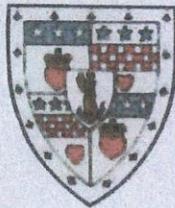
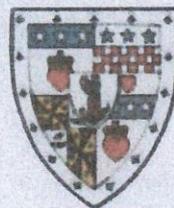


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CRUD

**Report on the proposal to create a community wildlife
area along the North Calder River glen adjacent to
Viewpark, Uddingston**

Dr Tim Edwards

REPORT

The following points relate to my observations regarding the securing of Viewpark Glen as a community facility. These observations are unlikely to be new to the Viewpark Conservation Group, as your group has been attempting to create a community facility for many years. However, they might help to clarify your situation and focus a particular course of action.

I have used the following sections to structure my suggestions:-

- The arguments for creating a **community facility** based on the glen
- The glen as a country park and/or a **tourist attraction**
- The capacity of the **Viewpark Conservation Group**
- The problems in **obtaining agreements** from the Local Authority, landowners and developers
- **The way forward** for the conservation project

A community facility

The following points validate and support any arguments that the community may use to secure the glen as a community facility:

- The community of 16,500 (approx) is 'boxed in' by the M74, A721, A725 and the new M8 extension, making the need for such a facility adjacent to the community essential (see map).
- The degradation of air quality caused by the transport network, recently highlighted in the news as a problem for urban areas of England, is partly ameliorated by greenbelt and woodland planting.
- The glen and adjacent woodland provides a significant barrier between the current community and its new housing, and the M8 extension and Strathclyde Business Park developments. This provides significant audio and visual barriers to the urbanisation of the surrounding area.
- The glen and adjacent areas have a long historical use with a local and Scottish significance, giving the new and expanding Viewpark community a 'sense of place'.
- The protection and possible restoration of some of these historical features is an important community goal and can only enhance our understanding of Scottish history and protect our heritage.
- With the increasing urbanisation of the area, conservation of the remaining small areas of historical significance is important to provide contrast and not to lose the character of the original landscape.
- The community has developed a number of initiatives based on the glen and adjacent areas, including a conservation group, a fishing club and wildlife walks with the local Primary school. These types of initiative would not be possible without the glen.
- The glen has provided many in the community with a focus. In an area where many are either out of work, retired or unable to work, the opportunity to make a voluntary contribution; ranging from tree management to path maintenance, wildlife observation to historical research, is critical for the well being of many community residents.
- A community project for the development of the glen would provide opportunities for young unemployed community members to gain new skills and provide a new focus on life.

- With the current emphasis on obesity and ill health in the Scottish population, the glen area provides exercise opportunities for the community without having to travel to other locations. The recent health walks initiative was exactly conceived to realise and support opportunities such as this.
- Having this facility in the community reduces significantly the number of car journeys to other non-urban areas, which would otherwise be required for recreation.
- The glen forms part of the North Calder river valley, a significant green corridor linking green areas (Drumpellier and Straclyde parks) to the Monkland canal and Clyde river valleys. This enables the movement of wildlife through the dense urban and road network that enrich so many of the community's daily lives.
- The wildlife corridor principle, threading through the landscape as it currently does, has enabled species of significance to populate the glen; from Otters and Kingfishers to Badgers and Roe deer.
- A community project such as this has many ongoing benefits, including an increased use of existing and proposed footpath and cycle links. The glen can provide recreation opportunities for others outside the community area, helping to integrate communities cut off by urban and transport barriers.
- A facility such as this ensures a better quality of life and a more sustainable environment, raising house prices in general and making the area more attractive as a place to live and work.
- A community project would improve access and make the glen a safer place to visit for people of all abilities. It would conserve aspects of the historical landscape and features for future generations, stop further degradation of the landscape and enhance habitats through projects such as tree planting and grassland management.

The above points will have different importance depending on your particular interests and who the target audience is. However, these provide an idea of the significance of the glen to the community.

