



Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership  
Formartine

# Balmedie Views Report



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***The Balmedie Views Team  
have found this project to be a positive  
experience and were very encouraged by the  
enthusiasm of the local people of Balmedie.  
They would like to express their appreciation to  
everyone that participated in and assisted  
with the project.***

# Background

In April 2009, three Community Action Researchers were employed from the local community by Aberdeenshire Council, funded by Community, Learning and Development. This project followed the 'Planning for Real' exercise held in the Balmedie Leisure Centre in the summer of 2008. It was felt that the whole community should be given the opportunity to contribute their ideas, issues and concerns. The involvement of all local people was encouraged and welcomed in participating in this project.

The community action research team were tasked with the following:

## Aims

To work with the local community of Balmedie to:

- Assess local needs.
- Identify key gaps in provisions and facilities.
- Establish a sustainable community plan to address significant needs.

## Objectives

- To clearly identify and evidence community issues and concerns.
- For the local community to be engaged in processes and to become more empowered through action, involvement and achievements.
- To increase resources and opportunities available in the local community.



## Process

The following process was carried out as a result of training and exploration into community research methods and case studies and responding to the project as it evolved.

- Community surgeries twice weekly at day and evening slots at popular community locations, advertised locally. The sessions were held to encourage a dialogue between the community and the research team and begin to establish areas of concern and ideas for improvements. Individuals willing to lead new community interest groups were identified at this stage.
- Community newsletter delivered door to door to introduce the project, familiarise people with the process and raise awareness. This also included information on current activities and groups in the village - this need was identified in the community surgeries.
- Project graffiti boards installed at busy local venues including school dining hall to maximise awareness of the project and help formulate what followed.
- Questionnaires delivered to and collected from all 1,158 households, door to door, within the Balmedie area. A further opportunity for return was provided by positioning of collection boxes at popular locations in the village.
- Specifically designed young people questionnaires completed by 103 Secondary School pupils at Bridge of Don and Ellon Academies and Robert Gordon's College.
- Specifically designed P6 and 7 pupil questionnaires completed by 15 Balmedie Primary children.
- Priority themes identified from questionnaires, graffiti boards and surgery responses. Strategy for café events devised with the help of Steering Group members.

Over  
300 people completed  
questionnaire





Over  
50 attended  
the discussion  
café events

- Community ‘Youth Café Event’ to discuss emerging priority themes with young people, identify a way forward and those willing to be involved. All secondary school pupils were invited to attend.
- Community ‘World Café Event’, open to all, to discuss priority themes with adults and families, identify a way forward and those willing to be involved. A vote was taken to identify the order of importance of topics discussed in the evening.
- First meetings of new groups facilitated by the team.
- Findings and implications of project discussed with Steering Group.
- Report in the form of a newsletter delivered door to door to thank the Community, feedback results of project and highlight achievements and the next steps.

“A nice place to live”

## Findings

### Children and Young People

#### Balmedie Primary School children

- Identified the **‘best thing’** about Balmedie was the **new play park** on Eigie Road.
- Asked for more sports facilities for older children.

The questionnaire asked the children to choose from a ‘field of words’ how they felt about living in Balmedie and why. The overwhelmingly most popular emotions were **Happy** - 67%, **Lucky**, **Pleased** and **Safe** because Balmedie was “a nice place to live” with great play park equipment!

#### Balmedie’s Young People

##### Youth

- **60%** said they wished Balmedie had a **youth facility** although discussions at the ‘Youth Café’ event indicated an even greater demand. Feedback indicated that the benefits of such a facility would be threefold:
  - » Give them a **space to make their own** and engender a sense of belonging. There was also enthusiasm for all pulling together to fundraise for this which would give a focus and a reason to interact.
  - » Provide a **venue for and an emphasis on youth provision.**
  - » Provide a **common meeting place** for Balmedie young people attending all academies. While the majority of young people attend Bridge of Don Academy, significant numbers choose to go elsewhere and without many youth activities in the village they become isolated from the majority.
- There was an emphasis from the young people that it would need adult supervision.
- Discussions at the ‘Youth Café’ showed enthusiasm for forming a **Youth Action Group** to have a voice and take these issues forward. Names have been passed on to Community Learning and Development.



