
Community Spaces in Lochside

a *vision* for creating a great neighbourhood



April 2008

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Executive Summary

This report sets out a vision for the main areas of public open space in Lochside in Ayr and outlines the potential role of two new public spaces which are being created as part of the housing redevelopment being carried out by Ayrshire Housing. Public workshops and site observations were used to create a vision for the area and recommendations for short term and long term actions.

The work highlighted a desire within the Lochside community to have better quality, more functional spaces offering opportunities for quiet reflection and for more active recreation. These spaces should be linked together in a network and offer the possibility of holding community events. Discussion also identified the need to talk in more detail with the people living and working closest to each space before taking anything forward.

Currently, the spaces around Lochside are underused. This is for a variety of reasons including: poor quality of spaces making them unattractive and potentially dangerous; concerns over antisocial behaviour and a lack of clear function for the spaces meaning that they are hard to use. Some spaces, such as the school grounds are dominated by one particular use meaning that fewer people can use them than if they were multi-functional. Young people in the area have indicated that they are often moved on from open spaces without any obvious reason.

A number of short term actions have been suggested to address these issues. These focus on encouraging use through organised and informal activities; improvement of the condition of spaces and consultations and experiments to determine the best use for individual spaces in the longer term. Longer term recommendations for the public spaces in Lochside are also laid out – looking in most detail at the more formal areas around the Lochside Community Centre and Braehead Primary School but also at the wider ‘backlands’ areas.

The report identifies a general purpose for the new areas being created as Ayrshire Housing moves forward with the current phase of regeneration but acknowledges that the detail of how these spaces should function and how they should be managed can only be developed with the full involvement of the people who will be moving into the new houses. It is proposed that this consultation, visioning and development process forms part of the work required to integrate new with old in Lochside and thus reduce the risk of creating a community within a community.

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BACKGROUND

Lochside is a community on the North side of Ayr. Housing in Lochside was predominantly built in the late 1940s and consists mainly of four and eight flats in a block.

In common with many housing developments of this age, Lochside has a range of small common and communal spaces scattered throughout the houses. Most of these are 'backlands' areas or small corners where two or more streets join. Typically these spaces have no clearly defined function and often, therefore, attract little use or inappropriate uses. In addition to these informal spaces, there are two more clearly defined greenspaces in Lochside – the playing fields around Braehead Primary School and the gardens around the Lochside Community Centre. This latter greenspace also has an adjoining grassed area with swings.



Work has begun on the regeneration of Lochside including the building of new homes in the area bounded by Wills Road, Galloway Avenue and Gould Street. Plans for this area include the creation of two new public spaces.

The placemaking exercise is focused on the development of both the existing and new greenspaces to create a quality of environment which contributes to the regeneration of Lochside.

The Placemaking Process

'Placemaking' is an approach to revitalising public spaces, developed by the Project for Public Spaces, a not for profit organisation based in New York. It is based on the premise that successful public spaces are 'lively, secure and distinctive places that function for the people who use them'. Their process for planning public spaces involves systematic observations, interviews, surveys, photography and place evaluation workshops with community members and stakeholders. Workshops are used to show the potential for positive change, and there is an emphasis on making both short-term and long-term changes.

The methodology used for the Lochside placemaking involved a series of site evaluation workshops with community stakeholders in late 2007, followed by interviews and discussions with key agencies and organisations. The site evaluation workshops were held in community facilities in Lochside and were attended by around 30 community members and local agency representatives – including a group

of young people from the area¹. Participants were asked to evaluate the school grounds and the area around the community centre using a place evaluation questionnaire. They were also asked to consider what might be possible for the wider spaces in Lochside including the new spaces which will be created in the housing development. They then developed priorities for short and long-term action, and reported their findings.

Figure 1 – Place evaluation questionnaire completed during the site visits

evaluation of the site		Site #	
Rate the Place:			
Comfort and Image	poor		good
Overall attractiveness	1	2	3 4
Feeling of safety	1	2	3 4
Cleanliness/Quality of Management	1	2	3 4
Comfort of places to sit	1	2	3 4
Comments/Notes:			
Access and Linkages	poor		good
Visibility from a distance	1	2	3 4
Ease in walking to the place	1	2	3 4
Public transport links	1	2	3 4
Clarity of information/signage	1	2	3 4
Comments/notes:			
Uses & Activities	poor		good
Mix of shops/facilities	1	2	3 4
Frequency of community events/activities	1	2	3 4
Overall busy-ness	1	2	3 4
Economic vitality	1	2	3 4
Comments/notes:			
Sociability	poor		good
Number of people in groups	1	2	3 4
Evidence of community involvement	1	2	3 4
Sense of pride and ownership	1	2	3 4
Presence of children and older people	1	2	3 4
Comments/notes			

identify opportunities

place evaluation

1. What do you like best about the place?
2. What would you like to be able to do in this place?
3. List what you would do to improve this place that could be done right away and that wouldn't cost a lot
4. What changes would you make in the long term that would have the biggest impact?
5. Ask someone in the place what they like about it and what they would do to improve it. Their answer:
6. What local partnerships or local talent can you identify that could help to implement some of your proposed improvements?

