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**Re: 24.01.25 Burnbrae Farm Woodland Creation proposals**

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From Symington Community Council <symingtoncc@hotmail.com>

Date Wed 19/02/2025 13:31

To Andy Greathead <AGreathead@savills.com>

Cc Andy <Andy@walkerhineswoodlandservices.co.uk>; Liz Kelly <liz.kelly@btinternet.com>; Debs <whitedj@btinternet.com>; John & Jillian Mulholland <jcrm617@btinternet.com>; rhona40 <rhona40@aol.com>; Julie Howie <juliehowie@hotmail.com>; Julie Dettbarn <julie.dettbarn@south-ayrshire.gov.uk>; Ferry, Stephen <stephen.ferry@south-ayrshire.gov.uk>; Townson, Duncan <duncan.townson@south-ayrshire.gov.uk>

Hello Andy,

Having discussed at our 18/02/25 meeting MacTaggart & Mickel's position on the Community Council's proposals, as stated in your 24/01/25 email, here is the Community Council's response, which I have copied to Community Council members and Ward Councillors.

The impression we gained from our interaction with you and Andy Hines was of the consultation being conducted in good faith.

The only caveat being that the landowner, who has the prime vested interest in the proposed woodland, was not revealed to the community by the consultant, but by the community's investigation.

The Confederation of Forest Industries' guide '[Engagement with Local People and Communities - Good Practice Guidance for Woodland Creation Proposals](#)' recommends that "*Information such as who the landowner is... should always be made available*".

This is supported by the Scottish Government's '[Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022](#)', which states "*There should be transparency about the ownership, use and management of land, and this information should be publicly available, clear and contain relevant detail.*"

Nonetheless, we came away from our 04/12/24 meeting feeling that our proposals had been reasonably aired and discussed.

So, though not unexpected, it is with some disappointment we read MacTaggart & Mickel's position on our proposals. Unlike our engagement with you and Andy, their response feels cold and unsympathetic to our aspirations. It seems the only points they are willing to engage with are those that don't affect the fundamentals of their vested interests. I might have said the fundamentals of their *investment*, except that, by way of the Forestry Grant Scotland, it will be *our* taxes that fund their woodland and the resulting revenues.

The Scottish Government's 'Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022' also states:

*"Land ownership, management and use should deliver a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits" and "There should be meaningful collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land".*

Our main grievances are threefold.

### 1. A pretext for housing development

MacTaggart & Mickel appear either unwilling or unable to 'read the room'.

The Community Council's 12/12/24 email reiterates "*concerns by some members of the community, including members of the Community Council, that the woodland proposal is a pretext for housing developments*"; concerns prompted by the extensions (obvious shelter belts) of compartments 1, 3 and 4.

That it has taken this extent of prodding and poking to elicit the statement that "*MacTaggart & Mickel Group Limited will be promoting these sites through the next LDP*", we find somewhat disingenuous and not in the spirit of an open and honest consultation.

Whilst we were not startled by MacTaggart & Mickel being "*unable to change the design* [of the extensions] *at this stage*" – though we thought that's what the consultation process was about – we were startled by their apparent excitement that eligibility for the 'Woodlands In and Around Towns' grant would be met once their prospective developments are built and our infrastructure is creaking under a population of plus 2000.

MacTaggart & Mickel must be aware of the community's previous assertions that Symington has received *enough* new development, such that its infrastructure is unable to cope and its character being lost. As such, we were a vocal part of the lobby that resulted in the stance taken in the LDP; that South Ayrshire Council "*will not support proposals to build on unallocated sites on the edges of other towns, or villages within 'Kyle', unless justified through LDP2 policy, or a site specific need*".

### 2. Access by the community

Accessing the woodland to the North East of the road by way of the "*core path network from Symington Mount*" (i.e. Dankeith Woods) may be convenient to MacTaggart & Mickel, but it is unacceptable to the community because the referred path is not easily accessible to anyone who is not firm footed. It would require walking along muddy and uneven ground, traversing a steep slope and crossing a burn.

### 3. Continuous Cover Forestry

We appreciate MacTaggart & Mickel has not written off this management principle, but it has rather kicked it into the (20 year) long grass. Could an assurance not be provided; that the community will be consulted during the 20 year management decision?