## Community

- **60%** of young people selected **'room for improvement'** when asked do you feel there is a sense of community in Balmedie?
- **69%** of young people said it was **not easy to get involved** as a young person in their community. **27%** said they didn't feel involved in their community because there was a **lack of activities on offer for their age group**.
- **30%** said they felt **no current village events involved them** and 11% suggested more community events would improve things.

There was a clear feeling that while the primary school children felt part of the village the young people felt they were outside of the existing village community and that few activities or events were geared up to include them or interested them.

## Facilities

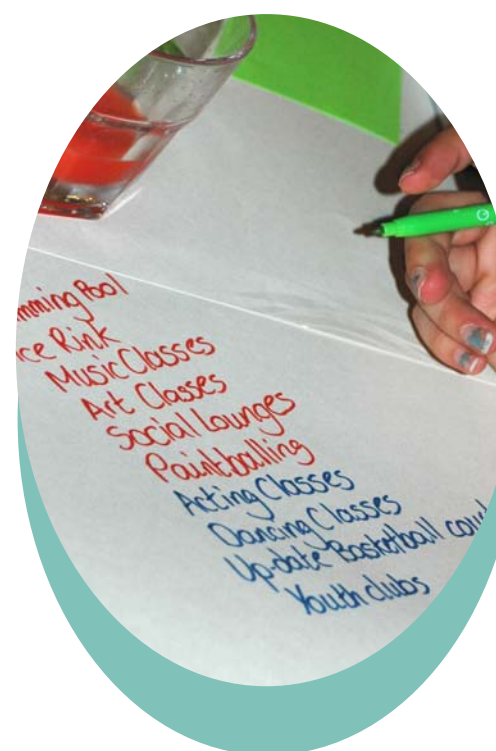
### Classes and Activities

- **89%** said they were involved in **no activities** in Balmedie or left it blank and 27% said they didn't feel involved in their community because there was a lack of activities on offer for their age group.
- **46%** said there was **nothing on offer that they liked**, although 43% admitted they didn't know what activities or events were on.
- A recurrent theme at the 'Youth Café' event discussions was that the younger people in this age group found it especially hard that classes they previously attended at the Leisure Centre **did not seem to be open to them beyond the stage of P7**. The perception was there was little or nothing open to them at the leisure centre.

### Leisure Facilities

- **40%** wanted a **cinema**.
- **27%** wanted a **swimming pool**.
- **18%** wanted **better football provision** in the village.
- **12%** wanted **more shops in Balmedie** and 7% want a **second takeaway**.
- **10%** wanted a **skate park**.
- **8%** said they'd use **bigger, better gym facilities**.

Funding which was raised for a skate park in previous years is being held by the Community Council. Community Learning and Development will assess whether current demand is based on potential use or in memory of the fundraising. The Community Council will take it up if a skate park is decided upon.



### Bus Service

- **29%** of Academy aged pupils in the village **complained** about the frequency and reliability of the bus service.
- There was also feedback that no service running into Bridge of Don restricts what after school activities Bridge of Don pupils from Balmedie could engage with.
- The bus service was seen as vital by this age group as so little is on offer to them in their own village.

## Some of their answers to “Is it easy to get involved?”

“Everything’s targeted towards younger age groups”

“There’s nothing to get involved in”

“Only facilities for young or old people”

“No, older people don’t trust us”

“Yes, you should get involved - for all you know you could have great ideas”

“There’s hardly anything available for secondary pupils”

“There’s nothing except to wander the streets, which creates a false impression of youth culture”



54 requests  
for a GP

## Findings Community

The combined priorities from the consultation are as follows:

### Health

- **48% of households** who responded to the questionnaire expressed a desire for a **Balmedie GP** and **12% for a dentist**.
- There were also **54 requests for a GP** at the 'Planning for Real' style event in 2008.

The following were voted at the 'World Café' event as the top two priorities for the village:

- » **Petition** NHS Grampian, Aberdeenshire Councillors and local MSPs for a Balmedie GP Surgery.
- » **Approach a local GP** to find out what is required in terms of population for a new practice.

### Youth

- **27% of household** questionnaire respondents said they have concerns over the **behaviour of youths and the lack of provision for them**.
- Solutions were discussed at the 'World Café' and the majority voted for "**adults to mentor young people to set up a group to take forward ideas**". This was encouraging as it mirrored the young people's priorities at their 'Youth Cafe' event.

