

Ness Castle Stakeholder Group Meeting Minutes

Microsoft Teams

16 November 2022 at 6:30 pm

In Attendance	
Councillors Cllr Jackie Hendry (Chair)	JH
Parent Council Representatives Andrew Martin, Holm Parent Council William Porter, Ness Castle Parent Council	AM WP
Community Representatives Gail Beveridge, Holm Community Council Murray McCheyne, Holm Community Council Scott McRoberts, Resident	GB MMC SMR
Ness Castle Primary Craig Connon, Head Teacher	CC
Highland Council Representatives Robert Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning & Estate Strategy Dorothy Gibb, Principal Estates Officer Ian Graham, Road Safety Officer Finlay MacDonald, Head of Property Services Ruth MacKay, Head Teacher, Holm Primary Evelyn Miller, Cleaning & FM Manager Alan Paul, Estates Officer Fiona Sangster, Estates Co-ordinator Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager South Gordon Stewart, Education Advisor	RC DMG IG FMD RMK EM AP FSa FSh GS
Kier Construction Philip McDowell, Regional Director Scotland	PMD
Apologies Cllr Alasdair Christie Martin Fitzgerald, IRA Parent Council Audrey Kellacher, Lochardil Primary School Cllr Andrew MacKintosh Helen Mudie, Ness Castle Primary School Sandra Reynolds, Education Officer	

<p>1. RECORDING OF MEETING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JH informed the group that the meeting would be recorded. 	
<p>2. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions were made for the benefit of PMD who was not familiar with all the Stakeholders. 	
<p>3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minutes were approved by FMD and seconded by FSh. • DMG explained that although the minutes had been issued to the Stakeholder Group, they weren't available on the THC website yet due to a technical issue with the webpage. 	
<p>4. PROGRESS UPDATE - PHIL MCDOWELL, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, KIER CONSTRUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PMD explained that he had just returned from annual leave and was therefore providing an update from a report provided by a fellow Director. • Overall, progress is good. • External works had been affected by bad weather however the asphalt will be completed by end of the week. • Soft landscaping is progressing and should also be completed by end of this week, beginning of next. • All scaffolding is down, and the building envelope has been completed. • The building has now passed the air tightness test. • Internally work is progressing well, and the upper floor is nearly complete. • Key areas remaining to be completed are mainly on the ground floor with flooring of the atrium and some decoration to complete but this should be concluded by the end of next week. • Commissioning is progressing in line with the programme with the majority completed this week. • PMD noted that the building will provide a fantastic, high-quality environment for users. • Handover is now expected on 2 December and PMD is quite confident that Kier are on track for this. 	
<p>5. PROGRESS DISCUSSION – THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FMD explained that he had met with Sean O'Callaghan of Kier on site on Tuesday and they had concluded that 7 December was to be the handover date due to the volume of work still to be completed. • FMD noted that the quality is good, there are a lot of trades working on site who are all conscious that there was a standard required and therefore they were not to rush. 	

- PMD recognised that building completion is much later than intended. The market is a difficult environment at present and so it is difficult to secure resources Scotland-wide. The project has been a challenge for everyone, and he recognises the difficulty the delay presented to all around the table.
- CC expressed disbelief that the term “progress is good” was being used. The school were told July, September, October, November and now December for completion.
- PMD took this on board but explained that the point he was trying to convey is that over last couple of weeks progress has been good on site. The situation with the challenging market is not ideal and has caused a lot of problems.
- PMD offered his apologies and explained that it was not for the want of trying on Kier’s behalf. The challenges faced are not limited to the Ness Castle project but are across the industry and across Scotland. Despite this, PMD is confident that what will be handed over will a high-quality building.
- MMC commented that these dates did not happen today and noted that communication about the delay has been challenging and lacking and there are lessons to be learned by THC on this.
- MMC added that handover is now 7 December, but Finlay Niven had indicated to him that he expects to be on site after that. Although MMC understood that handover may still happen, if Kier were still on site what would that look like in practice.
- PMD explained that a soft landing was expected on this building and that he expected to keep a senior member of staff on call at the project to deal with any snagging or problems encountered in early stages of occupation. There will not be a lot of contractors on site beyond handover and only if they are required to close off any issues.
- MMC asked what would be expected for a normal project.
- PMD explained that it varied. An extreme example being the Burrell Collection where there was a presence for 12 months to deal with any issues that arose. For the school PMD would expect someone on site until the New Year.
- PMD noted that a lot of snagging should not be expected as although the school was a complex building in term of the geometry inside, it will be handed over to a very high standard.
- AM wished to echo what MMC had said about communication. It is important to let parents know what is happening.
- AM asked if we were still on track for a January opening.
- DMG commented on the comments regarding problems with communication and explained that THC can only go on what the contractor is telling them.
- DMG added that THC have been pressing for definitive dates and understands there is a lot to do but explained that we cannot do that until we have a handover date.
- DMG added that the handover date was pushed back again only yesterday, and it is now not physically possible from a logistical point of view for the school to open in January.

