**BATHGATE TOGETHER

Notes taken at a meeting of Bathgate Together held on the 22nd of January, 2025 in Room 11, Partnership Centre, beginning at 7:00 p.m.**

**List of attendees:**

Rosslyn Barr / Bathgate Hills Venture Group

Douglas Benson / West Lothian Council

Derek Brown / Bathgate Band

Harry Cartmill / Councillor & Procession Committee

Jim Easton / Friends of Little Boghead

Robert Gemmell / Boghall Parish Church

Billie Hamilton / Cyrenians OPAL

Lucy Lawson / Unicorn Market

David W. Main (note-taker) / Bathgate Community Council & Bennie Museum

Nairn Pearson / West Lothian Council, Economic Development

Pauline Stafford / Councillor

Donald Stavert / Bathgate Community Development Trust

Billy Weir / Bathgate Community Centre Management Committee

**Apologies:**

Stuart Barrie / Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian

Jane Boyle / Twinning Committee

Willie Boyle / Councillor

Steven Firth / Regal Radio

**AGM**

Results of a survey of members was announced. Ten replies to the survey have been received so far. Members are happy to continue to meet ten times a year. One organisation has now been added to the mailing list, namely, the Church of Scotland.

Election was held. Donald Stavert was re-elected as Chair, Lucy Lawson was elected as Vice-Chair, no nominations were received for Secretary or Treasurer. Since the organisation has no funds to date, the appointment of a Treasurer is not required **at this stage however it is hoped that that will change in the future.**

**End of AGM – 7:15 p.m.**

**January Meeting**

**Donald Stavert** began the meeting with a brief résumé of a meeting he had attended of the “West Lothian Climate Action Network” (WLCAN) held recently in Boghall Parish Church at which several suggestions were made as to what steps the local community might take to confront the current climate emergency. Members of WLCAN would like Bathgate Together to host a second meeting early in the New Year to build on some of the suggestions made at the first meeting, for example, the need for a community transport strategy or the framing of a policy with regards to the development of open spaces within local neighbourhoods, etc. Donald proposed that as an “umbrella” group covering a range of local stakeholders, Bathgate Together would be an ideal “fit”. A date in February or March was suggested. Both **Rosslyn Barr and Nairn Pearson** made the further suggestion that such a meeting should be open to all; however, **Derek Brown** wondered how that would actually work – would it not have to be a “hybrid” meeting?

**Lucy Lawson** admitted that whilst the marketing of the Christmas Fayre held on the first weekend in December could have been better, on the whole both she and the market stallholders were pleased at how things had gone.

Lucy then brought to the Group’s attention the fact that her lease for the Bathgate Market site had only ten days left to run before it expired! Could anyone help sort this out – perhaps Nairn?

In connection with the staging on that Saturday, **Nairn Pearson** suggested that perhaps some £5000 in future would be needed to be raised in order to meet growing public expectations? Where might such funding be obtained? If Bathgate Together was to become a charity might that open up additional sources of funding?

**Pauline Stafford** then mentioned her continuing involvement with the “Garden Group” who are to meet in the last week of January. It has been already decided by members of the Group to stage an event on the 7th of March in order to raise awareness amongst the general public of what the Group has been up to over these past months.

**Harry Cartmill** mentioned that the AGM of the Procession Committee had taken place several weeks back at which the issue of financing the annual Procession / Gala Day cropped up. Harry mentioned that to keep this event running costs upwards of £50,000 per annum – and this does not take account of the numbers of hours that the members of the Procession Committee devote of their free time! Still, the committee members are as committed as ever.

**Billy Weir** then spoke at the decision by the Council to review how the county’s community centres were run. It is the Council’s contention that the current modal of operating these centres costing almost £1,000,000 per annum has to be looked at since in these times of severe financial restraint that the Council is operating under, with the intention that members of the several management committees take a grater share in assisting in the operation of these centres as well as contributing to some of their running costs.

Billy then spoke about the two Bibles which had previously belonged to St. John’s in Mid-Street and were in danger of being sold off once that church was vacated had it not been for the timely intervention of a range of local people and community organisations (including, Bathgate Together). The Bibles – one of which dates back to 1624!) – are on display in a specially designed cabinet in the Partnership Centre in Bathgate.