A tourist attraction

Some community members and others from the conservation group have visited other countryside facilities, such as Mugdock Country Park, in order to investigate the possibilities for the glen area. I feel the following points should be considered in this context:

- Facilities such as Mugdock Country Park rely on core funding from Local Government. While initiatives within the country park can be put in place to generate income, this only helps to offset the true costs – there will always be a requirement for Local Government financial support for country parks.
- Local Government is not in a position to support new facilities such as this. Indeed I understand North Lanarkshire is considering its support of country parks in general as part of the pressure to cut costs.
- The footfall required to generate income from any business in such a facility is considerable, and this would not be realistic in Viewpark.
- Linking this facility to other potential tourist locations, such as nearby Grants Distillery and Bothwell Bridge battle site, has some merit, but this requires more sites across a larger area to create any sort of area based tourist initiative that would have the critical mass to generate tourist interest in any number.

- Once a site becomes a managed facility, such as a country park, the administration and management structures that need to be put in place would remove the site from community control.

It is my conclusion therefore that an initiative such as this needs to remain within community control and responsibility. It needs to be of such a scale that the community can manage it on a day to day basis, and that it's real significance is as a facility providing a very wide range of opportunities for the local community and not as a tourist attraction per se.

Viewpark Conservation Group

With any community initiative, there is always a core of committed members that are prepared to put in the time and effort needed to realise these targets. Viewpark Conservation Group (VCG) is of sufficient size, in terms of committed members, to undertake an initiative such as this. However, there are a few points that need to be considered:

- Do group Members fully realise the commitment (in terms of effort and time) that would be required when undertaking such a project?
- Does the group have a long-term plan for 'bringing on' new members, not just to support the current work, but to ensure continuity to manage a project such as the glen in the longer term.
- The VCG is a fully constituted group but the need to take this to a higher level by seeking Charitable Trust status would be essential to access any future agreements, funding, insurance and long-term responsibility. Does the group have the capacity to move to this status?
- The lobbying of local and national politicians will have to form part of the groups action plan. While there has been some success in this area (the play equipment for example), the time, effort and expense needed here is considerable, as is the need to deal with 'deaf' ears' on a repeated basis without losing heart.
- As this site appears to be 'political' in a local sense, the group needs to have clear leadership, with regular agreement on actions, otherwise local politicians (and newspapers) will use any discord or disagreement to their advantage.
- The ability to keep this issue and initiative in the public light will be a skill. The more prolonged positive publicity there is the better. Ideas, such as a monthly column in the local paper (news from Viewpark Glen), help to keep the area in the public eye but require considerable commitment.
- There may be a need to negotiate regarding, for example, the exact boundary of the glen. The group needs to be clear if they are able to consider a smaller site, and if so by how much, without compromising the principles of VCG or offending any specific member of the group.

Obtaining agreements

There is concern that the Local Council is pushing for use of the land for the development of further business and industrial units, or is at least favourable to such a proposal from others. To this end, there is suspicion by the group that any approach for lease agreements will be unsuccessful and purchase is the only option. There certainly seems to be some moves to use some of the land left, after the M8 extension has been completed, to expand Strathclyde Business Park. The funding of the archaeological survey by Park Lane Palisades Ltd, a company

classified as 'Development of building projects' in the company register, is unusual. The felling of the trees alongside the proposed cycle path link, unnecessary for a cycle path but necessary for a roadway, is equally telling.

However, the land has previously been designated green belt and some of the land is liable to flooding, is steep and is undermined, leaving only three areas worthy of consideration for development (see map).

Area 1 between the M8 extension and the A8 has probably already been sold by the Douglas Support Trustees and presents no threat to the glen. Area 2 presents an opportunity for a number of units, taking access directly off the A725 onto relatively flat ground above the river flood plain. This in turn would not significantly threaten the glen but it would be a visual incursion and may present a barrier to wildlife, if the west side of the A725 is developed more. The area of land however is small and may fall below the critical mass required to keep the costs of the installation of infrastructure to a profitable level.

