

**PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL**

**Environment Committee – 12 November 2008**

**PLACECHECK COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**Report by the Executive Director (Environment)**

This report gives an overview of the Placecheck Community Engagement Initiative recently trialled in Errol and Dunning and recommends how this could be taken forward for other communities within Perth & Kinross.

**RECOMMENDATION**

This report recommends that “Placecheck” be used as one of a range of methods of engaging with communities on public space issues and that requests for “Placechecks” be prioritised using clear criteria, which are set out in this report.

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 puts responsibility on Local Authorities to effectively engage with the communities they serve in terms of a duty to undertake Community Planning and power to Advance Well-being. The Council has made a significant commitment to this in the aims and objectives of both the current Corporate and Community Plans and through the recently approved Community Engagement Strategy 2007-2010. Community engagement is also a major theme running through the Single Outcome Agreement agreed in March this year between the Council, Community Planning Partners and the Scottish Government. To reflect this commitment, The Environment Service, in conjunction with Education and Children’s Services, recently piloted “Placecheck” as a potentially effective way of engaging communities on issues relating to the physical environment of their settlements.
2. “Placecheck” was developed in the late 1990’s by the Urban Design Alliance (UDAL), a group representing a wide range of environmental professionals and practitioners including landscape architects, engineers and architects. It was seen as a simple way of getting communities to identify what it was they liked and didn’t like about where they lived and how they could identify and work with the different Community Planning Partners and possibly take action themselves, to care for and improve their environment. The scheme has been successfully implemented in many settlements across the UK from neighbourhoods wanting to improve their local streets and open spaces to whole settlements getting involved.

3. The “Placecheck” method was initially identified by the officer working group currently developing the Public Space Management Guide for Placemaking in Perth and Kinross. It was tested in the centre of Perth and Alyth. This was followed by a discussion with a number of community groups invited to the ‘Have Your Say’ event as part of developing the Community Engagement Strategy at the Salutation Hotel in Perth on 17 March 2007. Being well received, a trial of “Placecheck”, to be jointly run by The Environment Service and Education and Children’s Service in a small community, was agreed and Errol was chosen as a suitable sized community for this. A cross service project team was set up in April 2007 and a challenging timescale was set to initiate the community engagement, identify priorities, undertake investigations, carry out the design work, feedback and engage with the community, consult on the proposals and implement the agreed works to be completed by the end of March 2008.

This was largely achieved and a detailed description of how the Errol Placecheck was undertaken is contained in Appendix 1, with further details provided in Appendices 2-7.

4. An independent evaluation of the community engagement aspects of the Errol Placecheck was carried out by the Devlin Beattie Partnership. They found that overall, both the community and officers involved found “Placecheck” very positive (Appendix 8). They also found it met virtually all 10 of the national standards for community engagement as set out in the Council’s Community Engagement Strategy. Some of the key benefits of “Placecheck” were:
  - Simple and equitable method of engaging on public space issues within a settlement.
  - Provides an opportunity for involving all community groups and encourages the inclusion of harder to reach groups. “Placecheck” can also work towards promoting good relations between persons of different racial groups, an integral part of the Race Equality Duty.
  - Encourages Council services and other stakeholders to engage with a community and work more cooperatively to solve local issues. This includes explaining clearly to the community why certain things can not be done, as well as working together to achieve the things which can.
  - Positively changes the perception of the Council through the face to face meetings between officers and the community, focussed on working together to best use resources for solving local priority issues.
  - Gives all age groups within the community the opportunity to have their say on what they like, don’t like and needs to be improved in their settlement. The school and youth “Placechecks” in particular were very positive elements.
  - Promotes active citizenship and involves local people and all stakeholders including the council in improving the local area.

5. It was identified however, that “Placecheck”, in the form undertaken in Errol, was resource intensive for both services, in terms of officer time and funding to implement the proposals. As such, the review suggested the need for a strategic approach to identifying in which communities “Placechecks” should be undertaken. In addition, adequate timescales to allow proper engagement with communities including feedback as well as undertake good quality design and implementation, need to be allowed. Whilst the works have undoubtedly addressed the priorities identified by the community, pressure to complete the design and implementation work to meet year end spend in Errol, restricted the quality of the finished product and attention to detail. It also limited the potential amount of community involvement in the design and implementation of the proposals. A formal assessment of the community’s views on the impact of the works in Errol would be very valuable and will be undertaken early in the New Year. More time for design and implementation would also have allowed better links with longer term proposals identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.
6. Some of these lessons have been used to inform the Dunning Placecheck which had its first Community day on 23 August 2008. Whilst the process and inputs in terms of staff time and financial resources are similar to Errol, it is being run over a longer period. This should help to ensure there is better engagement during the project development and implementation stages leading to both high quality improvements and long term involvement from the community. Other changes for Dunning included a pre-meeting which was held in March with key community organisations to discuss the format of the “Placecheck” and the boundaries of the zones for the joint site visits. An additional mini “Placecheck” was held on the evening of 26 August 2008 for those who couldn’t attend on the main “Placecheck” day. Although this took additional officer time it provided an opportunity for greater community engagement. The feedback and prioritisation engagement event for Dunning will be taking place on Saturday 15 November 2008 within the village.