Also, MacTaggart & Mickel has not commented on practices of mixed silviculture that could be initiated at a planting stage; an example of which is referred in the Community Council's 12/12/24 email.

The Scottish Land Commission's protocol for '[Responsible Natural Capital and Carbon Management](#)' states that "*Landowners and managers should work with the local community to identify opportunities to share the benefits from the management of natural capital and carbon with them and to support local priorities and aspirations*". The Commission says that "*Actively implementing this protocol... will help organisations provide reassurance for stakeholders that they act responsibly and will help to meet their environmental, social and governance (ESG) commitments*".

Unfortunately, we are not experiencing the great claims made by MacTaggart & Mickel's ESG statements; for example, that it works "*closely with local communities to ensure that we are socially and environmentally responsible*".

Our feeling is that MacTaggart & Mickel is distancing itself from us and acting as though its plan for the woodland is a 'fait accompli' and the consultation a formality.

For the reasons stated above, the Symington Community Council is unable to support the current design of the Burnbrae Woodland proposal.

Regards,  
Dave

David Houfe  
Symington Community Council Vice-chair & Secretary

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**From:** Andy Greathead <AGreathead@savills.com>

**Sent:** 24 January 2025 13:56

**To:** Symington Community Council <symingtoncc@hotmail.com>

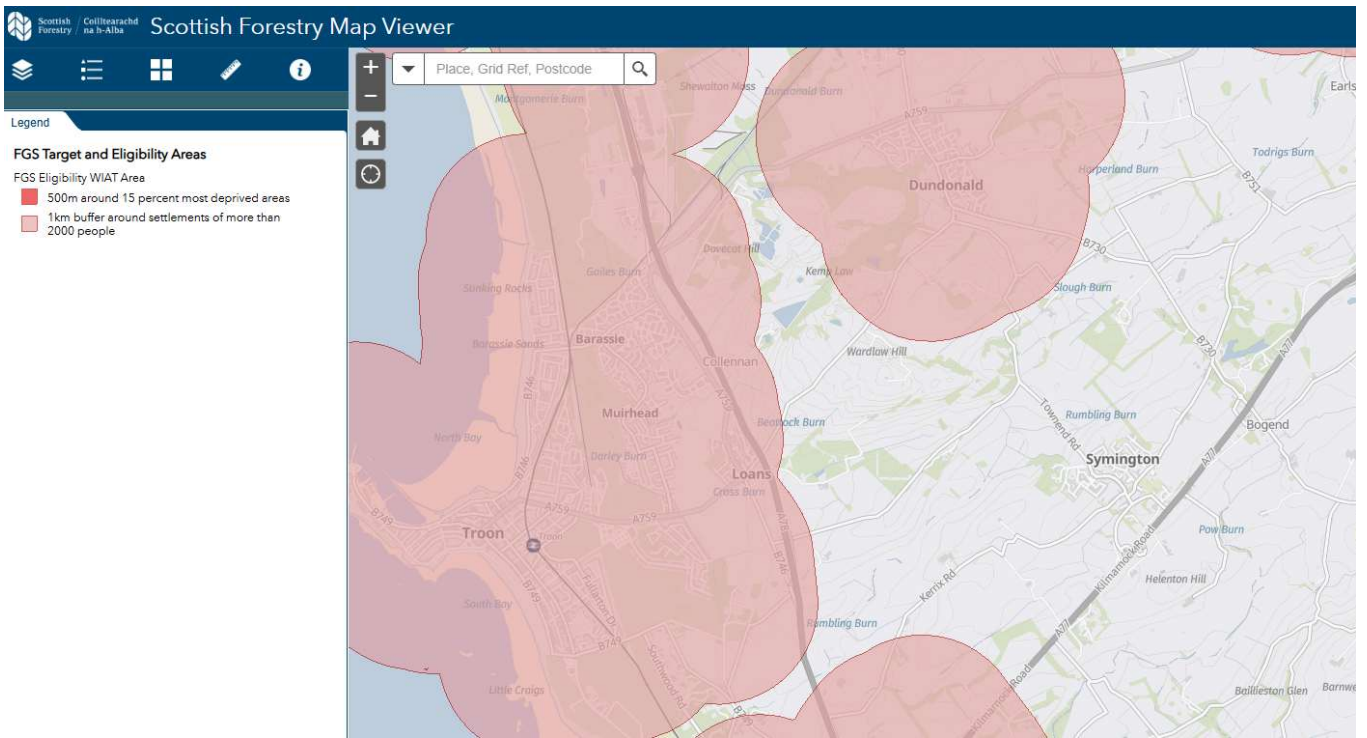
**Cc:** Andy <Andy@walkerhineswoodlandservices.co.uk>; Liz Kelly <liz.kelly@btinternet.com>; Debs <whitedj@btinternet.com>