¹ It was evident from our discussions with community representatives that the main users of many of the open spaces in Lochside are the young people of the area. We, therefore, asked the youth consultees to identify the uses of these spaces at present.

Placemaking Findings

Evaluating and developing the existing open spaces

Community Centre and adjacent greenspace

During the workshops and interviews, local stakeholders indicated that they liked this area because it was green (the garden by the Wellbeing Centre was especially well liked and could be expanded and opened up to other users). They felt that this space acted as the 'core of the community' – linking the community centre with the surrounding area. Some people liked the mounds in the grassed area (see photo) but others felt that they just restricted use of the space.



Stakeholder consultation identified a range of desired uses for the space building on its central role in the community. People were particularly keen to increase the links between the community centre building and the greenspace at the back of the centre (at the moment this is an imposing and bleak wall with barbed wire and shutters).



It was felt that this space should be able to host events linked to the community centre perhaps open days or galas and that these could extend out into other spaces around Lochside with individual spaces acting as 'rooms' for different parts of a gala event. There was significant support for the creation of an outdoor

eating area which could be used by staff and visitors at the community centre and could potentially increase income for the centre if food and drinks are being sold.

The youth consultation identified the following uses for this area at the moment: sitting on the swings; rolling down the hills; playing 'man hunt'; sitting on the bench at the Church; 'hanging about'.

School grounds

Stakeholders liked the open, spacious, green feeling of this area which contrasts with the relatively enclosed feeling of surrounding streets. They also commented on the feeling of safety. The existing picnic benches and tables are well-used and add greatly to the space. People indicated that this area is versatile and has the potential to support a wider range of uses.

The primary use of this space is obviously educational and most of the desired uses that were identified relate to this role. People felt that it would be good to develop a garden area within the school grounds – perhaps related to the seating and tables to make this area feel less like part of the playing field. The importance of play was highlighted both within and outside school hours and people were keen to see more provision for formal and informal play perhaps with a range of organised activities. Similarly, it was felt that this should be a setting for sports and games – trampolines, football, basketball and tennis were mentioned as possibilities.



The importance of the school grounds as a meeting place for young people (which is easily over-looked and, therefore, safe) was also highlighted. People stressed that the primary role of the space has always to be school activities and that the flexibility of the space should be retained – keeping most of the grounds open and developing smaller areas of interest around the edges. A number of respondents indicated that there was a local desire for a Multi-use Games Area (MUGA) – particularly one which could host formal football activities. Effectively this means a pitch large enough to host seven-a-side football (approximately 60mx40m). It is clear that the only space in Lochside big enough to support such a pitch would be the school grounds. The development of a pitch and associated facilities could benefit the school and add to the school's role as a community resource.

As with the community centre, this space was identified as being suitable for local galas and events. On a day-to-day basis, people wanted to be able to walk around the site and to have picnics.



The youth consultation identified the following uses of the school grounds: skipping; sitting on benches; going down the ramp on skates; playing football with friends.

Possible uses identified for the other spaces in Lochside

Participants in the workshops identified a number of things which they wanted to see in Lochside and which might best be accommodated in the remaining spaces in the area. These were:

- growing spaces: allotments, a community garden, a city farm
- social spaces: places to meet neighbours and friends close to home; a café/refreshments van; seating areas with bins
- play spaces: kickabout football; things for mums to do while their kids play; a skate park²
- wild spaces: sites for wildlife, particularly a wildlife wetland area – if well designed and sited, this could be an educational resource



Before any decision can be taken on these uses, it is important to engage both with the people who live close to each space and with those responsible for management and maintenance. It would be good to include community groups and organisations such as the police in these discussions.

General issues

A number of issues/considerations relating to the general spaces around Lochside were raised:

- there is a need for better lighting of public spaces and buildings to make people feel safer and to encourage use later into the evenings

² A number of people indicated that what the area needs is fewer but better planned and equipped play areas – both in terms of play equipment and facilities for parents – this may mean that some of the existing play areas should be converted to other uses. These uses should still be open space ones unless there is a good rationale for losing unused spaces.