## **PROPOSALS**

7. “Placecheck” has been successful in effectively engaging communities on public space issues. Although it is not an overarching method of community engagement for all council issues, it has been successful in encouraging more joined up service working within the Council and with other community planning partners, however there is still work to be done. In view of the heavy demand on resources, particularly staff time, it would not be possible to undertake numerous “Placecheck” events across various communities in Perth and Kinross. To take “Placecheck” forward on an equitable and effective basis to make best use of resources, criteria are required to ensure suitable settlements or communities are selected in a fair and transparent way. Scoring will assist with prioritisation where several communities can demonstrate a need for “Placecheck” and the submissions will be assessed by a working group before a programme is drawn up. The proposed criteria are adaptable and will be regularly reviewed to reflect changes in Council and Community Planning priorities or any change in resources. Currently the following draft criteria are suggested and they will be completed in advance of any further “Placechecks”:

Criteria	Assessment
The proposal must relate to a self contained geographical community with a population of around 2000. This figure will be reviewed as Placecheck develops. The primary school catchment areas would if appropriate be used for the extent of addresses to be contacted and people to be invited to participate. Proposals for communities falling outside this threshold, or relating to another form of community will be considered if a compelling case is made. The limit is required in order that the engagement events, in the current format, can be managed effectively.	Yes / No
The proposal must be supported by all elected members for the area.	Yes / No
A number of public space management issues already exist which require resolution arising from customer contacts, local members, community planning partners, capital plans or asset management plans	Score (1-5)
Can additional funding be sought through new development or other, or has any additional funding been secured?	Score (1-5)
The community must be able to demonstrate how it will engage with the wider local community in the consultation and design process.	Score (1-5)
The community must be able to demonstrate the potential benefits of a "Placecheck" for their area by giving examples of the current issues and how these may be improved, in relation to the aims of "Placecheck". For example, evidence of ongoing problems and customer complaints.	Score (1-5)

If the answer to either of the first two criteria is "No", then it would not be appropriate to undertake "Placecheck".

8. Once a settlement is chosen, the timescale for completing the main "Placecheck" activities will largely be determined by the number of issues to be resolved and budget available to implement measures. A minimum of 18 months is expected based on the current model. Beyond this, it is anticipated that any longer term issues raised through the "Placecheck" will be addressed through ongoing contact between the community and Community Capacity Building Workers or the specialist officers within The Environment Service. The effectiveness of this will continue to be reviewed as Placecheck develops.
9. The number of "Placechecks" which can realistically be commenced in any one financial year based on the current model is probably limited to one, depending on other service priorities and programmes. "Placechecks" could overlap and acceleration of the programme may be possible in the future through improvements to the process, focusing more staff resources onto

“Placecheck” as part of an area based management approach and building the capacity of communities to undertake their own “Placechecks” or play a greater role in the process. In any event, “Placecheck” will remain only one of a number of techniques for engaging with communities on appropriate issues.

To help support “Placecheck” and other community engagement activities within The Environment Service a new post of Senior Community Capacity Building Worker has been created and an officer appointed who will start in January 2009. This will be particularly helpful in communities who need to have their capacity to engage built before they can engage effectively.

## **CONSULTATION**

10. There has been extensive local consultation with a wide range of residents and stakeholders as part of the “Placecheck” process in Errol and Dunning. The Depute Director (Education and Children’s Services), The Head of Legal Services, the Head of Democratic Services and the Executive Director (Corporate Services) have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

11. Revenue funding has been set for future “Placechecks” and it is hoped this can be combined with other external funding and linked to other council funding priorities such as the ABI or Conservation Area Management Plans and routine maintenance and repair programmes within Public Space Management.

## **COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVES 2006-2010**

12. The Council’s Corporate Plan 2006-2010 lays out five Objectives which provide clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape resources allocation. They are as follows:-
  - (i) A Safe, Secure and Welcoming Environment
  - (ii) Healthy, Caring Communities
  - (iii) A Prosperous, Sustainable and Inclusive Economy
  - (iv) Educated, Responsible and Informed Citizens
  - (v) Confident, Active and Inclusive Communities
13. The “Placecheck” process and outcomes clearly have the potential to deliver on all five Objectives. In addition “Placecheck” has the potential to deliver on several of the National Outcomes of the Single Outcome Agreement:

## EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

14. The Council's Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework requires an assessment of functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant equality categories. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new policies to ensure there is no adverse impact on any community group or employees.
15. The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework and assessed in relation to the Race/Disability/Gender Equalities Assessment. Consequently the following points were identified:
16. "Placecheck" has been identified as an extremely positive and inclusive model of engagement, with the capacity to strengthen and unite communities.

### Actions arising from the Equalities Impact Assessment:

Equality Group	Action	Who	When
RACE	Consider further whether it would be appropriate to contact migrant workers groups as part of the Placecheck exercise.	AC	All future Placechecks
ALL	Continue to engage with all equalities groups as part of Placecheck.	AC	All future Placechecks
ALL	Carry out an Integrated Impact assessment on the Placecheck process to consider equalities, economic, health and environmental impacts	AC	As part of the Dunning Placecheck Review

## STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

17. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a legal requirement under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 that applies to all qualifying plans, programmes and strategies, including policies (PPS). However, in this instance, no action is required as the Act does not apply to the matters presented in this report because they do not constitute a PPS as defined by the Act.

## CONCLUSION

18. "Placecheck", through the pilot project completed at Errol and underway in Dunning, has proved to be a very effective method of engaging communities in the future of their public spaces. It has also provided a good forum for stronger and more coordinated team working between different services within the council and with community planning partners at a local level. The

“Placecheck” process does require a commitment in terms of officer time and money to engage with communities and address the issues they raise. It will not be possible to commence more than one new Placecheck each financial year, in the current format. It is hoped that the procedure can be simplified over time.

JIM VALENTINE  
DEPUTE DIRECTOR (ENVIRONMENT)

**Note**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

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**Date:** September 2008



### Errol Placecheck Summary

#### Preparation

A Placecheck day was set for Saturday 23 June 2007 and all the key community groups were identified and contacted. The Placecheck day was advertised widely through the local press, posters and schoolbag leaflets. In advance of the Placecheck day a school and youth Placecheck were undertaken which were very valuable at engaging young people in the future of their communities. Arrangements were also put in place to make the event as inclusive as possible by using the village hall, running a crèche and providing light refreshments. Display material was produced and bookings taken as there was a limit on the capacity of the Village Hall and crèche.

#### Placecheck Day

On the day following registration, the event, attended by 33 local people, was opened by a local member and an outline of the format for Placecheck and was given by officers. The results of the school and youth Placechecks were presented and people then got into their groups for the walkabout led by officers. During the walkabout in different areas of the village the Placecheck forms (Appendix 2) were filled in and brought back to the Village Hall. Following a light buffet lunch the groups got together for the action planning and prioritisation session in the afternoon (Appendix 3). From this a list of short, medium and long term actions were produced (Appendix 4 - example for Park works) which officers took away to assess for the Placecheck feedback day of Saturday 18 August 2007.