Donald suggested that an alternative might be gradually to introduce these charges rather than impose them overnight. He himself suggested a reduction of some 5% over the next three years. Perhaps a portion of the fees which community centres levy on the use of their facilities might be given back to the Council rather than being wholly retained by the management committees. These and other suggestions will be presented to councillors in February.

**Derek Brown** advised the Group of several events that the Bathgate Band were to be involved in over the next few months. So, on the 24th of March, the Band is to take part in this year’s Scottish Brass Band Championships; on the 2nd of May, they are to take part in a jazz concert in Glasgow whilst still intending to take a full part in the various galas throughout the county in June / July as well as intending to go to Beamish again to take part in that competition.

**Jim Easton** began by informing the Group that the next “work day” at Little Boghead will take place on the 13th of February. In addition, he advised the Group that a “Community Engagement Officer” – Kim Wilkes – had now been employed to inform and engage the local community more into what is happening as part of the “Bathgate Water Project” by enhancing their presence on social media as well as seeking greater participation from local schools.

**David Main** started off by mentioning his attendance at an information session held recently in the Partnership Centre to find out about the setting up of a “banking hub” in the town as Bathgate is soon to lose its last remaining bank – the Bank of Scotland in June. The banking hub is a way round to mitigating the effects on towns suddenly being without any formal banking presence. Bathgate and Linlithgow (and now, Bo'ness) are to be the only towns which will have a banking presence of sorts in the immediate area. Whilst details and rotas are still to be finalised, on the whole the plan is to be welcomed.

In addition, David was pleased to advise the Group that Bathgate Community Council had agreed to donate the sum of £250 in order to allow Bathgate Library to purchase some new books – these books to be retained in Bathgate for at least six months before being lent out to other libraries in the county.

Finally, Bathgate Centrepoint Church (aka, “St. David’s”) has now received from the trustees at the Bennie Museum, the church’s foundation stone as well as the original lectern and hymn board. A further request for the memorial to George Harvie-Watt has also been made to the Museum.

**Rosslyn Barr** addressed the Group with an outline of plans by the Bathgate Hills Venture Group to devise a series of walks into the Bathgate Hills – the first being from Bathgate to Ravenscraig. It is hoped that these walks will be furnished with QR codes to enhance one’s understanding and appreciation of the surrounding area.

Again, in collaboration with both Museums Scotland and the Bennie it is hoped that “Lizzie” (or, at least, a copy) will be displayed in the museum sometime later this year or next after an absence of some several hundred million years (!) as part of an exhibition of fossils the Bennie intends to stage.

**Robert Gemmell** began his comments on a positive note in that the church at Boghall has been allowed to appoint a minister after a vacancy of some several years. The appointee – Don Westwood – is originally from Whitburn.

In addition, the Church is still heavily involved in helping out with the refugees currently staying in the “Cairn Hotel” in Blackburn – several members of the congregation regularly give up their time to help out at the hotel. In furtherance of which the Church intends to stage a one-day conference at the end of January to bring together a range of organisations to try and coordinate more effectively the range of services that are available both locally and nationally.

Finally, on the 8th of July a “peace and jamming” event is to be held in Boghall Parish Church as one of a series of “Viva Boghall” celebrations.

**Billie Hamilton –** informed the Group of various developments taking place at the hub in George Street. The group at this time are still working with B&Q but that is set to end in January. As such, Billie did make clear to the group that their hub is available free of charge to groups as a meeting space should anyone wish to do so. Indeed, on Friday – the 12of February – there is to be a Men’s Group briefing between 2-4.

**Douglas Benson**  advised the Group that there was to be a training event in the Boghall Drop-In Centre for those who wish to learn how to apply “Nyloxone” used in the treatment of addicts which prevents them – possibly – from dying owing to a drugs overdose.

He also mentioned that applications for what might be included on the so-called “Community Benefit Wish List” were now being sought.

Donald ended the meeting by reminding members that the AGM of Bathgate Community Development Trust is to take place on the 23rd of January

The meeting closed at 8:50 p.m.

DONM 26/02/2025 at 7:00 p.m.

 Notes by

David W. Main – 5/02/2025