

## *The View From Balkello*

A sharp, cold winters morning at the top of Balkello Hill looking from the Syd Scroggie Memorial Cairn south over rural Angus, Dundee sitting snugly in its natural contours almost hidden from sight with the Tay and North Sea beyond. A vista to be cherished, yet the silence and wildness of this spot, within three miles of a city of 150,000 people, punctuated only by the calls of a crow and the bleating of sheep on the lower slopes, could be lost forever by an ill-considered proposal to build a four lane bypass from Longforgan to Tealing.

Syd Scroggie may have been unsighted but he could 'see' his environment better than most and would surely have been appalled by the crass insensitivity of planners who could even consider such environmental destruction. The Sidlaws and the rural linkage between the hills and the city is a haven for wildlife and acts as a corridor connecting that hint of the Highlands that the Sidlaws represent, with the forest fringe of Dundee at Templeton and its nationally important red squirrel population.

It is not just squirrels of course that are iconic creatures of our local environment. Otters too are making a comeback and are been sighted around the many watercourses which cross the Howe of Strathmartine: otters whose habitats are protected by law from any disturbance. Are we really to construct a major trunk road right through their habitats?

Dundee Council seek funding assurances from the Scottish Government of 250 million pounds for this project which they claim is necessary to alleviate congestion on the Kingsway, Dundee's original ring road dating from the 1930s. Traffic volumes have certainly increased dramatically since then, but the main cause of congestion in recent years has been the locating of superstores and retail parks at or near important interchanges.

From the Morrisons development at Linlathen, we can now add the new ASDA currently under construction at the Myrekirk roundabout to the list of developments that city planners have allowed to aggravate traffic problems. Plans for hundreds of new houses near the Swallow roundabout are sure to place further strain on the transport network.

Tayplan and other development planning documents are full of glib talk of the environment and sustainability, but the reality of much of their proposals is set to encourage further car use and the further despoilation of our landscape and environment.

Much of Dundee's appeal, especially to the incomers buying high council tax banded properties that the council seem keen to attract to the city, is its proximity to a range of non-urban environments and the ease by which walkers, cyclists and others can find

peaceful solace from the pressures of daily life. A bypass to the north of the city will take away so much of this amenity and diminish the attractiveness of the city as place to live and work.

Are the interests of those most affected, and the opposition of Angus Council and local Community Councils to be over-ridden by the juggernaut of intransigent Central Government politicians and civil servants? With the consultation period of a review of Scottish planning policy recently ended, it is to be hoped that local communities are to be given full democratic rights to effectively oppose and stop the dictatorial approach of outside and vested interests.

We must also ask who gains most from this proposal? The road is really necessary only to allow more greenfield land to be built upon to the great profit of private developers but at the expense of the ordinary taxpayer and our natural environment. This is effectively a public subsidy to private business and must surely be unacceptable especially at a time of cuts in frontline education and other local authority services.

It has been claimed that shaving 10 or 15 minutes from journey times between the Central Belt and Aberdeen is essential for our economic wellbeing, but studies are increasingly showing that the economies that gain most from this are those of the centre rather than the regions. We also live in a world of emails and Skype and it must be questionable whether in 10 or 20 years the need for rapid business travel will be as great as at present.

If the Scottish Government has a quarter of a billion pounds to spend on infrastructure in North East Scotland then let's improve the rail network to allow a shift of freight transport from road to rail, improve and make affordable public transport, alleviating both road congestion and climate change.