#### Short Term Actions and Feasibility Assessments

Between July and August 2007 many of the shorter term actions were addressed such as removing developer's signs, re-lining road junctions, clearing weeds and relocating some park benches and bins. Feasibility studies were also carried out by staff for the medium and longer term priorities including traffic speed assessments, initial design work and costings.

#### Placecheck Follow up Day

The priority actions and assessments were discussed with the community in groups using the World Café coffee stop engagement technique at the August Placecheck day in the village hall. This involved four discussion groups, of about 10 people in each group, looking at four different topics for 20 minutes. The groups then rotated to provide an opportunity for participants to discuss each topic. Officers facilitated the groups and were able to explain what could and could not be done and who could help. Each group was then asked to identify their top 3 priorities at each coffee stop. The results were again

collated by officers and taken back to allow proposals to be drawn up. The project team then met following this to agree what could be taken forward within available budgets and timescales and a newsletter summarising this was produced and circulated to every address in Errol (Appendix 5).

### Project Design & Implementation

Between August and November the project team met regularly and progressed the designs and detailed costings for the agreed works. Presentation drawings were produced and an exhibition was advertised and set up in the village hall to inform the community and seek feedback. The exhibition ran from the Community Council meeting on 22 November to 21 December 2007. It was manned by officers three days of the second week including an evening and comments forms and boxes were left. There was very limited response to the exhibition and five booklets of final designs were produced and put on display in the school, local shops and the community hall. They were also made available in the form of PDFs on the council's website (Appendix 6). Between December and early February 2008 the designs, contract drawings and specifications were completed and works organised through tenders and the council's term contractor (Appendix 7). The majority of the works were completed by 31 March 2008, with remedial and seasonal works such as grass seeding being completed by the end of April. Some minor snagging works have been carried out subsequently.





## Appendix 3

### Placecheck Action Planning Form

<u>Action Plan</u>	Area/Street Name:	
<i>What can be done now?</i>	<i>Who could do it?</i>	<i>What do they need to enable them to do it?</i>
<i>What can be done by the end of the year?</i>	<i>Who could do it?</i>	<i>What do they need to enable them to do it?</i>
<i>What can be done next year or further into the future?</i>	<i>Who could do it?</i>	<i>What do they need to enable them to do it?</i>



## ERROL PLACECHECK - SATURDAY 23 JUNE 2007

Last Updated 18/07/2007

Zone 1 (Loan Brae, Beechgrove Place)  
 Zone 2 (St.Madoes Road, High Street, Gas Brae)  
 Zone 3 (High Street)  
 Zone 4 (Park, School, Church)

Zone 5 (Gas Brae, graveyard, South bank Dyke)  
 Zone 6 (Daleally, Church Lane)  
 Zone 7 (Station Road, Viewlands)  
 Zone 8 (Countryside Walks)

		<b>ACTION PLAN PARK &amp; COUNTRYSIDE ISSUES</b>	<b>OFFICER RESPONSIBLE</b>	<b>ESTIMATED COMPLETE DATE</b>	<b>ACTUAL COMPLETE DATE</b>	<b>ESTIMATED COSTS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
	<b>Zone</b>						
		<b>Short Term Actions (within 2-3 months)</b>					
a	1	Untidy grass area at Norlands - establish ownership & cut grass	Rob Bryce				
b	4	Bench needs to be relocated from the skate park to the play area	Graham Harbut				
c	4	Work with Community Association to put a metal plate over the manhole – health and safety of those accessing the park.	Graham Harbut				
d	4	Spray car park and assist in clear up.	Rob Bryce				
e	4	Park gates – repair and re-install	Graham Harbut				
f	4	Community centre grounds – Drain needs covered, tidy surrounds	Community association, Volunteers Rob Bryce				
g	8	Long grass on paths – Cut	Alistair Godfrey Rob Bryce				
		<b>Medium Term Actions (within year)</b>					
a	2	Wheelchair access to Gas Brae - Increase gap of gate and resurface	Alistair Godfrey / Andrew Smith				
b	4	Kids play park – Better selection of play furniture especially for u5's -relocate swings in park	Andrew Smith Graham Harbut				
c	4	Fence off children's playpark to keep dogs out, kid's safety	Andrew Smith Graham Harbut				
d	4	Lighting around skate park	Andrew Smith Graham Harbut				
e	6	Rights of way and paths not obvious – Improve signage, install info board or produce leaflets	Alistair Godfrey				
f	8	Path signage – Clearly indicate location of paths and junctions, map of path routes	Alistair Godfrey Rob Bryce				
g	8	Private signs – Change wording to less threatening 'no unauthorised access'.	Alistair Godfrey				
h	?	Refurbish Wildlife, Garden, Nesting Boxes, Wildlife Leaflet	Alistair Godfrey				
i	?	Countryside trail and path signing	Alistair Godfrey / COGG				
		<b>Long Term Actions (Year or More)</b>					
a	4	Multi sports pitch for older teens	Andrew Smith Jackie Halawi				
b	4	Park needs some infrastructure work ie. equipment	Andrew Smith				
c	4	Play Equipment - additional items requested	Andrew Smith				
d	4	Park Ranger - Request for Officer	Andy Clegg				





# ERROL PLACECHECK NEWSLETTER

A big thank you to everyone who turned up to the second Placecheck Event in the village hall on 18 August 2007. We had 35 people in groups circulating at 4 different tables manned by council officers to look at the priorities from all the suggestions which came out of the first Placecheck Day on 23 June.

The four groups identified the priorities on the attached sheet. Since the 18 August, the council team have been looking at these priorities to see what can be done with the resources available. The following projects are being taken forward in the next 6-12 months based on what you told us

## Community Support

### **Dog fouling**

New bins are proposed at Elm Street, the Public Park, and North Bank Dykes



### **Litter**

New bins are proposed at the Bus Stop in Station Road, outside Errol Primary School, the Bus Stop past the entrance to the Orchard and the Entrance to the Church. The bins outside the Chip Shop, Post Office, The Cross, Lifestyle Express and the Masonic Lodge will remain in place. Bins will be re-located at Church Car Park, North Bank, Dykes and Gas Brae. Bins in park will be designed to be more appealing to children



We will consider the education aspect of tackling these issues particularly through Ecoschools.

