Transport and access to services**

Community mini bus  
Better bus links to Pitlochry  
Develop childcare

**Infrastructure**

Develop collective oil purchasing scheme  
Develop community biomass/wood fuel  
Develop toilets/picnic places off the A93

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**4. VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

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**Mount Blair 2020**

A simple but powerful vision emerged from all the stakeholder meetings of a desire

**‘to see the Glens as a place where people could continue to live and work’.**

.....for people to be able to afford to live in the Glens through good access to reasonably priced housing, affordable fuel, and essential services

.....for people to be able to work in the Glens through the development and support for a healthy local economy and businesses and good access to high speed broadband connection and external markets.

.....for people to be able to enjoy visiting and living in the Glens through the provision of high quality opportunities for outdoor recreation that make the most of our natural assets and resources and through the provision of good village halls and other community facilities.

**5. THEMES AND PRIORITIES****THEME 1 ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE****Priorities**

- Continued development and promotion of the local paths network
- Developing and promoting the area as a HUB for outdoor recreation - with links developed to other local and long distance path networks
- Develop more outdoor activities and events and encourage use of the area for e.g. orienteering, photography, pony trekking, mountain biking, geocaching
- Community partnership with Forestry Commission to develop recreational opportunities and better access in local woods
- Making the most of the Craighall Gorge as a visitor site
- Develop Archive project and explore possibility of a Glens Museum.

**THEME 2 LOCAL ECONOMY AND TOURISM****Priorities**

- Better marketing, promotion and signage of the area
- Designation and development of the forests as recreational areas
- Develop more visitor facilities - café/pub/toilets/gallery/bunkhouse
- Develop more workspace for local small self employed businesses and arts and crafts
- Local produce developed and promoted and made available locally
- Opportunities for new entrants to take on a farm

**THEME 3 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES****Priorities**

- New Kirkmichael Village Hall
- Ongoing upgrade of other village halls (Ballintuim, Bridge of Cally, Blackwater)
- Improvement of play provision in the Kirkmichael
- Development of better all weather pitches in Kirkmichael
- Allotments/community orchard
- A pub back in the Glen (Blackwater)

**THEME 4 TRANSPORT AND ACCESS TO SERVICES****Priorities**

- Community Mini Bus and car sharing schemes
- Better public transport links to Pitlochry
- Develop childcare provision
- Village Caretaker Job in Kirkmichael to carry out a number of council services
- Toilets/lay by/picnic area/interpretation beside A93

**THEME 5 INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATION****Priorities**

- Better Broadband Connection
- Development of community biomass/wood fuel and other renewable energy sources
- Collective oil purchasing scheme

## **THEME 6      ROADS, TRAFFIC AND PARKING**

### **Priorities**

- Speed cameras on the A93 and policing to deter speeding motorbikes
- More visitor parking places on A93 - with local interpretation and information
- Move speed limit signs e.g. in Ballintuim to beyond the caravan park
- Bends better signed at Ballintuim and Bridge of Cally