- some of the young people consulted indicated there is little to do, that they often get chased away due to some perceived and actual ASB (e.g. fighting)

Spaces need to be designed and developed in such a way as to encourage 'busyness' and use by a variety of people. They should also be 'safe by design' with good natural surveillance. Coupled with this is a need to allow young people to use sites without being moved on unless there are genuine problems with anti-social behaviour.

The new spaces in Lochside



While everyone recognised the need to involve the new residents (i.e. those who move into the new houses) in any decision on the design and use of the new spaces, a number of potential uses were identified – these can form the basis for discussions with the Planning Authority and the beginnings of the consultation with new residents. Importantly, this consultation could act as a starting point for 'building the community' – bringing together the new residents with their neighbours (both in the new housing and in the remainder of Lochside).

The uses suggested were largely as social spaces – with the two new spaces acting as a focal point for meeting and socialising and for the new and existing residents to interact. The idea of the larger of the two spaces becoming a village green for the 21st century was particularly popular. The development of the new spaces could include a community garden (possibly linked to others at the community centre and school and the establishment of a gardening club for Lochside residents). The provision of seating was seen as important, as was linking these spaces with the others around Lochside as part of a network.



One group suggested that the new spaces should include trees planted by local residents and that, as these matured, they could be decorated for Christmas or for local events. As with the other spaces, people were keen to use the new spaces as venues for local galas and events in small spaces linking into larger events across the whole of Lochside.

Beyond the spaces

A number of community facilities which are clearly unachievable within the constraints of the current phase of development were also suggested. These were:

- a community pub
- a swimming pool with flumes
- a games hall
- a boxing ring (*readers should bear in mind that the youth consultation coincided with at least two world title fights*)

These ideas (particularly the community pub which seems the most achievable) should be considered as the next stages of regeneration are planned.

VISION

The placemaking workshop was used to identify short-term and long-term priorities to address the identified issues and aspirations, and a vision statement and project plan have been developed.

The vision for Lochside is:

A network of open spaces throughout Lochside which are attractive and safe, active and busy. These spaces are well connected to each other making the community attractive and walkable and offer something for all ages and interests. The community centre, school grounds and new spaces are the highlights of the network but all other spaces (including streets) play their part.

Goals

1. Encourage greater use of public spaces by different age groups
2. Develop spaces that meet the needs of all groups within the community
3. Develop a clear and sustainable approach to managing the spaces with detailed responsibilities for partners

NOTE : the first two goals are obviously inter-linked - people will not use spaces that do not meet their needs – but they are treated separately here for clarity since they relate to distinct sets of actions. Similarly, the long term use of the spaces is dependent on their ongoing management.

Encouraging greater use of public spaces

The public spaces within Lochside will only be successful and contribute to the overall success of the area if they are well-used. Well-used spaces are safer (through increased natural surveillance), better cared for and generate a sense of place. The spaces in Lochside at present are underused and tend to deter people for accessing them. It is important, therefore that positive steps are taken to encourage people to come out into the spaces and to continue to use them. Longer term success will depend on physical changes to the spaces themselves and to the provision of appropriate facilities but much can be achieved just through encouragement and through organising events and activities. What is crucial is that people begin to feel that there is a reason for using these spaces.



Short Term Actions

A series of small scale events should be set up in Lochside during the Spring and Summer of 2008. These do not have to be expensive or overly elaborate but they must involve as wide a range of people as possible. Initially, the focus should be on the Community Centre and School Grounds as these spaces are the most readily usable but, wherever possible, the 'backlands' spaces should also play a part. Involvement in planning and taking part in the activities will begin to change people's attitudes to the public spaces in Lochside – even those who do not become involved should at least be aware that something is happening.

As the season develops, it is important that the activities begin to link the spaces together possibly with activities using several spaces – for example, a 'kickabout' football tournament using as many of the spaces as possible with a final at the school or a treasure hunt for younger children which involves clues in several of the community spaces.



Activities could also include community cleanups (with a barbeque or some social event to draw people in) – this has the double benefit of involving people in the spaces while creating better conditions for their use. Other suggested short term actions which would involve people and change the environment for the better are focussed on the school and community centre: painting murals on blank walls; small-scale tree planting and improving lighting, paths and bins (including dog bins). (see next section for more detail).