## Community

### Newsletter

- 43% of young people and 25% of households who responded didn't know what was on.
- **58% of respondents suggested a regular community newsletter** and 57% of households and 31% of young people said it was the best way to advertise village events.
- At the 'World Café' event establishing a community newsletter and an online forum were given high priority for strengthening communication and village identity.

### Community Events

- **45% of households and 60% of young people** selected 'room for improvement', when asked "Is there a sense of Community?" A clear feeling was that it was easy to get involved in the community if you had primary aged children but much harder if you did not.



- **61% of households and 11% of young people wanted more community events,** ranging from barbecues, Christmas lights, bonfire night activities and social events that involved all age groups. The village Gala and school events were seen as the only things that presently brought the community together.

### *Village Hall and Green*

These ambitious projects were popular at the ‘World Café’ event. They are something to aspire to and they need a dedicated team of enthusiasts to take them forward.



“Is there a sense of community?”

## Environment

### *Litter*

**12% of respondents have concerns about litter** in Balmedie. 5% stated they thought that the previous litter pick helped bring the community together and wanted more of them.

### *Speeding and Pedestrian Crossings*

**10% of respondents have concerns about the lack of crossing and speeding on Egie Rd and North Beach Rd.** The Community Council were already aware of these issues from the ‘Planning for Real’ style event. They had a site meeting with the roads department back in March and will pursue this further with the new data. There were also safety concerns about junctions onto the A90. These will be improved when the A90 upgrade goes ahead.



### *Dog Mess*

**7% of household respondents complained about dog mess.** This has been followed up by the Community Council after a similar response at the 'Planning for Real' style event. There have been some constraints to putting in more bins due to budget limits but one has been added.

### *New Road Layout and Footpaths*

6% of household respondents saw the need for more footpaths in the village and more street lighting. There was also some concern over the new road layout.

### *Beach Facilities*

5% of household respondents had issues and concerns regarding facilities at Balmedie Beach. There is a sense that local people value Balmedie Beach and would like to see more made of it in terms of improving and expanding existing facilities.



## **Facilities**

### *Leisure Facilities*

Balmedie Leisure Centre is run by a voluntary Management Committee. The building is owned by Aberdeenshire Council and leased by Balmedie Leisure Centre Management Committee. This Committee run the Leisure Centre in respect of the operational and financial management of the centre. Funds for the day to day running costs come from daily income, fund raising and a grant from Aberdeenshire Council which has to be applied for on a yearly basis.

- **30% of Balmedie households said they use the Leisure Centre regularly.**
- This is widely regarded as the most valuable community resource in the village, however views have been expressed that the appearance of the building both inside and out is uninviting and needs improving. The front entrance is difficult to negotiate with a pushchair or wheelchair.
- **24% of respondents strongly expressed the need for more opening hours.**
- Requests were made for additional evening and weekend opening but the lack of opening throughout the school holidays is the main concern. The community expressed a need to be able to access the leisure facilities during school holiday periods.
- The feedback to the project has indicated that the Leisure Centre's programme of activities does not adequately reflect the Community demographic. There are few classes and activities for both the over 55's and 12 years +, the latter being more than 20% of Balmedie's current population.

Requested additional Leisure facilities included:

- » **21%** of households and **8%** of young people said they'd use **bigger, better gym facilities**.
- » **41%** of households and **28%** of young people said they wanted a **swimming pool**.
- » **12%** of households and **18%** of young people said they wanted **better football provision**.

### Library

- **23% asked for the library to be open more.** Residents expressed appreciation for the library facility but find the opening times confusing and limited.
- Storytelling/Rhymetime sessions are popular and well received, more opportunities for similar events would be welcomed. There are requests for the reintroduction of the library's Coffee Morning on a Thursday.
- P7 Homework Club is extremely popular with both pupils and parents, there are waiting lists to join this club.
- Book groups have become increasingly popular. There is a fully subscribed reading group running in the library and as a result a second group is now being supported by the library service.
- The library building is now being utilised by Balmedie Community Groups during closed hours.



### Bus Timetable Concerns

**22%** of households and **29%** of Academy aged pupils in the village **had complaints**, mainly about the frequency and reliability of the bus service. There was some acknowledgement of the improvements to the bus service since the Community Council's previous intervention. There were also substantial complaints from residents around the Old Road area about Stagecoach's decision to change the route without consulting them. All concerns have been passed on to the Community Council.