## High Street

We will be designing and implementing a co-ordinated street improvement scheme addressing:

- Cross repair and protection
- Perceived traffic speeds and car parking
- Bus boarders/shelter
- General environmental improvements using good quality materials, possible street trees, co-ordinated signage and furniture.

There may be longer term Conservation area enhancements including building facade improvements depending on resources

## Park and Countryside

A few new pieces of play equipment including an aerial cableway are being planned along with a new ball court. There would not be enough money to do the fencing around the play area as well. We will develop the



Countryside path scheme, including surfacing and signage. We will also work up a map to show the paths around the village to display on the community notice board.

## Gateways and Streets

Priority is resurfacing North Bank Dykes and the junction at the front of Errol Estate gates. We are also looking at improvements to the St Madoes approach / gateway.

To deliver these projects we will be working up proposals and displaying them in the Village Hall over the coming months. We will also discuss them with the Community Council and groups like TAPIE, Living Streets and CoGG. We will ensure we advertise any consultation events.

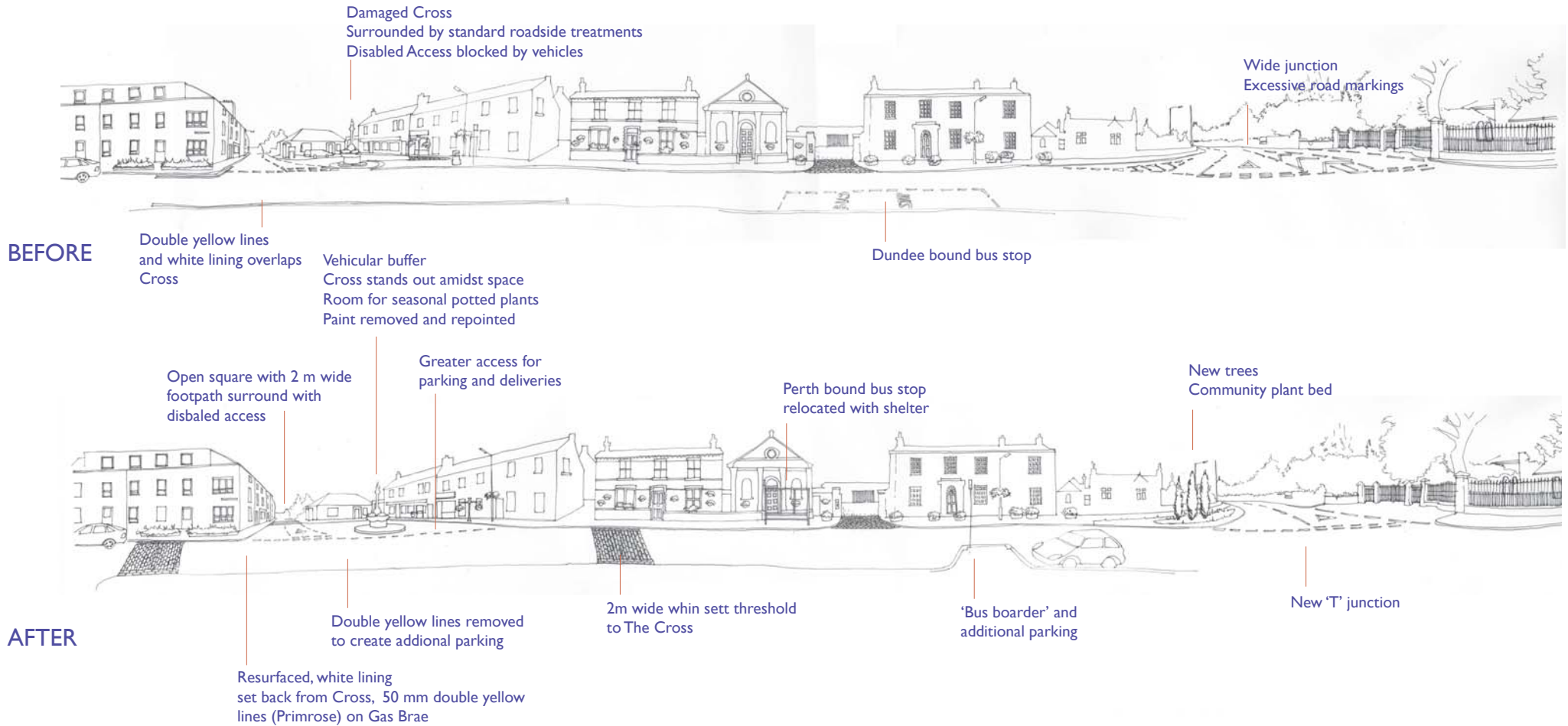
As well as the longer term projects we have carried out the following short term actions since the first Placecheck Day:

- Bins have been emptied more frequently
- Redundant sign poles have been removed
- Glass at park has been cleaned up
- Benches relocated in park
- Hole in Community centre car park has been filled in
- Park Gates have been repaired
- Developers are being reminded of road cleaning responsibilities and unauthorised signs have been removed
- Station Road junction vegetation has been cleared back
- Faded road markings have been repainted

Many thanks again for helping us deliver on the things you told us mattered in Errol. If you need any further information please call [01738 476476](tel:01738476476) and ask for Andy Clegg, Parks Development Manager

