

ABERFELDY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

COMMENT ON MONESS PURCHASE

Moness purchase news

Most people in Aberfeldy have known since the start of this year that Discovery Land Company (DLC) have been looking to purchase Moness, so this is no surprise to us. As a community council, we have asked through the proper channels on various occasions if this was in fact the case. The suggestion was always rejected, but of course, there will have been commercial confidentiality reasons for doing that. Many smaller transactions locally are not confirmed until everything is done and dusted, so we can't realistically expect DLC and Moness to be any different.

It is easy to speculate on the motivation for the purchase, confirmed by the DLC Press Release. There are obviously large numbers of people employed on the estate at present, and this is likely to continue if not increase through the next phase as significant numbers of high-end houses are constructed in the grounds. Beyond this, long term staff will be required to staff the castle, and also to look after the many houses involved, maintain the grounds, and keep the golf course to a high standard. We are told that up to 200 on-site staff will be required, with a similar amount in supporting roles and businesses, and it is easy enough to see that this will indeed probably be the case.

Some people try to deride such jobs as "seasonal" or "low paid", but we don't know that this will be the case. We do know that a significant number of people currently living in Aberfeldy are working at Taymouth, and they are quite happy to do so, citing good terms and conditions. This is part of our reality.

Our role

As a community council, our job is to represent the views of the people of Aberfeldy. We are careful not to step on the feet of others. Over the past few years, we have offered our support to Kenmore Community Council as required, but they are content that they are on top of things, despite recent controversies, and therefore, we have not sought to enter the debate that has been going on. However, Moness is right in the heart of Aberfeldy, and we will pay attention to this.

As a community council, we know that a big development like Taymouth can potentially overwhelm the local labour pool, housing and infrastructure more generally. Our role in this debate is to make sure that there is adequate supply and protection for all these resources. We know that housing in particular is key to local labour provision, and the Aberfeldy area has an existing demand for over 200 houses, even without the Taymouth development. Most people living locally simply cannot afford to pay current house prices, and young people going in to entry level jobs have no chance whatsoever. The result is of course that most leave to work elsewhere.

Taymouth gives some people the option of staying, and the 100+ houses potentially available at Moness could go a long way to satisfying at least part of the necessary housing demand.

Again, some will try to deride such housing, saying that it is tied to the job, and this constrains people, but we need to be very careful with such analysis. For many people, the current option is no job or housing at all in this area. It is usually people with many more options and choices who try to make such judgements. Many young people from Highland Perthshire are likely to get a

starting job at Taymouth, and they may then progress to something else in the future if they feel they have outgrown it and have some money to secure a house elsewhere. This is how the labour market works. Taymouth will give some young people a start which may not otherwise be available to them locally. We need to make sure that if they leave, they have a chance of getting a home elsewhere. This is not a job for Taymouth or DLC, this is a job for us, by which I mean all of us, local authorities and politicians especially.

Moness

Moness Resort is a hugely important facility in the town, and attracts many thousands of visitors, many on a recurring basis. The timeshare houses have been a big part of this, but we do have to be aware of changing tastes and the way that people now take their holidays. In many areas, the timeshare model has become dated, and people like greater flexibility. It is likely that going forwards, fewer and fewer people will choose this type of arrangement.

If the timeshare houses become residential rented properties, then obviously the number of holiday makers staying there will fall away over time. Working individuals or families staying there permanently are less likely to spend money in the places that visitors spend their money, but they will spend a much higher proportion of their income locally, they will do that throughout the year, not just in season, and they will support other key community facilities such as the school, the medical practice, the churches and so forth, as well as the local shops and organizations. Their requirements will be different, but Taymouth will develop over a number of years, and we know that local businesses can adapt.

Aberfeldy Community Council view

Having taken soundings from community council members, we would give a guarded welcome to this purchase. We understand the rationale, and see the potential, and we think this is the view of a significant number of people in the town. It is our job to articulate this, although we do have to maintain a forum for everyone, and not close down the discussion, or neglect to pay attention to what is going on.

We say “guarded” because we can see that it means change, and there may not yet be answers to some of the questions that we might have. It will be good for some people, but maybe not for others. However, any change is likely to develop over several years, and hopefully that will give time to adapt.

The purchase does raise the issue of housing provision, and we have to see further action on this in the immediate future. We probably need 400+ houses in this area that younger people can realistically purchase or rent. Taymouth may just have given us 100 of these, but we need many more as well.

This is what we, our local authority councillors and our politicians need to be concentrated on. For us, Taymouth is not a national issue that requires changes to legislation and all the rest. It is very much a local issue, and we will over see it properly if current legislation is applied in the way it is supposed to be applied. There are local options for more housing, and we need to try and remove any barriers that prevent these sites from coming forwards.

If the Taymouth development forces us to concentrate on what we do actually need in this area to give options for young people in particular, then that will be a good thing, because many young people do not have those options now. We therefore need to engage with this debate, and if DLC are putting our resources under pressure, then we need to expand those resources so that we can deal with this, not just for Taymouth, but for the local community more widely going forwards.

Victor Clements

21st September 2023

Chair

Aberfeldy Community Council