The area of open land north of the woodland strip above the glen and south of the M8 represents the area that I believe is of most interest to developers, but in turn would significantly degrade the glen as a recreation and wildlife site, and impose an urban environment on the housing community. I think this area might represent the main sticking point in any negotiations.

The need for a full assessment of the implications of further development in the A8/M8 corridor was identified in the review of the Glasgow and the Clyde Valley joint structure plan. The intention of this assessment remains un-clear.

The VCG has already approached the land agent regarding the possibility of purchasing the remaining Douglas Support land south of the extended M8. This has been provisionally offered at current agricultural prices, pending Trustee agreement, and represents at least a cost of £450,000. The following points need to be considered:

- The cost is likely to be £500,000+ by the time ancillary costs is taken into account. The commitment to raise this amount is considerable and should not be underestimated.
- Community Land Fund, which supports community buy out from a fund of money held by the Scottish Government, is seen as a significant source for the group. The group must be aware that there are many applications to the fund and that there will be a need to understand the requirements of the fund to be considered at all, for example Charitable Trust status.
- Fundraising from a variety of trusts and charities is possible but this again is a skill that the group needs to ensure it has to avoid repeated rejections.
- Fundraising from local business and industry is also possible but is much more likely to be successful on a project by project basis, i.e. for specific items, such as the Grant Whiskey river path trail, etc

The way forward?

I believe that it may still be possible to negotiate a lease on the land from the Douglas Support Trustees. While it is understood that the family Trust was primarily set up to provide support for the Douglas family members, and as such, securing maximum profit from assets would be a prime objective, there must be leeway for land that is of less significant value yet has strong historical ties to the family and its past.

The following action points, some of which are already in train, should be considered by the VCG in taking the glen project forward:

- Seek Charitable Trust status for the VCG. If the contact point for the group can be a community facility of whatever kind, this is better than a private address.
- Approach the Douglas Support Trustees to discuss the possibility of a long term lease arrangement (100 years at a peppercorn rent). This would enable the Trust to retain ownership but absolve them of responsibility. The issue of the exact boundary of any lease would be critical.
- Set out the group's intentions in a short but punchy document that the group can use to raise the profile of the project.
- Seek meetings with local Councillors and especially your MSP. The political climate has changed and with a new emphasis on land ownership, community health and well being, now is the time to make Edinburgh aware of the project.
- Strengthen links with as wide a number of public and non-government organisations as possible – Archaeology Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB, SWT, SEPA etc – the more these organisations are involved, no matter how small an aspect, the stronger the proposal.
- While I understand there is good community support for the proposal, and setting aside the need for a petition at this stage, some verifiable measure of community support is a useful tool.
- Set out a number of projects that the group would undertake – for example, better path access, tree planting, habitat enhancement (rhododendron control, nest boxes etc). Cost these in terms of materials and voluntary input, quantify them in terms of time and extent.
- Approach local business to outline the proposal and seek agreement in principle that they would consider supporting particular projects in the glen.
- Approach the local schools and encourage use of the glen for projects and heritage education. Try and work out a programme of schools involvement, no matter how small.
- Set up a more structured wildlife recording scheme for community use.

The key to pushing the project through is to be professional, organised and focussed with the full backing of the community. There is a general election coming up and your local Westminster MP and other candidates are good targets.

Good luck

Note:

This report is undated, but was commissioned in November 2014 and submitted shortly thereafter.

Dr Timothy Edwards was Team Leader, Environmental Services for Stirling Council, Manager of Mugdock Country Park, Director of Visitor and Operational Services for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and Secretary of Scottish Parks. An ecologist with a doctorate in ecological entomology, he has worked in Africa, New Zealand and Northern Ireland where he established a volunteer conservation organisation.