- DMG suggested that the next possible window of time would be the February mid-term break and recommended that this should be the new target date for entry.
- This would give more time for installation of ICT and furniture and familiarisation for FM staff for a smoother move. However, this would all be dependant on a December handover of a good quality building from Kier.
- FSh requested an urgent meeting with RC and FMD and expressed her disappointment at the moving in date now being a further 6-7 weeks away in February.
- RC agreed that an earlier moving in date can be discussed although the February date has been suggested.
- He reiterated what was said at the last meeting about not accepting a building that did not meet THC standards.
- RC understood and shared the frustration and disappointment but noted that with the planned handover date now into December, THC are not confident that entry in January would be achievable and will not put anyone through moving into an incomplete building.
- AM noted that at the last meeting a 6-8 week gap had been allowed for in case of delay and it was suggested that we could eat into that and still get into the building in January. He then asked that now there was another 6-8 week gap could that happen again and cause further delay? What confidence can we have in THC or Kier? He also noted that this was the third time the opening date was changing as far as parents were concerned.
- FMD noted that we have been in a similar position with previous projects and this project has been even more challenging for sub-contractors which has resulted in the programme being dragged out.
- In the past THC have suffered from moving into projects that weren't complete. It is very difficult for teaching staff to have work continue after a move, so we are not prepared to have people in an incomplete environment.
- We must be satisfied it is finished to the standard that we require.
- FMD noted that the reality is that Covid has affect the availability of sub-contractors and nationally the majority of projects are late.
- FMD suggested taking the Stakeholder group to the new building during the week of 7 December to see how it is.
- He also noted that we still need the six-week period after handover with the contractor off site to get the furniture brought in and constructed, resources moved across and looking at the timescale to achieve that it was agreed that February would be the best time.
- This would allow time to resolve any issues that arise before staff move across and to ensure that the building is operating smoothly and is of the quality, we need to be confident to tell the community that it is ready.

RC

- RC agreed with FMD. The 6–8 week period starts at handover so taking account of the Christmas break that takes us to February.
- RC also noted that PMD had a handover date that he was comfortable with and that had to be achieved. THC will not open a building we are not 100% happy with.
- WP noted the different dates for completion that had been intimated and asked why we could not provide a specific date.
- SMR noted that the main frustration is around communication and suggested that if a decision is made on February opening, the same procedure as last time is followed to update parents
- SMR asked CC and RMK about the current situation for staff and pupils.
- CC noted that the temporary accommodation is working, and Holm staff have been great to work with. Everyone has been looking forward to the new school opening in January and he suspected there would be anger and frustration when he told staff and parents this had changed.
- RMK agreed that both staff teams were working well together although there are some frustrations with lack of spare classrooms for meetings etc.
- RC agreed that communication from THC could have been better, but the situation had been a moving target over last few weeks.
- It was only in the last 24 hours that the moving in date of January had been considered unachievable, although THC had suspected there may be a further delay so had organised the meeting.
- WP asked why people weren't informed of THC suspicions.
- RC noted that several meetings and site visits had taken place over the past week or so. It had been noted that timescales were getting tighter, but it was only in the last week it had been suspected that January was not achievable.
- DMG added that THC were doing their best to communicate but dates given to THC from Kier were changing all the time. Two weeks ago, the date had already slipped by 5 days, but it was a shock yesterday at the further delay. DMG apologised but added that THC were doing as much as they can to communicate as and when there is accurate information.
- JH asked if THC could continue with the weekly updates to Councillors.
- AM asked if the weekly updates could be issued to Head Teachers too for sharing in their weekly newsletters which go out every Friday. Even if there is only something like “the soft landscaping being completed” was shared it would help keep parents informed and make them feel valued and involved.
- JH asked officials to confirm that a letter will go out to parents tomorrow. FSh confirmed that this would happen.
- RC agreed that an initial update will go out tomorrow and then a weekly update every Wednesday to allow time for it to be included in the school newsletters.