### More Shops

- **16%** of household respondents and **12%** of young people wanted **more shops**.
- **27%** of household respondents and **7%** of young people want a **second takeaway**.
- The area of ground opposite Barratt's headquarters has planning permission granted for 5 shops which should be going up soon. There is also a new shop unit in the Old Road. The Co-op will shortly be extending into the unit between it and the pharmacy.

# Next Steps

## Achievements

- The project created opportunities for local partners, individuals and local businesses to collaborate. This ensured that everyone felt represented in the process and has improved communication links between these groups.
- Levels of participation were high. Questionnaires had a 23% return rate from households and many more people contributed through the drops-ins and graffiti boards. It has become apparent that the project has provided the spark to get the residents thinking and talking about their community and bringing about change.
- The National Standards for Community Engagement were observed and met. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that being a part of the project was accessible to all and reached people not currently engaged within the community.
- The project has brought individuals with common goals together which has led to the formation of three new strong community groups. These include:
  - » **Balmedie Christmas Group**, a committee of community volunteers working together to fundraise for and organise a programme of Christmas events and village decorations for the community to enjoy.
  - » **Better Balmedie**, a group of local people with an interest in gardening, litter picks and small scale village improvements that will benefit the whole community.
- Further groups in the process of consolidating are:
  - » **Newsletter Group**, for people interested in producing and delivering a regular newsletter for the whole Parish.
  - » **Children's Discos**, a group of parents willing to volunteer and support the return of children's discos.
  - » **Youth Action Group**, young volunteers interested in improving the village for their age group.
  - » **Village Music Group**, a group of local musicians with a shared interest in music.
  - » **Craft Group**, an informal drop in craft club for local people.



## Next Steps

### Work in process

#### Health

In response to the priorities identified at the 'World Café' event a petition was started at the Gala and was also left in popular village locations.

The Community Council has asked Malcolm Bruce MP to represent Balmedie's case to NHS Grampian. They have also written to the Scotstown Medical Practice suggesting a satellite surgery and received a reply saying there are no plans for Balmedie at present. The Community Council will continue to make representations on behalf of the village.

#### Facilities

##### *Library*

The findings from the consultation which relate to Balmedie library have been passed to Aberdeenshire Council's Library and Information Service. We hope these will be taken into consideration when planning future provision for the area.

## Next Steps

### Beyond the project - recommendations

#### Youth

This has been passed on to Aberdeenshire Council's Community Learning and Development Services (CLD). The priorities are as follows:

- **Formation of Youth Action Group** to represent interests of young people within the community.
- **Dedicated time and space for youth activities.**
  - » To create new opportunities and activities for young people in the village.
  - » To provide a common meeting place for Balmedie young people attending all academies.
  - » Tackle antisocial behaviours.
  - » To re-establish young people's part in the community.

## Community

The **Balmedie Views Project** has initiated the beginnings of change and improvement for the village. Three strong new groups have emerged and communication improved over the short period of this project. Many other groups have yet to establish themselves, including the development of a Parish Newsletter Group. The newsletter has been identified as being crucial to inform, improve communications and to engender a sense of identity within the community.

The establishment of a village green and possible building of a village hall would provide a focal point for the community and a much needed additional venue for local groups and activities. The residents have also overwhelmingly identified a need for more community events as the most effective way of bringing the community closer together.

- In order for these and further developments to be taken forward the project team feel it is imperative that dedicated support is given. **We recommend that further funding be sought to employ a dedicated worker to facilitate and support the creation of a community action group** of local volunteers to tackle these outstanding issues.

## Facilities

The project has identified that the Leisure Centre is at the heart of the community and as such needs to be made more of. Having considered the research findings there is a need for the Leisure Centre program to be expanded to include classes for 12+ and the over 55's. We would recommend that the Management Committee also consider providing leisure access and activities in the school holidays.

We would recommend that the findings from this research be taken to the next Management Committee meeting to discuss the potential development opportunities. This may include staff training, the expansion of the current program and improving the surroundings. The Management Committee may also wish to consider offering a placement to a student studying in this field, for example Sports Management.





# Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership

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