GOREBRIDGE COMMUNITY COUNCIL – JUNE 2021

All council meetings, seminars and briefings are still being done digitally and likely to remain so. Although I am not holding any formal surgeries just now people are contacting me by telephone, email, letters, Facebook or other social media and some people have knocked at my house. Possibly start to do surgeries in the libraries after summer recess. The enquiries are the usual mixture of housing enquiries, school placements and appeals, potholes, parking issues at Gladhouse and some business enquiries relating to grants.

The Council is still operating critical services and there are restrictions in place about some workers or trades people entering into homes – unless for emergencies and some other services. We are now well on the way to loosening up many restrictions in council and in the community. At Group Leaders meeting we have agreed a return to the normal cycle of meetings – and which started a few weeks ago.

I got my maintenance chemotherapy on Monday 10th May and was self-isolating until 17th May. I’m back to my normal routine now.

Since last community council meeting the by election in Ward 5 was held and SNP successful in retaining the seat, the council is back to having 18 full councillor membership, and Cllr Stuart McKenzie is settling in well.

Full council meeting was four weeks ago and there were one or two things of particular interest.

* THE UK Levelling Up Fund. This is being distributed differently from all other funding – direct to councils bypassing SG and CoSLA. Midlothian is a Level 2 area.
* Public holiday next year for the Queens Platinum Jubilee is June, and the May bank holiday moved to June so folk can have a long weekend.
* Building rationalisation – demolishing or repurposing all council buildings in Dalkeith and have a social housing building programme. This will also mean more people will have to work from home, we are in ongoing discussion with the Unions regarding this. A lot of staff are unhappy. Home might not always be the safe place people want it to be.
* Local Housing Strategy – ensuring we have sufficient homes to accommodate our growing population. I personally don’t think it’s ambitious enough. The statutory requirement is to have one done every five years but I think a longer term strategic view needs to be taken – physical disabilities, learning difficulties, age issues.
* Council house building programme – The council is running out of ground to build on that it owns. This means MC will have to look to buying land to build putting us in direct competition with private developers, increasing the cost per unit, etc. The council house waiting list is enormous, in excess of 4,000 people looking for a home. Includes 484 specialist housing over the next five years.
* Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, homeless prevention fund. A way to help those at risk of losing their homes to be helped. It is a small amount of money £30k over two years.
* Roads Capital programme – further fund to redress the potholes, etc. Roads are graded and work undertaken as required – we were not given a list of roads, but if you have a query regarding a particular one let me know.
* Learning Estate Strategy – authority to Director to undertake consultations in areas of need (repair, demand, etc), for us the Gorebridge consultation will be 2023/24 to be completed by 2025. I think the meeting with the director has been arranged for August or September.

The council house site at Morris Road, Newtongrange is making good progress.

Work has started on a new junction and layout at the Auld Toll and Shell Garage (A7 and B704). There will be pedestrian crossings etc. Cllr Muirhead and I have been pressing for this for quite some time. The work should be completed by end of June. There is significant delays at the junction for now.

Newbattle Community High School is still operating as the schools testing centre, and Edinburgh College at the Dalkeith as the ‘ordinary’ or symptomatic testing site, Easthouses, Newtongrange and Newbattle Church (Mayfield site) was operating as the local asymptomatic testing centre and will closed two weeks ago, the new asymptomatic testing centre will be opened in Ladywood, Penicuik. Ramsay Croft, Dalkeith will be operating as a walk in testing site shortly. Gorebridge Leisure Centre opened on 18th March 2021 as a mass vaccination centre, letters continue to be sent out for confirmed appointments there. All reports I have received are that the centre is working very well and it is the Moderna vaccination that is being used. For the foreseeable future people here will receive two doses of the same vaccination. The LC will continue for some time to be used as a MVC.

From yesterday for two weeks, Gorebridge MVC will operate a drop in session for anyone over the age of 40 for Astra Zeneca first dose or second dose if you had the first less than 8 weeks ago. There are other drop in centres for Lothian – Bathgate and Ingliston. It will operate on a first come first served basis for 10 hours each day.

We need to take special care just now as Covid numbers are on the rise. Public Health Scotland, NHS Lothian and the Council are working together to try and contain the spread and keep the numbers down. The numbers in schools is rising steadily and there is over 200 children isolating, I do not know if there is any serious cases. The BBQ beach party arranged by pupils from Midlothian and East Lothian is a huge factor in the cases – this was not an educationally arranged outing, the pupils arranged it themselves. I am advised this happens annually.

Due to Gorebridge leisure centre being closed for its usual activity and Newtongrange leisure centre being used for aging well and MAC Jim and I have been working with some community groups to get alternatives up and running, so that the groups normally resident in the LC can have a temporary home. We have taken this forward for officers to liaise, discuss etc with private facilities and have some kind of partnership arrangement in place. We are still awaiting an update – I may have an update for the meeting.

The proposed Springfield development (Gowkshill, Gorebridge, Newtongrange and Mayfield) is attracting a lot of attention and I am getting a lot of emails about it. Unfortunately I do not wish to comment due to regulations to keep impartiality and to ensure I can take part in the planning meeting. However, I am encouraging people to lodge their comments in the planning department’s portal and/or to write me an email detailing their comments.

The pot holes and clogged drains in the ward are now in a serious condition (and county wide) – flooding is the major side effect which in turn causes the pot holes and the issues these cause to get worse. The council is working on a reactive basis only so now my daily walks are located round the blocked drains. I pick a street and walk both sides, take photos and send them on for attention. I could do with a bit of help to do this – any offers?

Last meeting I mentioned there would be a bus development project to improve bus access at junctions, bus lanes, route development, linking east to west and west to east, a route into the Gyle, etc. That bid has now been submitted for the collective bid for the area – we should hear back in June.

Jim Muirhead and I have discussed how to spend our environmental funds, and are keeping up to date with one another on this to avoid duplication or to share the cost.

There are a few litter picking groups starting up and if you wish one to start here the Council Offices can provide pickers, hoops, bags from recycling@midlothian.gov.uk and a pickup of the litter to advise contactcentre@midlothian.gov.uk of place bags have been deposited.

Take care and stay safe and remember FACTS – the vaccine programme is going smoothly in Midlothian and a more normal life can be a real prospect in the very near future. Try and make sure you attend at the requested time or make alternative arrangements, please don’t be a DNA (did not attend).

Have a wonderful summer.