**Subject:** 24.01.25 Burnbrae Farm Woodland Creation proposals

Dave

Re emails below, I received a response from MacTaggart & Mickel Group Limited to confirm their position but unfortunately not in time for your meeting on 21 January. I have listed the items we discussed at our meeting on 4 December with further comment in red.

1. While generally supportive as the woodland creation proposals enhance the current natural habitat and have the potential to provide a much needed off road walking route out of the village, Symington Community Council do not support woodland creation at the south east extension of compartment 1 and compartments 3 and 4 and see these as a precursor to future housing development. **Unfortunately we are not able to change the design at this stage in terms of structural planting. MacTaggart & Mickel Group Limited will be promoting these sites through the next LDP and the information will be publicly available.**
2. Symington Community Council are keen to see pathways that join Symington village to the network of paths through the woodland creation area avoiding walking along the public road. **These could potentially link to the existing core path network from Symington Mount to the east and via Townend Brae to the west.**
3. In the longer term, Symington Community Council are keen to see the maturing woodland managed under continuous cover forestry as opposed to a restructuring system of felling and replanting productive areas as they mature. **Continuous cover forestry is a system that avoids felling and replanting large areas by using heavy thinning or small scale felling often linked with natural regeneration of trees instead of replanting. From a commercial point of view, restructuring the woodland by felling and replanting productive areas as they mature is more common in UK Forestry and is easier and less intensive to manage. Deciding which management system to use would happen around year 20 when thinning could start in the faster growing conifer crops. Continuous cover forestry management will be considered over appropriate parts of the woodland at the time of first thinning.**
4. Symington Community Council would be keen to be involved in management of some of the internal hedges but assume that external roadside hedges will continue to be cut back by a contractor. **This would involve community groups layering hedges within the woodland to regenerate them.**
5. Symington Community Council would welcome the improvement of pathways including some surfaced sections for wheelchair users which could be grant funded under a Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) scheme administered by Scottish Forestry. **We could look into a funded Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) scheme following establishment of the woodland creation scheme. Currently Symington is outwith the eligibility area (as the population was around 1,600 in 2022 with a population of 2,000 required as shown below) but this will change as development takes place.**



6. Symington Community Council would welcome community involvement in the woodland creation area in the form of walks, benches and interpretive signage providing information on the biodiversity and species within the woodland. **We could look into a funded Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) scheme following establishment of the woodland creation scheme subject to eligibility criteria.**

We also discussed with Symington Community Council the following section of our draft woodland creation operational plan to be submitted to Scottish Forestry as part of the Forestry Grant Scheme application which includes:

**Additional Features Beyond Grant Aid Support**

*The landowner is keen to cooperate and support the local community and after consultation with the Community Council the following items have been agreed. These features are not part of the grant aid funding, however, they show the genuine desire to work with the local community in order to create a woodland that is valued and well-used by local people.*

- *Establishing small plots of wild flowers, which will be tended by local people and allowed to spread into the adjacent woodland edges*
- *Installing bird and bat boxes, with opportunities for these to be made by local school children, Scouts group or community groups*
- *Incorporating a wider range of flowering trees and shrubs to support the local drive to create habitats suitable for pollinators*

I will be at Burnbrae on 30 January and would be happy to meet up in the afternoon (say 2pm?). Please let me know if this suits.

Many thanks

Regards

Andy

**Andy Greathead (MIC For)**

**Director**

**Rural**

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