One engagement idea which has worked well elsewhere is to create a clearer identity for key public spaces – this can be as simple as a naming competition for local groups. Given that there are several spaces involved, it might be possible to run a local mapping exercise with the primary school and with community groups asking people to map the public spaces throughout Lochside – to comment on the condition of each space, to indicate what they would like to be able to do their and to tell us what they call these spaces (it would be interesting to know, for example, if adults who grew up in Lochside use similar names for these spaces to the children growing up in the area now. The group or individual who gives the 'best' name for any space could then formally name it as part of a community event.

Long Term Recommendations

The short term actions described briefly above should begin to identify local views on what each open space should be used for and will have begun to test out these ideas to see which ones are genuinely practical given the size and location of the spaces.

During this time, it will also be possible to review the current levels, location and condition of play facilities and to explore the potential uses of the school grounds with the school and Education Authority. With this information, it will be possible to finalise the range of functions for each space and to resource and develop them accordingly. It is important that this is done in partnership – involving local residents and groups, Ayrshire Housing, Ayrshire Initiatives, South Ayrshire Council, the police etc. - as the different players will bring a range of resources and expertise to the project thus increasing the chances of longer term success.

While the final decisions will be based on partnership discussions, the initial vision for public spaces in Lochside that has emerged is as follows:

- **all spaces** recognised as having a potential community value should be fit for purpose, multifunctional and well-managed (the community – in the widest sense – just needs to decide what the purpose and functions are)
- **the school grounds** should primarily be developed to support active and youth functions since these match best to its educational role
- the space around the **community centre** should be developed as a community garden with the opportunity to eat and drink there.
- the **other 'existing' spaces** should be developed to offer quiet areas primarily for people living immediately adjacent to them. For spaces where there are enough young people nearby, this should include the opportunity for play.
- as the housing stock in Lochside is renewed, steps must be taken to ensure that the new **streetscapes** add to the open space network – connecting spaces and acting as spaces in their own right; the school-community centre-new spaces axis is particularly important as the heart of the community and the surrounding streets should be developed and managed accordingly
- the **new spaces** being created by Ayrshire Housing's current phase of activities should form the third element of the 'heart of Lochside' – the larger of the two spaces should be developed for socialising and act as a village green. The smaller space, being closer to traffic, might be developed more in terms of landscaping and the creation of seating areas

One theme which ran strongly through the consultation feedback was the idea that quality public spaces should offer the opportunity to reinstate the local gala. Through a process of short-term experimentation and improvement, it should be possible to develop the network of spaces to act as a venue for a gala. As previously outlined, the individual spaces - along with the community centre and school buildings - should function as a network with some activities being specific to one space, some taking in several spaces and some linking outdoor to indoor (catering in the community centre and outside as well for example).

Developing spaces that meet the needs of all groups within the community

As has already been stated, successful places are busy. They feel safe and welcoming and people identify with them. Spaces which have no clear purpose don't work as places – they tend to be neglected and fall into disrepair. Similarly, spaces which are dominated by one use or by one user groups don't work well as places – a football pitch is just a football pitch and a skate park full of young people is an intimidating place for others even if the skaters are minding their own business and offer no real threat. It is important therefore to ensure that the spaces around Lochside offer something for everyone and that, where possible, these diverse uses are clustered together to create a sense of busy-ness and excitement.

Short Term Actions

It is important in the short-term to focus on getting as many people as possible involved in improving the public spaces in Lochside. Initially, this is about building on the community interest generated during the placemaking and carrying out a range of clean-ups to make the spaces safer and more attractive. Cleanups should be organised within the community and advertised to draw more people into being involved in the process. Any activity used to increase local involvement should also be used as an opportunity to develop ideas for each space. These ideas must include an appropriate and workable mix of uses to meet the needs of the widest range of local people.



to begin the development of a community garden at the community centre. The wall at the back of the community centre could be brightened up and made more attractive and welcoming by the creation of a mural – this could involve youth groups, the school and/or local arts projects. It might also be possible to replace the tired swings and such like near the community centre although this may need to wait for a more thorough review of play facilities throughout Lochside.

Murals are also a possibility at the school and could be part of increasing the community-school links. One group within the consultation suggested creating bike sheds/racks to encourage more cycling around the area. The introduction of lighting, seating and bins along with work on some of the key footpaths in and around the school and community centre would make the spaces more usable and could be carried out in the first year of development.



Long Term Recommendations

Longer term, once ideas have been firmed up and resources identified, it will be possible to create the facilities needed to meet the needs of local people. These could include:

- **all spaces:** lighting, seating, bins and paths and any facilities needed to be fit for the purpose identified. For spaces where there are enough young people, this should include the opportunity for play, even if this is just a kickabout area.
- **the school grounds:** a school garden (open to the public if possible); a Multi-use Games Area or similar sports facility; a more challenging/larger play area than elsewhere in Lochside
- **the community centre:** a community cafe which could be run as a community enterprise; there could also be a play component to the community garden and greenspace for younger children
- **streetscapes:** trees and grassed areas; traffic-free or shared space/homezone areas where pedestrians have priority over cars
- **the new spaces:** the village green - some tree planting, a community garden and small-scale play facilities (perhaps naturalistic play with boulders and mounds rather than swings and chutes).

