

**The Highland Council**  
**Highland Council 25 June 2015**

Agenda Item	16(ii)
Report No	HC/27/15

**Central Community Council**

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

**Summary**

The report outlines the background and approach in an attempt to establish representation for the Central Community Council area in Inverness. There are 2 potential options – a merger with Crown Community Council or a merger with Park Community Council. The report sets out the context, public consultation feedback and discusses the key issues highlighted. Members are asked to consider which of the 2 options would best achieve democratic representation for the Central Community Council area.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Community Councils were formed under the 1973 Local Government (Scotland) Act and provision was also contained for their continuation under the 1994 Local Government (Scotland) Act. Each Local Authority was to create a Scheme for Community Councils which will provide the framework for their operation. There is provision within the legislation for making minor amendments, reviewing and revoking a Community Council Scheme. Advice from Legal Services is that any changes must be considered and approved by a full meeting of the Council and cannot be delegated to an alternative committee e.g. an Area Committee.
- 1.2 Provision for a Central Community Council was contained in the original Inverness District Community Council Scheme from 1974. To officers' current knowledge, no Community Council has existed for Central to date despite continued efforts from local Members and officers to generate interest.
- 1.3 In 2010 and 2013 attempts were made to establish a Central Community Council. These were unsuccessful. In November 2013, following a further failed attempt to generate interest from local residents in setting up a Central Community Council, Central Ward Members requested officers to explore how to ensure Community Council representation for the Central area of Inverness. This report sets out the background to that work and seeks members' views on how best to proceed.

## **2. Achieving Representation for the Central Community Council area**

- 2.1 The Central Community Council area covers the city centre area of Inverness, stretching out along Millburn Road, encompassing the Longman Industrial estate and everything north to the firth. To the west it is bounded by the river. A map outlining the area can be found at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The population of the area is low, 1077, with an electorate of 920<sup>1</sup>. The low population level is one of the reasons that generating sufficient interest in setting up a Community Council is challenging. The second is that a considerable proportion of that population will be in rented accommodation including short term lets in the city centre. The transient nature of this population has also contributed to the challenges of getting people involved in the Community Council.
- 2.3 Officers were asked to explore a way of achieving representation for the Central Community Council area. The preference from local Members was to make the Central Community Council more viable by increasing its population through transferring part of Crown Community Council, with whom it shares a border, to Central. Upon consultation, Crown were not in favour of losing any of their area but were willing to merge with Central to create one Community Council covering the Crown and Central areas of Inverness.
- 2.4 *Consultation Feedback*  
On this basis, a consultation was drawn up to seek views from the public on a merger between Crown and Central Community Councils. The consultation ran from May to the end of July 2014. A total of **6 responses** were received. **5 of the 6 responses** received indicated that any merger between Community Councils should be between **Central and Park Community Council**, which covers the area on the opposite side of the river from the Cathedral along to the Friars Bridge and back to the canal. A summary of each response is outlined below. Each full response can be found at appendix 2.

### *Response 1 – Cllr Allan Duffy*

- Not in favour of a merger between Crown and Central. Would prefer a merger between Inverness Central and Merkinch Community Council.

### *Response 2 - Chair Park Community Council*

- Park would be interested in covering the city centre until if and when a Central Community Council could be formed.

### *Response 3 – Secretary Park Community Council*

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<sup>1</sup> Updated population at June 2015 based upon the 2013 Mid-year population estimates

- Park already represents businesses and residents in the City Centre and would be a natural merge between Central and Park.

*Response 4 - Cllr Donnie Kerr*

- Support the expansion of Park to cover the Central Community Council area. Not in favour of a merger with Crown because this would create an overly large community council in terms of geography and population.

*Response 5 – Inverness Concern*

- Feel Park would be better placed to represent the City Centre given their existing involvement in the City Centre and that Crown already have significant projects of their own.

*Response 6 – Inverness Community Council Forum*

- Feel other proposals have been dismissed. Park covers a much smaller area than Crown and therefore it would be more sensible to merge Park and Central, creating a more viable area and electorate.

2.5 Following these submissions, officers were asked to meet with Park Community Council to understand how they would propose to represent the Central area. The note of this discussion can be found at appendix 3. A subsequent submission was also received from Crown Community Council outlining how they would propose to represent the Central Community Council area. This can be found at appendix 4.

### **3. Issues for Discussion**

3.1 The original rationale for a merger between Crown Community Council and Central Community Council was based upon:

- Geographical synergy - their close proximity to the Central area;
- Continuity – Crown has already been undertaking representation for the Central area, commenting on planning applications etc.; and
- Crown is a long established Community Council.

