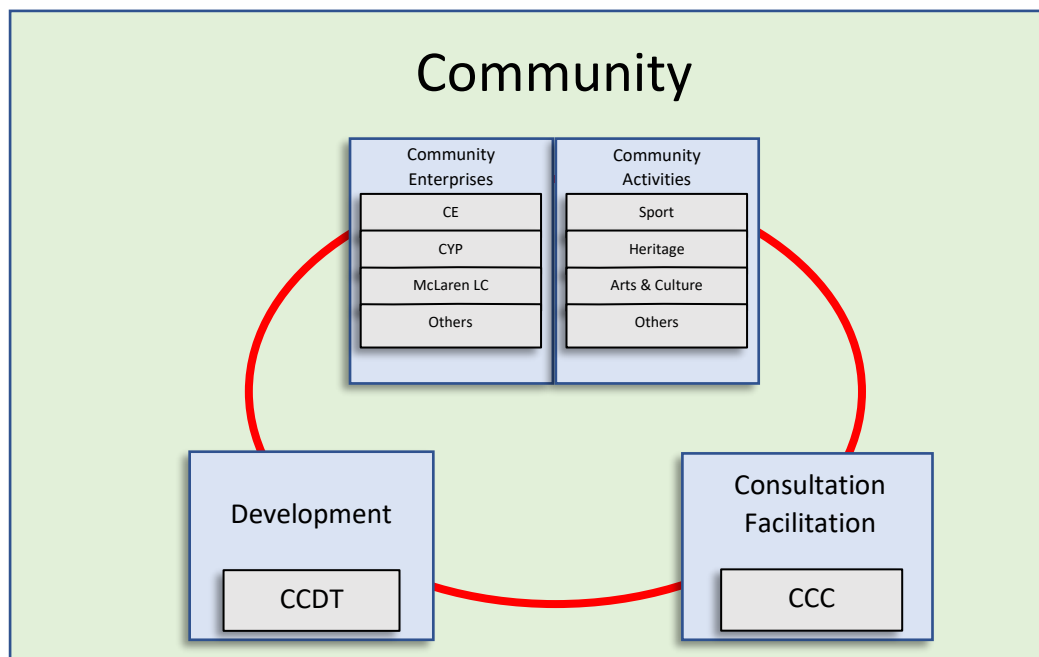**Communication with the Community**

Basics

The fundamental duty of CCC is to <u>ascertain, co-ordinate and represent the range of views</u> held in the community. Community councillors are expected to keep their own opinions out of this process. This means that, typically, community councillors must not publish or publicly express their own views. To reveal an opinion would undermine the extent to which a councillor is seen to be impartial before having heard the community.

1. CCC communication with the community is an active process. It requires easy-to-use & accessible mechanisms for speaking to and then listening to the community both as individual community members and as community organizations. Proactive communication means that whenever there is a project development being considered, then the community must be engaged with. Reactively, all members of the community must feel free to approach CCC with unsolicited questions or comments.

2. CCC must distinguish between opinions and wishes of individual community members and the range of views that the community as a whole holds. Ascertaining the range of views of the community requires an active process that is designed deliberately to reach all parts of the community. Whilst there will always be highly active subsets of the community who will make their views known, it is important that everyone has the same opportunity. We define the breadth of our community by covering these specific demographics:

- Age
- Gender
- Socio-economic status
- Employment status & location: employed (locally, commuting or travelling), unemployed, retired
- Leisure interests: sports, arts, culture, natural world
- Geographical area: town centre, periphery, hinterland

Reaching this breadth does not currently happen and will require careful thought and action. It might be worth establishing a representative panel from the community.

3. CCC has two formal needs for communication with its community: informing and consulting. It is proposed to keep these separate as they serve different purposes and have different requirements.

Informing
Information is provided to the community from the CCC. The fundamental principles are:
1. Neutral: the content should be plain and factual, not tainted by any opinion
2. Clear: free from commentary
3. Authorized: agreed/managed by CCC; contact details for response always available

Depending on the priority and urgency at the information, there are two types of mechanism:
a) notices that people must actively visit, such as FaceBook or a physical noticeboard. It is proposed that 3 are required:
    i. Facebook page – read only to ensure neutrality and clarity
    ii. CCC Webpage – to hold additional background information and detail
    iii. Physical noticeboard – for those without regular internet usage
b) circulation (that is delivered to each household/business)
    i. BLV article/insert

Informing will often stimulate community debate. That debate is welcome but since it necessarily involves opinions, it must be kept separate from the CCC information itself.

Consulting
Consultation with the community empowers CCC to understand and report the range of views in the community. In creating and conducting a consultation exercise, the same three principles apply:
1. Neutral: both sides of argument provided to minimize bias
2. Clear: questions with adequate explanation and no opinions
3. Authorized: the CCC must approve all consultations
The process must meet these criteria:
a) Democratic: every member of the community must demonstrably have the same opportunity to respond
b) Informed consent: purpose and procedure of consultation explained beforehand
c) Adequate: consultation should allow all possible answers including open-ended comments
d) Independent: people do not see the responses of others before making their own response
To hold and use data generated by consultation, CCC will need a privacy statement.

Depending on the type of consultation a choice will be made between various different media. The following are all suitable, in different circumstances:
    i. Survey: in both electronic form (e.g. SurveyMonkey) and paper form.
       Specific questions with specific response options plus opportunity for open-ended comments
    ii. Suggestions/comments box:
    iii. Community panel: designed to be representative of the community

Other contact with community members
Alongside these two formal forms of communication there will also be frequent contact with individual community members and small groups. These contacts are vital to the work of CCC and need to be taken seriously. They do not, however, provide CCC with the range of views of the community.

Comment
We live in a world where information and opinion are no longer always distinct categories. Too many politicians and media treat their own opinions and wishes as if they were facts: wishful thinking is not factual. It is increasingly difficult to obtain information that is not coloured by opinion or spin. However, it is important for CCC information to establish a reputation for reliability. This can only be done by having all statements made by CCC checked for accuracy.

We also live in a world where our casual interactions with others tend to confirm our own opinions and biases. This creates for each of us the belief that our opinion is one that is widely held. Social media contribute massively to this process. When social media are used, as if for debate, but actually to promote a particular viewpoint, it is easy for others to be misled. Whilst there will always be those who wish to publicize their views (and social media exist for this purpose) this will normally create a highly biased impression of the whole community for anyone who is following. A good account of the phenomenon is here:
https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/problem-social-media-reinforcement-bubbles-what-you-can-do-about-ncna1063896

Posts on social media are not "the voice of the community". They are often intentionally posted to have a particular effect. They are another form of publishing – the modern day equivalent of the Victorian pamphlet. They strongly tend to attract visible followers whereas most people who disagree with a post will likely simply move on without comment.

Finally, psychology has found an interesting and challenging thing. Most conversations start by one person pointing out one of 3 types of thing:
1. something that is undesirable and problematic (eg "the weather's really poor today")
2. something that is unlikely (e.g. "it is snowing in June")
3. something that is very desirable (e.g. "how lovely that the sun is shining today")
Of these, the first is commonest.
Threads in social media go the same way: longest threads are triggered by pointing out something that is, or is presented as, undesirable and problematical. News articles actually do the same thing: most stories in most news media are about things that are undesirable and problematical.
The issue here is that the negativity of the undesirable spreads outwards. Published complaints about one part of Callander trickle into a general negative impression of the whole place.