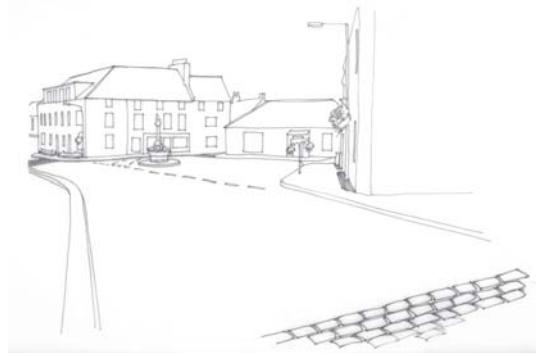


## The High Street



## The Cross





## The Cross

- Paint removal and repointing
- Kerbed buffer and setts extended
- Extra space for plant pots
- Open square with 2m wide footway surround and disabled access
- Greater access for parking and deliveries
- Pitched/horronised stone trim to bulding line
- 2m wide whin sett threshold to Cross space
- Perth bound bus stop relocated upstreet with shelter
- Double yellow lines removed to enable additional parking
- Resurfacing to give well maintained finish
- Option to replace lights at Cross at same time



## View up Gas Brae towards the Cross

- 2m wide whin sett treshold to Cross space on approach from Gas Brae
- 50 mm double yellow lines (Primrose) on Gas Brae



## Junction of High St, St Madoes Rd and Loan Brae

- Reduced to 'T' junction with adequate space for larger vehicles
- Vehicles encouraged to stop before turning right into High St
- Road markings minimised
- Asphalt retained to East Park Gates as advised by Historic Scotland
- Grass verge formed to east, with 3 small trees and permanent community plant bed beyond sightlines
- Welcoming entrance feature created on approach to High St





## Appendix 7

### Errol Placecheck Works



Path & Road surfacing Improvements and new lighting to Cross area



New ball court part funded by Scottish Football Association and Developer Contributions.



New bed planted by Take a Pride in Errol on St Madoes Road Corner.



# Evaluation of Errol Placecheck

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Report  
February 2008

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# 1 Introduction

The corporate plan for Perth and Kinross Council, 2007-2010 sets out its vision of:

‘...a confident and ambitious Perth and Kinross with a strong identity and clear outcomes that everyone works together to achieve.

Our area will be vibrant and successful; a safe, secure and healthy environment; and a place where people and communities are nurtured and supported. ‘

In 2007, Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) launched its Community Engagement Strategy and piloted new approaches to community engagement. The strategy reflects the national standards for community engagement, introduced in 2005 to improve the quality of engagement between public bodies and communities. The strategy was built up through a process of dialogue with key stakeholders, many of whom participated in a series of workshops examining the national standards and how to harness them effectively in Perth and Kinross.

Errol Placecheck was one of the pilot initiatives and was supported by resources to take forward short timescale projects. The project was devised as a joint pilot initiative between PKC, Errol residents and businesses with the intention of being an inclusive process engaging a wide range of community participants.

Placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed and focusing people on working together to achieve them. A Placecheck can cover a street (or part of one), a neighbourhood, a town centre, or a whole city. The setting might be urban, suburban or a village.

Placecheck involves participants walking around a defined area or sites to identify what’s good about the area, what needs improved, what opportunities are present and what the priorities are. It brings a range of perspectives together to identify what might be important but not necessarily visible to all. The Placecheck focus can be broad or narrow ranging from a complete regeneration agenda to the narrower one of environmental improvements piloted in Errol. Placecheck is recognised as a simple and valuable tool to bring diverse and often conflicting interests in a community together.

Developed by the Urban Design Alliance in the 1990s, Placecheck is now in widespread use in communities throughout the UK and is recommended in the Council’s draft Public Space Management Guide as an ideal method of engaging communities in celebrating, managing and improving their public space.

As Placecheck was a pilot initiative, PKC considered an evaluation critical to determine future useage.

This evaluation examines the Placecheck pilot in Errol and benchmarks it against the national standards for community engagement. The evaluation provides an independent assessment of the value and impact of the Placecheck for all stakeholders including those in Perth and Kinross who have not yet tested out Placecheck but wish to learn from others' practice.

## 2 Methodology

The evaluation adopted a stakeholder approach, recognising the need to capture the views and experiences of all participants and take into account the different perspectives involved. The methods used to deliver the evaluation were:

1. Desk research
2. Focus group with project team members
3. Focus group with Errol residents
4. Electronic feedback

**Desk Research** - included analysis of team meeting minutes, project plan, DVD, project priorities, web information.

A **focus group** of ten project team members discussed the purpose, added value, impact/outcomes and lessons learned from the Placecheck pilot.

**Focus group with Errol residents** - Discussion in Errol Community centre with four local participants examined expectations, experience and impact.

**Electronic feedback** -Two local participants gave feedback about the Placecheck process electronically.

# 3 Planning and delivery

Planned outcomes for the Errol Placecheck were:

- More people involved in community activity and decision making
- Local public space management issues scoped and prioritised
- Community engagement as per the National Standards for Community Engagement demonstrated
- Evidence that the Council’s Public Space Management Unit can work together with other council services and stakeholders
- Placecheck viewed as a valuable tool for future implementation

## Project Team

Following agreement at corporate management level, it was considered that a joint approach from the council was necessary rather than a responsibility of one department/service. A project team of officers from PKC was established from:

- The Environment Service (TES): Community Greenspace, Traffic and Road Safety, Street Lighting, Roads Maintenance, Public Transport and Conservation
- Education and Children’s Services (ECS): Cultural & Community Services: Community Capacity, Youth Work, Performance Planning
- Housing and Community Care was also represented.

The lead officer, keen to establish if Placecheck was an appropriate tool for community engagement within the PKC practice portfolio, was the Parks Development Manager from the Public Space Management Unit of TES.

A series of planning meetings established the purpose and potential outcomes of the Placecheck. Outcomes are identified above. The purpose of Placecheck was to test out a new approach to community engagement within the context of public space management and specifically, environmental improvements.

The pilot was also used to demonstrate a community development approach and the value of sharing practice. Workshops on community engagement, led by Cultural & Community Services, were delivered to promote familiarisation with the national standards for community engagement.

Project team roles and responsibilities were also agreed. Community profiles were used to map the area. Action minutes were produced and circulated after each meeting, with timescales and named responsible officers clearly indicated. For some officers, working and sharing resources across the Council was a relatively new experience and was viewed as one of the positive outcomes of the pilot.