FSh/RC

RC

- RC to work with PMD on the updates.
- WP asked PMD what percentage of the work had been completed on the first floor of the building.
- PMD estimated this to be 97%.
- WP asked if snagging works could be started earlier to speed things up.
- PMD explained that Kier had started to compile a snagging list and then THC would also snag each area as they were ready. This is already ongoing as well as the commissioning and is a key activity.
- WP asked THC representatives if they had also started their snagging list.
- FMD explained that THC had a Clerk of Works on site throughout the project and now had the Commissioning engineers on site. Various testing is done as the project is progressing and is not left until the last month. Areas of work are checked as and when they are ready, and Building Control also visit at various stages. As things come together there are more intense checks of things that are visual and anything that requires it is made good. That is where we are now and will continue until handover.
- RC added that the 6-week period after handover was on a fully snagged building although there is never zero snagging and defects at this stage and there may be a short list of items to be sorted.
- WP asked PMD how confident he was with the 7 December handover date.
- PMD stated that what Kier have tried to do is to commit to a date that is achievable but recognise that there is always a risk with the date. Securing resource has been incredibly difficult on this and other projects so that is reality.
- He added that on the previous dates communicated there had been some risk items such as materials but at this stage there is only a low risk so he is very confident that a high standard of building will be ready for handover 7 December.
- WP asked if the shortage of sub-contractors could still be an issue.
- PMD explained that at this stage of the project it was not an issue, and he was confident that resource will not compromise completion for 7 December.
- WP asked if the path on the East side of the building would be completed before handover.
- PMD confirmed that this was likely, but he would check this on his next visit.
- MMC noted that Finlay Niven had told him that the path WP mentioned was not owned by THC and would therefore not be getting done.
- DMG explained that discussions had already taken place with Planning concerning the path and it was difficult to achieve due to ownerships issues and DDA slope requirements. DMG to discuss further with Planning.

DMG

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WP expressed concern about people using the route when the Heras fencing is removed. • WP asked if the bus provided for pupils to Holm would continue. • FSh confirmed that the bus would continue. 	FSh
<p>6. SAFER ROUTES TO SCHOOL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IG noted that the bus provision had significantly reduced the number of vehicles at Holm and that the parking cones provided had also helped with parking. • Speed cushions on Brodie Road are now in place. • The survey conducted on the access roads to Holm Primary concluded that the average speed was under 30mph. • Stratherrick Road will be in the new 20mph zone and further monitoring will take place after this is implemented. • The scooter pods and bike shelter for Holm Primary have been ordered and should be there in a few weeks. There had been some delay whilst the school chose a colour. • MMC asked if the light controlled crossing on Dores Road was still planned as no work has started to date. • IG to investigate this. 	IG
<p>7. EDUCATION/SCHOOL MATTERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CC noted that the school was running well as a school in another school. • Parents and children seem happy and are looking forward to Christmas. • Staff teams at Ness Castle and Holm are working well together. • FSh noted that it was good for the two schools to have had time to make the bond whilst both were accommodated at Holm. 	
<p>8. COMMUNITY BENEFITS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be discussed at next meeting 	Note
<p>9. AOCB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. 	
<p>10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be confirmed. • A visit for stakeholders to the new building to be arranged after handover date of 7 December, and a visit for pupils to be arranged before Christmas if possible. 	