3.2 However, a range of issues to consider were raised during the consultation:

- That merging Central and Crown would create a very large Community Council in terms of population and geography.
- Park also represents the businesses and citizens of the Central area.
- Although new, Park is an effective and sustainable Community Council.
- Crown already have existing projects that may take their focus away from the City Centre.

3.3 1. Population

Table 1 sets out the population size of a new Community Council should Central merge with Crown or Park Community Councils.

<i>Table 1</i>	<b>Total population*</b>	<b>Electorate*</b>
Crown + Central	6615	5619
Park + Central	3508	3054

*\*updated populations at June 2015 based upon 2013 mid-year population estimates*

Looking only at Inverness, table 2 sets out the different population sizes of Community Councils in the City. Crown is currently fifth largest and combining with Central would make it second largest.

*Table 2 – Population and Area of Inverness Community Councils*

<b>Community Council</b>	<b>Total Population*</b>	<b>Area (sq kms)*</b>
Inverness South	6666	17.5
Smithton and Culloden	6406	6.5
Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather	5671	1.2
Westhill	5616	11.2
Crown	5538	1.8
Lochardil	4976	4.1
Merkinch	4578	1.3
Muirtown	4204	1.7
Dalneigh and Columba	3794	1.2
Culcabock and Drakies	3426	1.4
Inverness West	2755	53.8
Park	2431	0.5
Holm	2080	2.7
Balloch	1514	5.1
Raigmore	1386	1.0
Ballifeary	1279	1.6
Central	1077	3.2

*\*updated populations at June 2015 based upon 2013 mid-year population estimates*

Outwith Inverness the largest Community Councils are:

*Table 3: Largest Community Councils in Highland*

<b>Community Council</b>	<b>Total Population*</b>	<b>Area (sq kms)*</b>
Thurso	7353	5.1
Wick	6807	7.7
Alness	6014	11.9
Dingwall	5592	12.1
Nairn River	5505	7.1

*\*updated populations at June 2015 based upon 2013 mid-year population estimates*

A merger between Central and Park would create a Community Council of just below average population size within the Inverness area. A merger between Crown and Central would create a particularly large Community Council in

terms of population but not the largest either within Inverness terms or across Highland as a whole.

### 3.4 2. Geographical Size

Table 4 sets out the geographical size of a new Community Council should Central merge with Crown or Park Community Councils.

<i>Table 4</i>	<b>Total area (sq km)</b>
Crown + Central	5.0
Park + Central	3.7

Table 5 sets out the geographical areas covered by Community Councils in Inverness.

Crown currently covers an area of 1.8 sq km.

Park currently covers an area of 0.5 sq km. The smallest area covered by a Community Council in Highland but with the highest population density.

*Table 5*

<b>Community Council</b>	<b>Area (sq kms)*</b>	<b>Population Density (Persons per sq km)*</b>
Park	0.5	4862.5
Raigmore	1.0	1385.9
Dalneigh and Columba	1.2	3161.4
Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather	1.2	4726.0
Merkinch	1.3	3521.4
Culcabock and Drakies	1.4	2447.0
Ballifeary	1.6	799.2
Muirtown	1.7	2472.9
Crown	1.8	3076.7
Holm	2.7	770.5
Central	3.2	336.6
Lochardil	4.1	1213.6
Balloch	5.1	296.9
Smithton and Culloden	6.5	985.6
Westhill	11.2	501.5
Inverness South	17.5	380.9
Inverness West	53.8	51.2

*\*updated populations at June 2015 based upon 2013 mid-year population estimates*

Currently Park Community Council covers geographically the smallest area of all Community Councils in Highland. A merger between Park and Central would create a Community Council of around average size within the Inverness area. A merger between Crown and Central would create a slightly above average sized Community Council but not the largest within the

Inverness area.

3.5 3. Community Council Background

Crown Community Council was formed in December 1995. It has a possible membership of 12 and a current membership of 7. They also currently have 2 associate members. As their submission at appendix 4 highlights, they have a number of members with expertise in planning matters and have an established Planning Sub Group to consider planning applications. They have “looked after” any major planning applications in the City Centre in recent years and have recently entered submissions on:

- Eastgate Centre expansions into Eastgate 2
- HMOs
- Planning applications for the Glebe Street site
- Rose Street Development
- Redevelopment in Academy Street.