**‘It was great to work with a bigger team, to have different departments working well together and knowing we were all aiming for the same thing’**

*Placecheck team member*

Tasks identified and allocated within the project team to ensure positive outcomes included:

- Identifying community organisations and briefing them in advance of the Placecheck events
- Ensuring updated knowledge about potential local issues was shared within the project team including alcohol by-law issues and planned housing developments
- Identifying minority communities who may need additional support to participate
- Arranging risk assessments
- Tracking previous engagement/consultation with the community and outcomes
- Mapping existing services and issues in the village of Errol to establish Placecheck sites and walkabout routes
- Planning publicity and practical arrangements including venue, refreshments and crèche
- Arranging production of a DVD as a record and learning tool
- Briefing elected members

Team members were involved at all stages of the Placecheck process and presented as a unified corporate body during engagement with the community.

**‘The Council people were very well organised - it looked really slick and corporate (in the community centre)’**

*Errol resident*

## **Publicity**

Effective publicity for the Placecheck was viewed as crucial to its success. Information was posted on the council’s website, leaflets were distributed from Errol Primary School via schoolbags, briefing meetings were held with local organisations and every house was sent a letter outlining the purpose of Placecheck and inviting participation. The local Community Capacity Building officer also referred to the Placecheck during any contact with local people and businesses in the lead up to the first event.

The extent and variety of publicity had the effect of generating a lot of local interest and word of mouth ‘buzz’ about the potential of Placecheck for Errol which, according to community participants, has traditionally felt on the margins of PKC priorities. The Placecheck was viewed as something unique both in its format and that it was being piloted in Errol.

**‘We were used to being a bit sidelined by the council and suddenly felt like royalty’**

*Errol resident*

## Engaging children and young people

Early in the process the Community Capacity Building officer identified the potential of engaging children and young people in the process through two distinct methods:

1. Primary school Placecheck
2. Streetwork

The children's and young people's Placecheck took place in advance of the main event and findings from both the primary school and streetwork were fed into presentations during the first Placecheck event, informing the action planning process. Local adults reported this part of the Placecheck as being particularly valuable, both in hearing the views of young people and as a vehicle to divert negative opinion about young people.

**'It was great. The teenage bashing was just starting and then the positive stuff from kids was presented - it changed everything'**

*Errol resident*

## Resources

To ensure the Placecheck was a successful event the following resources were in place at the events:

- Badged staff team in place during the Saturday walkabout, action planning and follow-up feedback events
- Community Police present at events
- Free crèche available to participants on a pre-booked basis
- Buffet lunch provided
- Sole use of community centre arranged
- Corporate pop-ups and exhibition materials prominently displayed
- Local enlarged Ordinance Survey maps available to assist walkabout and action planning phase
- Presentation linking Placecheck to corporate plan priorities produced and shown at first event
- Cameras available for walkabout participants
- Event opened by Provost

Resources to help progress priorities identified during the Placecheck were in place. However, human resource time was a requirement that did not attract additional resources, resulting in officer time being diverted from existing priority projects eg. conservation area schemes within TES and voluntary sector liaison within Cultural & Community Services.

## Walkabout and action planning

On a Saturday in June the first event took place over a morning-early afternoon. Despite terrible weather conditions, over 40 people participated in a walkabout of eight zones, armed with cameras to record their views about the quality of the village environment and areas for improvement. Staff had been pre - allocated to group walkabouts and to provide information where appropriate.

Group discussions to agree priorities themed around the eight sites followed with short (2-3 months), medium (within a year) and long term (year or more) priorities agreed. The dialogue that decided the priorities, including input from council officers with expertise in the implications, was viewed by local people as being particularly useful and for all participating, a first. Feedback has suggested it felt like a meaningful discussion was taking place rather than a question and answer session or council officers 'fielding' complaints /issues.

Information about likely cost, possible disruption to residents, implications for car drivers and safety for children was all discussed openly in groups and informed and influenced the priorities identified.

**'We originally concentrated on one thing then when the cost was explained, we realised there were other more important things for that amount of money to be spent on. Without that input we would have wasted time on something that wouldn't have worked'**

*Errol resident*

Priorities identified were grouped into four themes: street, park, litter and miscellaneous and ranged from improved signage, requests for dog waste bins, an extension to the community centre and diversionary activities for young people.

The event was evaluated positively by participants with **68% evaluating Placecheck as either a good or very good way of working with residents to help identify local priorities. 76% reported the time allocated to giving background information during the Placecheck was just right and 62% reported the time allocated to the walkabout was just right.**

## August feedback event

35 local people returned in August to the feedback event where the World Café method, successfully piloted in Perth and Kinross by Cultural & Community Services in 2006, was used to generate discussion about the priorities from the walkabout and prioritising event and feedback on the actions to date from the first event.

A crèche was arranged as per the first event.

Officers had used time to research the issues and priorities raised from the first event including traffic surveys, costings and specifications for the ball court. This was essential information to inform prioritisation from the first event.

Priorities were grouped and narrowed down to create an agenda for both the Council team and local people. The themes agreed were:

- Community support
- High Street
- Park and countryside
- Gateways and streets

Some small scale actions, already planned and implemented by the Council team from the first event, were reported on. Outline costs and the implications of progressing priorities were explained.

### **Continuing dialogue**

Following the first event, residents quickly saw some short term actions implemented eg. faded road markings repainted and dog waste bins erected.

These were followed by a newsletter to all residents from PKC to confirm the top priorities and advise of the next steps.

An exhibition of the proposals to address the community priorities took place in Errol community centre from 22 November – 19 December. The display was staffed for 3 evenings one week. This was followed up with another letter drop before Christmas advising people of progress from the Council team, referring them to copies of the drawings left at several locations in the village and that accessible on the PKC website. Community participation at this stage was low.

In addition, email contact has been ongoing with some residents about progress they were particularly interested in being involved with eg. developments in the park with parents of small children who are keen to play a role in planned improvements.

