

Dear Gavin

Please find enclosed our responses to last night's event – once again thank you for organising this and to all the participants.

We fundamentally understand the concerns raised and again wish to underscore our commitment to work with the Community Council and the community at large to ensure the Hunter Global leadership Centre is seen as an asset and as a good neighbour, investing in the local area for good.

The new Centre is extremely important to the Hunter Foundation and Strathclyde University and we believe this is the right place for it in a building which looks to the future, set into the landscape which will help to support the long term future of Ross Priory and the Estate. We sincerely want to be a good neighbour and listen to the Community council to find the best way of doing this.

The location is set approximately 20m back from the waters edge within the tree belt with 90 new trees which will replace those that are of poor health and add 60 more. This and other investments in new maintenance buildings, and boat club facilities will help to maintain the estate and the setting of the historical building. The new building is far enough away not to compete with the Priory, set into the trees, and a very low energy sustainable design with green roofs, photovoltaic panels, high levels of insulation and will be net zero carbon for energy usage.

An independent visual assessment has been made and forms part of the Planning Application. The building is screened from view from the Priory and only partially seen from the Loch. What is important to the Foundation is that there are views to the loch from the main building to remove participants from their everyday lives and make them think in a different way. So we believe the building is far enough away to minimise its impact from the loch but close enough to give people the sense of being in a special place.

The proposal has 19 rooms which may be available for use by Ross Priory, to increase the Priory's potential for events, but we actually see the increased use of the Priory's rooms and facilities by the HGLC to be the key factor, a guarantee to increase the usage in order to increase income and the future of the building. Questions were asked about the increased traffic this will create, and we want to work with the Community Council to find the best way to do this and help with other issues that affect those using the 'horseshoe' Ross and Aber Road.

For instance as requested last night we will commission a traffic impact analysis and then work with you on mitigation measures to minimise traffic volumes and to manage the timing of traffic flows – as we already indicated our policy is for car sharing to and from all of our events and this has worked well historically.

In turn, again as we have stated, we will not allow traffic to or from the Leadership Centre coinciding with the opening and closing of the school and will have that written in to any permission if granted.

Along with this we have committed to upgrade the laybys from the Primary school to the Ross Priory junction and subject to the findings of the traffic impact analysis will look to additional mitigation measures such as signage for example. Hence we will work with the community to develop a traffic management plan but again to reiterate two points: our use of the Centre is specifically focussed on small groupings, not large gatherings; secondly the 100 person capacity for large gatherings is something we would only use once or twice a year. Traffic flows will not increase massively and moreover our 'users' arrive one day and leave 3.5 days later – this will not generate daily increases in traffic excepting staff, hopefully from the local area, will add but again that will be managed via car sharing and staggered timings.

We also want to make clear we have already carried out multiple surveys for visual impact, plants and wildlife, and these form part of the application. The buildings are not in the flood zone and we have been careful to avoid disruption to the setting and want to improve it through future investment in the estate. We will continue to consult with interested bodies such as the Fisheries Trust and will look to make sure we do not disturb the natural balance as far as possible.

Lastly mention was made of connecting to the main drainage system, 1.6km away, up a very steep hill. The reason we have opted for a local solution to Ross Priory is not just about the cost and disruption this would cause locally (across roads/private land etc) but importantly the environmental implications on energy requirements to pump that distance uphill: this is a balance we feel to be appropriate.

Similarly mention was made of the carbon footprint and environmental concerns. Again to reiterate we have undertaken numerous studies and as I noted last night our Foundation recently invested half a million pounds in support of environmental causes – we take our environmental responsibilities very seriously.

We are excited about the Leadership Centre being part of your Community. We hope you can see we are sincere in this and will allow us to move forward with this important development for Scotland's future.

Yours sincerely

Tom

(Sir Tom Hunter)