3.6 Park Community Council was formed in 2011. They have a possible membership of 9 and a current membership of 7 and they currently have 1 associate member. Park acknowledge that although they are a relatively new Community Council, they feel they have “teeth” and have been effective since starting up. They have set out – appendix 3 – how they would propose to operate a joint Community Council by rotating meetings between the Centre and Park areas and considering planning issues as a whole Community Council.

3.7 Both Park and Crown Community Councils have been keen to stress their interest and commitment to the City Centre area and have provided examples of how they have been involved in commenting upon Planning applications and new developments.

3.8 Concerns were expressed during the consultation that Crown already have a number of significant projects within their interest which therefore may take their focus away slightly from the centre. However, Crown have not indicated any concern in this area and demonstrated how they have been recently involved in developments across the City Centre.

3.9 Both Community Councils appear committed to taking on the Central area and the additional workload this would involve.

**4. Local Member Views**

4.1 Local Members are divided upon the best solution for ensuring representation for the Central Area. The Central Community Council area is within both Inverness Central and Inverness Millburn Wards therefore Members in both

Wards have an interest in the proposed merger.

- 4.2 Inverness Central Members are divided upon this issue. 2 Members favour a merger between Park and Central Community Council, citing population and geographical parity, along with the views expressed during the consultation. It is also felt that a merger between Park and Central would assist in achieving the sustainability of Park Community Council, given that this is currently a small Community Council both in terms of geography and population. These Members note that whilst Park is a new Community Council and has no history of operating as a Community Council, they have done so very successfully since 2011.
- 4.3 The 2 other Members of the Central Ward favour a merger between Crown and Central Community Council, outlining the established nature of Crown, their experience of City Centre issues and particularly their expertise in relation to Planning issues. Members were keen to stress that this was not a negative reflection on Park but that at the current time, their belief was that Crown was better placed to take on the Central Community Council area.
- 4.4 Inverness Millburn Members all agree that a merger would be best between Crown and Central Community Councils for similar reasons outlined above. Central Members have different views.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 On the basis of the information available, a case could be made for a merger between Central and either Crown or Park Community Councils. Both Community Councils have their strengths and have demonstrated commitment to the city centre area. Either option would be better than having no Community Council representation as is currently the case.
- 5.2 Given Members' experience of supporting Community Councils across Highland, they are asked to decide which merger they favour.
- 5.3 Officers would recommend that in the future, whichever Community Council takes on the Central area, seeks the views of the other Community Councils also bordering the City Centre on specific and significant issues.
- 5.4 Following on from the decision taken above, Members are then asked to agree that the Highland Community Council Scheme of Establishment is amended to reflect:
- The new Community Council – either Inverness Central Crown OR Inverness Central Park - will operate from November 2015, following elections to this new Community Council.

- As per the membership formula in the Scheme, the new Community Council will have a membership of 13 (Inverness Central Crown) OR 10 (Inverness Central Park) as per the updated population at June 2015.
- The Community Council grant will be recalculated as per the formula agreed by Council in June 2011 to reflect the merger.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Legal and risk Implications:**

The Central Community Council area has been without representation for a significant period. It is important for a decision to be taken to be able to secure representation going forward.

### **6.2 Equalities Implications:**

There is a need to ensure representation for residents living within the Central Community Council area.

### **6.3 Climate Change/ Carbon CLEVER Implications:**

There are no Climate Change/Carbon Clever Implications.

### **6.4 Gaelic Implications:**

There are no Gaelic implications

### **6.5 Rural Implications:**

There are no rural implications.



## **7. Recommendations**

7.1 On the basis of the information available, a case could be made for a merger between Central and either Crown or Park Community Councils. Members are therefore asked to consider the 2 options available and agree either option A or B.

- Option A – a merger between Central Community Council and Crown Community Council.
- Option B – a merger between Central Community Council and Park Community Council.

7.2 Members are also asked to agree:

- That the new Community Council – either Inverness Central Crown OR Inverness Central Park - will operate from November 2015, following elections to this new Community Council.
- As per the membership formula in the Scheme, the new Community Council will have a membership of 13 (Inverness Central Crown) OR 10 (Inverness Central Park) as per the updated population at June 2015.
- The Community Council grant will be recalculated as per the formula agreed by Council in June 2011 to reflect the merger.