The spaces, to be successful, should offer the potential to host community events and need to be designed with this in mind.

A clear and sustainable approach to managing the spaces

In the end, the spaces around Lochside will only contribute to the development of a thriving community with a real sense of place if they are properly managed. This is not just about maintenance, although controlling litter etc has its part to play; it is the ongoing extension of 'encouraging people to use the spaces'. Someone needs to oversee the regular maintenance of equipment and spaces; to identify when spaces need to change and to take action (communities change and spaces need to evolve to provide new uses); to oversee events (even if these are organised by others) and to make sure that people within Lochside feel a sense of ownership of these spaces – that they feel comfortable using them and that they take a pride in them.

Short term action

It is important that, at this stage of the placemaking process, a community-based working group with representatives from all the key stakeholders is established. This group can oversee the short-term actions, assess what has been successful and begin the process of longer-term change. The group must involve key organisations including the Housing Association and the Council but must also include local people and organisations. Participants in the placemaking workshop were asked to identify which local people and organisations should be involved in taking things forward.

Their list was as follows:

- School (especially the eco group)
- Police / community police
- Local residents (young and old)
- Local councillors
- Community support officers

- Tenants and Residents association
- Voluntary groups
- Church

This is obviously not a full list and Ayrshire Initiatives will need to identify who is missing. Once the group is up and running, it should continue to look for others who might usefully be involved.

Longer term actions

In the longer term, it seems likely that a more formal structure might be needed to continue the success of Lochside as a place. This might be a Development Trust or similar community-based organisation or it might involve a community-based group informing the work of the Council or the Housing Association. In addition, it may be possible to set up a community enterprise which could run the community café (and any outreach vans/kiosks etc used at the other spaces) and be responsible for maintenance of the public spaces. Such enterprises have been established by Housing Associations and Urban Regeneration Companies elsewhere in Scotland and also by voluntary sector groups.

Lochside Placemaking Short Term Action Plan

Action	Purpose	Lead
Immediate actions		
Discuss draft report with community representatives	Gain local approval of the general ideas	Ayrshire Initiatives/ Placemaking Scotland
Present current thinking on the new spaces to SAC planners	Requirement of planning permissions for new housing Get planners insight into wider proposals	Ayrshire Initiatives/ Placemaking Scotland
Arrange and hold meeting of 'technical' stakeholders – planners, land managers, school authorities, police, roads etc	Discuss practical feasibility of the ideas within the report	Ayrshire Initiatives/ Placemaking Scotland
Set up working group to take forward development of the open spaces	Formalise stakeholder involvement in the process Further develop ideas Oversee implementation	Ayrshire Initiatives
Possibly meet separately with technical players	Further explore possibilities for change	Ayrshire Initiatives/ Placemaking Scotland/
Summer 2008 Actions		
Community Cleanups	Involve more people Encourage greater use Improve the spaces	Working group
Events using the spaces	Encourage greater use Find out more about what people want to be able to do	Working group
Consult with people around the smaller 'backlands' spaces	Encourage greater use Find out more about what people want to be able to do	Working group/ Placemaking Scotland
Lighting/seating and bins in main spaces	Make space feel more welcoming	Working group
Murals on community centre and school	Make spaces more attractive and welcoming	Working group
Mapping and naming event	Encourage ownership and understanding of local spaces	Working group
Develop community garden at the community centre	First significant change to a space – improving the space and encouraging more changes elsewhere	Working group
Later Actions		
Consultation event with new residents and existing residents	Get more detailed ideas about the new spaces and encourage greater interaction	Working group/ Placemaking Scotland

Photograph acknowledgements

- Cover Ayrshire Initiatives
greenspace scotland/SNH
greenspace scotland
- p4 greenspace scotland
Ayrshire Initiatives
- p6 greenspace scotland
greenspace scotland
greenspace scotland/SNH
- p7 all Ayrshire Initiatives
- p8 Glasgow City Council
greenspace scotland/SNH
greenspace scotland/SNH
- p9 all greenspace scotland
- p11 Kelvin Clyde Greenspace
- p12 greenspace scotland/SNH
Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust
- P14 greenspace scotland/SNH
Ayrshire Initiatives