Local residents report their relationship and perception of PKC as being transformed by these relatively simple and low cost approaches to engagement. 'Putting a face to the Council' and having a direct link into the complex bureaucracy the Council can appear to be to local people, are viewed by residents as positive outcomes from the Placecheck.

Generating social capital to invest in the changes and improvements prioritised during the Placecheck is part of the Placecheck agenda. This is at an early stage in Errol. Whilst community organisations are active on the issues of immediate concern to members, a co-ordinated approach from community organisations is not yet evident.

Some individuals who participated in the Placecheck have yet to find their fit with community organisations. There is acknowledgement that the Placecheck was a catalyst for community cohesion but there is also concern that the momentum created by the Placecheck may be lost. This is partly connected to the time taken to see longer term projects developed but is also based on the absence of co-ordinated community activity growing out of the Placecheck.

The Council's Community Capacity Building officer carries significant respect in the community and is working effectively to follow up the Placecheck process. There has also been input from a design team to discuss works in the village cross area with businesses as well as the works involving the Take a Pride in Errol group and work with the local school on Cistern Green.

However, with no dedicated staff support and a lot of heightened expectations amongst residents about village improvements, adequate capacity within community organisations to work in partnership with the Council is crucial. Consideration of this should be part of any future Placecheck planning.

## 4 Benchmarking

This section benchmarks the Errol Placecheck against the ten national standards for community engagement presenting evidence of practice where available.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Sample evidence from Placecheck</b>
<p><b>INVOLVEMENT</b> We will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of engagement</p>	<p>All known community organisations contacted and briefed Marginalised communities researched Posters, leaflets and web information as publicity Contact with all residents made via invitation letter Leaflets in schoolbags to parents</p>
<p><b>SUPPORT</b> We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement</p>	<p>Placecheck delivered in primary school to engage young children Streetwork with young people Accessible venue used Research re. marginalised groups Free crèche provided</p>
<p><b>PLANNING</b> We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken</p>	<p>Evidence of need was not gathered in advance of agreeing Errol as the Placecheck pilot and there is no evidence of a strategic fit. Community profiles used for planning Purpose, scope and timescale all agreed within PKC and outlined to community organisations in advance of events</p>
<p><b>METHODS</b> We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose</p>	<p>Placecheck identified by 68% of local participants as a good or very good engagement method Placecheck identified as best practice in national public space management guidance Placecheck also effective in generating corporate working and identity for PKC team</p>
<p><b>WORKING TOGETHER</b> We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently</p>	<p>Joint training on the national standards for community engagement was delivered. The PKC team developed the programme over a series of meetings and communicated all relevant information to community organisations. Roles and responsibilities were clearly identified and communicated. Key council officers were involved in the process and all were well prepared with information to present at the Placecheck events. Plain English was used to describe technical processes. The Placecheck method transparently identifies purpose,</p>

	roles and expectations of all involved including expectations of community participants.
<p><b>SHARING INFORMATION</b> We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between participants</p>	<p>Having made the decision to pilot Placecheck in Errol, all subsequent information was effectively shared across participating council services and community participants. Leaflets, letters to every household, web information, community meetings and follow-up email dialogue is evident.</p> <p>There remains a gap in information about how and why Errol was identified as the pilot site and the strategic fit.</p>
<p><b>WORKING WITH OTHERS</b> We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement</p>	<p>All relevant PKC and community services and structures were involved, researched in advance and delivered to a high standard. Community Police were involved during events.</p> <p>However, Community Planning partners were not part of the process at all.</p>
<p><b>IMPROVEMENT</b> We will actively develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants</p>	<p>As a pilot, the Placecheck provided learning for all involved and a recognition of the value of engaging with communities to achieve best use of resources.</p> <p>Improved working arrangements between PKC services have been evidenced and an improvement in the community's image, understanding and communication with PKC is evident through community feedback and ongoing dialogue.</p> <p>A DVD was produced of the Placecheck and will be used as a learning and development tool</p> <p>Engaging with Community Planning partners is recognised as being 'the next stage' in and future Placecheck processes.</p>
<p><b>FEEDBACK</b> We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected</p>	<p>Placecheck has a built in feedback process which was used effectively and continues to be supplemented by email contact and direct feedback from PKC staff, including ongoing dialogue from Community Capacity Building officer and design team.</p>
<p><b>MONITORING AND EVALUATION</b> We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieved its purposes and meets the national standards</p>	<p>Community experience of Placecheck events were evaluated very positively at the time. External evaluation commissioned to measure impact against national standards.</p> <p>Evidence provided on all standards.</p>

## 5 Outcomes

The Errol Placecheck is not yet complete. Whilst short term priorities have been progressed, more substantial projects, with the associated spend, are just about to start. Given this, progress and delivery against planned outcomes is progressing but cannot be fully evaluated.

### **Outcome 1: More people involved in community activity and decision making**

During the Placecheck process more people than have been involved before in community activity participated. Community participants reported a previously unknown 'feel good factor' and a high degree of 'community spirit'. Some participants have remained part of the Placecheck progress and intend to continue to progress the priorities identified through existing community organisations whilst others have yet to find a fit between their interests generated through Placecheck and current community structures.

Others from existing community organisations report a boost to their agendas from the focus given to Errol via Placecheck.

Some participants' priorities have been progressed on the Council's part as far as is likely eg. placing of dog waste bins. However, given the resource climate councils are in, continued monitoring of dog waste is unlikely to be a priority for PKC and is an example of where local people can build on progress made. This is not fully appreciated within Errol with some local people expecting continued council intervention rather than harnessing a community response. A process of capacity building will assist in overcoming this gap in the positive outcomes delivered through Placecheck.

### **Outcome 2: Local public space management issues scoped and prioritised**

Short, medium and longer term priorities have been identified, scoped and costed through the Placecheck process. PKC is committed to delivering these priorities over the next 1+ years. The Placecheck process has ensured priorities have been developed in dialogue with local people which should contribute to more cost effective and sustainable impacts.