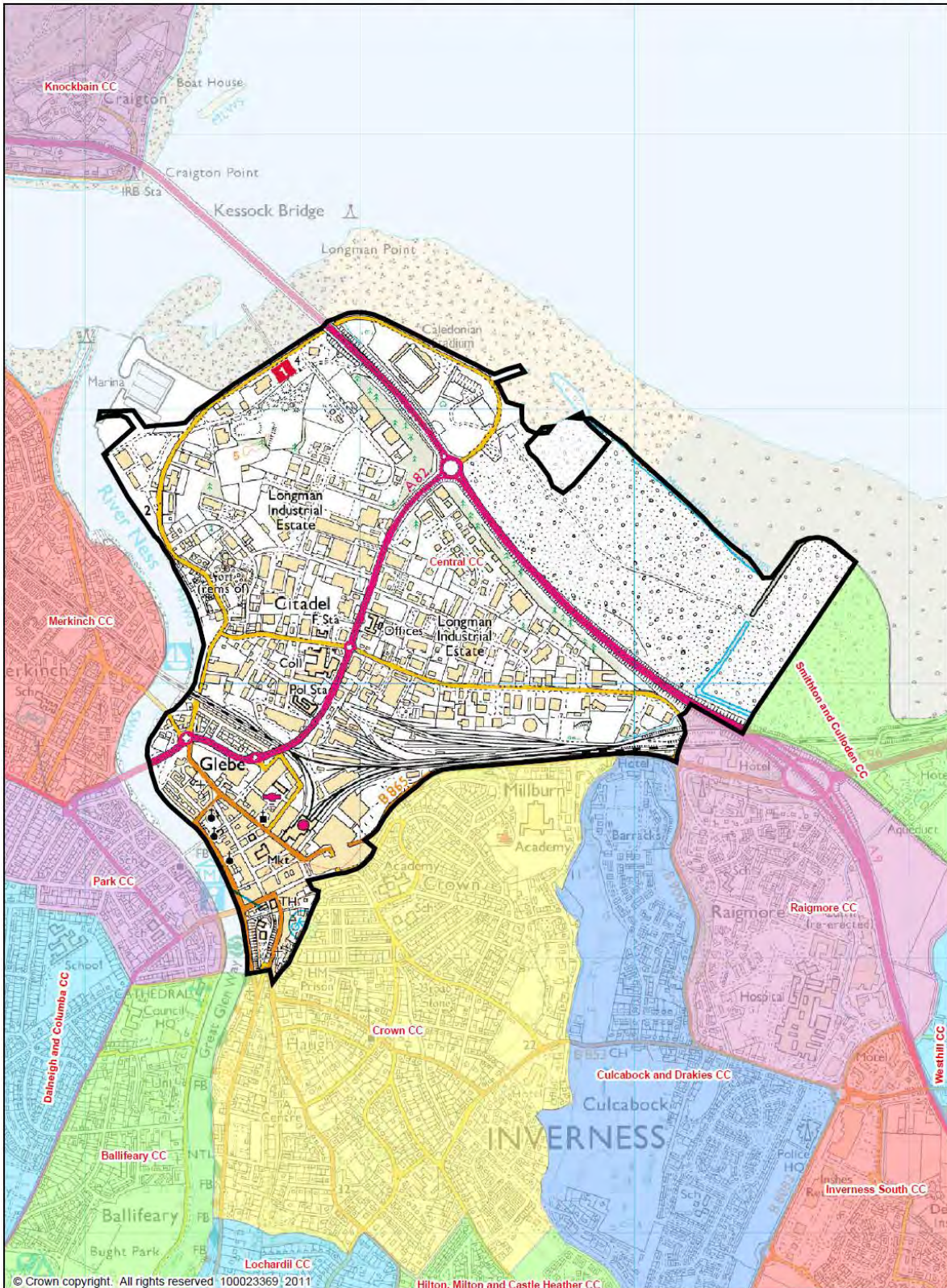
Designation: Head of Policy and Reform

Date: 4 May 2015

Authors: David Haas, Inverness City and Area Manager  
Alison Clark, Principal Policy Officer  
Jimmy Flint, Ward Manager

### Central Community Council Boundary

April 2011



### **Consultation Response 1 – Cllr Allan Duffy**

I think a merger of crown and central would not be the correct way to do this. I think extending community councils boundaries would be a better idea as the Crown don't really know what is happening at the bottom of Academy street; whereas Merkinch CC does. That way you give a wider range of input to the City Centre.

Councillor Allan Duffy

### **Consultation Response 2 –Chair Park Community Council**

Just to put this on an official basis: Park Community Council are very interested in covering the city centre until if and when a city centre Community Council can be formed. We are an active Community Council and could be an asset to the city centre.

Chair, Park Community Council

### **Consultation Response 3 – Park Community Council**

#### **Secretary Park Community Council**

We the members of the Park Community Council are concerned at what appears to be a “fait accompli” in regards to the merger of the Central Community Council with the Crown Community Council. We are now an established and effective Community Council who already represent businesses and residents in the City Centre and we feel that it would be a more natural merger to merge the Central CC with the Park CC.

Secretary Park Community Council

## Consultation Response 4 – Cllr Donnie Kerr

I support the expansion of Park CC to include the area which would have been covered by Central CC if they had been formed. As a local councillor who personally leafleted the Central CC area in an attempt to encourage residents to form a CC for the area I am aware that because of various reasons (such as a small geographical area of remit and a very small electorate, combined with a largely transient migrant worker population in the City Centre area who are not registered to vote) did not make the establishment of a City Centre CC possible this time round.

A suggestion was muted to Crown CC to part with the Haugh area where they have no members and to my knowledge have shown little interest in during their tenure as a CC. This would allow Central to cover a larger area with a larger electorate and might make a Central CC sustainable. For some reason Crown CC did not favour this proposal, they instead wanted to take over the Central CC area in totality and merge with it.

I am not in favour if this move and I will explain my reasons for this below;

1. Crown CC already have a large geographical are to cover with a substantial electorate, Park CC cover a much smaller area and for many years this CC was in abeyance, during this period an area of Park CC was removed to add to the Merkinch CC area of remit thus further weakening the Park CC area, this state of affairs lasted until my fellow ward member Cllr. Janet Campbell persevered and campaigned until a Park CC was formed a few years ago.
2. See map in accompanying document for comparative sizes of CC in the City Centre, you will see that Park CCs area of remit is tiny in comparison to the existing Crown CC area. It should also be noted that although the area of Central CC is quite large it is sparsely populated and encompasses a geographical area that is made up largely by the Longman Industrial estate where there is a minimal electorate in residence.
3. When we compare population numbers between Park and Crown it is clear as matters stand at the moment Crown with a population of 5154 and an entitlement of 12 CC members in comparison to Park with a population of 2368 and 9 CC members there is already a considerable discrepancy in size between the existing community councils as is.
4. If Crown were merged with Central this would create an excessively large community council in comparison with other Inverness CCs and would create one overlarge CC, I believe that we should be creating community councils, especially in a built up urban area, that have a comparable size profile of population, as you will see from the figures below this is not the case in the muted Crown/Central merger.

I also feel that by Increasing park it will be more sustainable and I have been most impressed with Park CC to date although a new CC they have risen to the challenge, they have effectively stood up for their community in the RNFAS wrangle over inadequate parking as part of the Flood works/streetscape works and scored a notable victory for their community on this matter over some ill thought out proposals to the riverside streetscape layout. I feel it would also be beneficial that one community council covers both banks of the River Ness in the City Centre area.

Crown	5154	Park	2368
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Central 824  
Combined 5978

Central 824  
Combined 3182

I therefore conclude after closely studying the matter that the merger of Park and Central CC areas would be more advantageous to the City than a merger of Crown and Central CCs, which I think I have adequately demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs of my analysis.

Unfortunately there have been certain flaws where the Consultation has gone to press where it can be seen to be slanted or biased by the comments made by both staff and some elected members. Clearly these comments were not based on factual analysis of the subject matter and are exceedingly questionable given that Park had expressed an interest in the Central CC just as Crown did, but there is no mention of this in the consultation press release/propaganda document produced by HC.

Councillor Donnie Kerr.

**Inverness, Urban Community Council areas**

Community Council	Total Community Council Membership	Total Population	Area (sq kms)	Population Density (Persons per sq km)	Core membership	Additional Member / 1000 population	Additional Member if pop. density < 8.8
Ballifeary	8	1180	1.6	718.1	7	1	0
Central	7	824	3.2	254.8	7	0	0
Crown	12	5154	1.8	2790.5	7	5	0
Culcabock and Drakies	10	3501	1.4	2574.7	7	3	0
Dalneigh and Columba	10	3607	1.2	3050.6	7	3	0
Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather	12	5313	1.2	4574.9	7	5	0
Holm	9	2120	2.7	790.9	7	2	0
Inverness South	11	4519	17.5	258.4	7	4	0
Inverness West	9	2364	53.8	44.0	7	2	0
Lochardil	11	4594	4.1	1132.1	7	4	0
Merkinch	11	4247	1.3	3201.8	7	4	0
Muirtown	11	4164	1.7	2437.5	7	4	0
Park	9	2368	0.5	4661.7	7	2	0
Raigmore	8	1539	1.0	1540.3	7	1	0

## **Consultation Response 5 – Inverness Concern**

Inverness Concern was formed to allow interested citizens to have an active role in the proposals that will affect the City. We were aware that at the time of forming there was no Community Council covering the City at a crucial time in its development.