### **Outcome 3: Community engagement as per the national standards for community engagement demonstrated**

Errol Placecheck has been benchmarked against the national standards for community engagement with evidence provided against all the standards. Particular highlights relate to the **involvement, support, methods, improvement** and **feedback** standards. It should be noted that the feedback standard is often challenging for councils so progress on this is very significant and positive.

The absence of a clear strategic fit and involvement of Community Planning Partners indicate room for improvement on the working with others and sharing information standards (though information was shared effectively between those involved.)

#### **Outcome 4: Evidence that the Council's Public Space Management Unit can work together with other council services and stakeholders**

The Council's Public Space Management Unit demonstrated sound leadership and effective support and co-ordination of the events was led by Cultural & Community Services. The collaborative approach recognised, valued and harnessed the contribution from other services and demonstrated the value and impact of Placecheck for the first time in Perth and Kinross.

The Unit also demonstrated to council colleagues the value of engaging directly with a community about resource allocation, ensuring monies are allocated according to community knowledge of need and interest.

#### **Outcome 5: Placecheck viewed as a valuable tool for future implementation**

Errol Placecheck was unique. It was a first for Perth and Kinross which attracted both optimism about testing a new approach and scepticism about the potential for impact and change.

Some of the scepticism was based on the absence of environmental improvements in Errol meeting strategic priorities. None of the relevant strategic plans or planning structures had identified Errol as demonstrating a particular need so services' initial perceptions about the Placecheck were that it had come 'from left field'. Equally, local people in Errol, though delighted to be prioritised, expressed some surprise that Errol had been identified as the pilot site.

The revenue resources allocated to support the process went some way to offset these initial questions and once the Placecheck was confirmed as going ahead, all involved embraced both the principles and practice and delivered a successful pilot.

Lessons have been learned from the pilot. The key issues raised for PKC include:

- The value of **engaging with a wider community**, rather than specific interest groups, has been recognised. The diversity of community input, from children through young people and to older adults, including those not normally involved in community activity and decision-making, was unique both for some community members and council officers. The added value and sense of cohesion from the process was welcomed and appreciated by all participants.
- **Community engagement is not a quick fix.** There is an interest within PKC about developing the community trust model locally. Whilst this is recognised as being a long term aspiration, the process of getting to the stage of communities identifying the need for, and investing the time and energy, in developing a community trust, is recognised

as being challenging. Some of the feedback from Errol residents suggests a continued expectation that the council will provide indefinitely. This does not indicate an appetite for community ownership of local development and improvement.

- The added value of **council services working together** with a shared vision, goals and co-ordinated practice, is one of the most positive outcomes from Placecheck. The challenge is to maintain this momentum which officers already report is dissipating eg. not all officers are aware of the communication arrangements in place with local people on progressing priorities or of fortnightly minuted meetings circulated to team members.
- **Is this a sustainable process?** The pilot was successful but without ringfenced resources there is concern about how the council can fund the priorities identified through a Placecheck process? With this in mind, planning for any future Placecheck is vital and should address at an early stage the need for community buy-in to priorities identified. This increases the potential to generate external funding for priority actions. Critical questions to be asked prior to a further Placecheck/Placecheck rollout include:
  - What is the purpose of Placecheck?
  - What are the planned outcomes?
  - Does the planned 'spend' timescale allow for adequate engagement of communities?
  - What will happen after the Placecheck?
  - How will issues raised and priorities identified be resourced/resolved?
  - Is there capacity within the community to contribute to resourcing priorities/seek solutions to issues?
  - Who will help build capacity where there are gaps?
  - What will happen about unresolved issues? Who will be responsible for maintaining dialogue with the community about them?

The issues raised for the Errol community include:

- How do we **maintain a profile with the council** that will continue to improve our village? Having had the level of investment the Placecheck pilot brought, Errol residents now want to maintain the interest of and dialogue with the council.
- How do we **build on the sense of cohesion** evident during the Placecheck? Suggestions have been made about launching a community newsletter but who does this remains unclear.
- How do we **maintain momentum** in improving our village? Whilst groups and individuals have maintained an interest in being involved in the implementation stage of Placecheck, there is a recognition that the time lapse between a summer 2007 event and implementation of projects, will result in some local people losing focus, if not interest.

## 6 Conclusions

The Errol Placecheck was a successful pilot that engaged well with a community, promoted joined-up working across council services and projected an image of corporate effectiveness.

A diverse range of community voices were heard and priorities developed based on a broad view about the needs and aspirations of Errol, whose residents were delighted to have such a high profile with the council.

The planning and presentation of the two Placecheck events were well executed and received, and the sound work of the PKC team was both evident and acknowledged very positively in Errol.

The availability of ring-fenced monies to support priorities identified contributed to a well motivated PKC team and to an extent, to community interest. However, the availability of a crèche, use of cameras, good refreshments and the pilot nature of the Placecheck all contributed to a 'feel good factor' in the village. Though unlikely to be sustained without financial investment, the immediate success of the two events were not wholly dependent on financial resources.

The Placecheck benchmarked well against the national standards for community engagement, including on the feedback standard which can be challenging for councils, as complex bureaucracies, to deliver.

Since the Placecheck communication within the community and between the community and PKC team, has been mixed. Dialogue with local residents and community organisations has been ongoing and has included positive developmental contact through the newsletter, letters and exhibition in the community centre. There have also been complaints about lack of progress. Whilst this is of course legitimate, some community feedback has highlighted the continued dependency on council services to address local community issues which might be more effectively addressed within and by the community itself.

Issues of sustainability have been identified. For the council, rolling out the Placecheck approach without ring-fenced or top-sliced monies, presents a challenge: officers' apprehension about raising community expectations through an exciting process with little financial investment to resource expectations. Identifying where a planned Placecheck fits with strategic priorities and clarifying expectations of both Community Planning partners and communities in generating funding for priorities would help overcome this.

Effective and concentrated capacity building within communities in advance of Placecheck rollout is recommended. This will contribute to creating community structures and processes that can work in partnership with the council to deliver priorities identified and be more

involved in organising a Placecheck from the start. Without this, PKC risks creating cynicism about the purpose and value of the Placecheck process within communities.

## ***Appendix 1***

### **Contributors**

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