We have attended all the Consultations on the proposed changes to the City where we met members of Park Community Council but not once was there any members of Crown Community Council in attendance, that therefore shows how interested they are in representing the citizens of Inverness in the proposed developments.

Crown Community Council have huge proposals with the Midmills Building and the proposed mini brewery in Ness Bank to deal with on their doorstep, with the proposed developments in the City that will be putting a lot of pressure onto an already stretched schedule. The area covered by Park Community Council is roughly a quarter the size of the current area covered by Crown Community Council, so it would make sense to make the two Community Councils more equal in size.

The City deserves to have active and dedicated representation.

Secretary Inverness Concern

## **Consultation Response 6 – Inverness Community Council Forum**

This matter was discussed at our last Forum meeting in May – it was reported that Crown members agreed with the merger proposal.

Forum members were relieved that, at last, Central (and the city centre) would have community council representation. However, many were disappointed that, and questioned why, firstly, the Forum had not been approached directly for its views and secondly, more importantly, other proposals appeared to have been dismissed - this merger was the only one suggested - with some suggesting this indicates further erosion of local democracy. Members reported that Park CC had expressed great interest in a merger.

Park CC covers a much smaller area than Crown. It would appear far more sensible to merge Park and Central CCs, thereby creating a more viable area and electorate than that created by a merger with Crown.

Chair, Inverness Area Community Council Forum

## **Meeting with Park Community Council 22-9-14 RE: Central Community Council**

The points below are a summary of the discussion between Park Community Council and Council officers regarding Park's proposal to take over the Central Community Council area.

- Although Park CC is small, feel that we have teeth and been effective since starting three years ago.
- In taking on Central, we would propose to approach in the same way as when setting up Park – need to listen to local needs and priorities.
- Initially we would intend to hold two separate meetings – so two per month. One for Central and a separate one for the Park area. We feel this is needed as the needs are different and that a lot needs to be done in the centre. Would intend to meet with businesses and residents to find out what people want.

Don't feel this would be unmanageable.

Going forward, envisage rotating meetings between the Central and Park areas.

- Planning – would intend to address in current way - one person scrutinising the lists and taking to a CC meeting if necessary.
  - Area – we would suggest that one option would be for Park to take over from Innis Street, up Academy Street to Hamilton Lane, then down to the Haugh. Crown, if willing, would then take over Eastgate, the Eastgate Centre, Milburn Road and the Longman. This would share out the area covered and feel this would be a fairer division. However we would be happy to take on the whole of Central if Crown would prefer not to proceed with this division. We would suggest that it would be difficult to split this area any other way.
  - Happy to taken on until a point that a CC wishes to be formed solely for the Central area.
  - Happy to be flexible and recognise this is going to take time.
  - Don't see the river as a barrier to Park taking on Central CC.
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## **CROWN COMMUNITY COUNCIL Submission Regarding Central Community Council.**

Crown Community Council was formed on 13 December 1995

We are fortunate to always have some members who have planning expertise so Crown Community Council Planning Sub Group is formed after each Community Council election.

Crown Community Council agreed to also look after any major planning applications in the City Centre and over the years our submissions have included -

- a) Eastgate Centre expansion into Eastgate 2 in Falcon Square
- b) HMOs
- c) Several planning applications for Glebe Street site
- d) Rose Street development plus proposed student hub
- e) Redevelopment in Academy Street – work just commenced

During this summer 2014 - Crown Community Council Planning Sub Group made submissions on –

- Eastgate Extension – Multiplex Cinema (8 Auditoria) and Additional Restaurant/Retail Units
- Proposed Restaurant/Micro-Brewery at Glen Mhor Hotel in Ness Bank
- The King's Highway in Church Street – proposed change of use from public footpath to outdoor seating area

After the local elections in May 2011 the Crown Ward was split so is partly in Central Ward and partly in Millburn Ward.

This means that Crown Community Council has some members who live in Central Ward and some who live in Millburn Ward.

It also means that all Highland Councillors representing Central Ward and Millburn Ward can attend meetings of Crown Community Council – 4 from Central and 3 from Millburn.

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