

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 26 AUGUST 2003

SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE PROPOSALS AFFECTING AUCHINCUIVE CAMPUS, AYR

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise the Committee of :

- proposals for the rationalisation of the teaching activities of the Scottish Agricultural College, involving the transfer of higher education degree level courses to Edinburgh; and
- the response to the proposals and alternative proposals which are being advanced by the Auchincruive Working Group.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Board of the Scottish Agricultural College appointed Deloitte & Touche to carry out an independent external review of all its teaching facilities which include Auchincruive in Ayr, Craibstone in Aberdeen and the Bush Estate in Edinburgh. The purpose of the review was to recommend measures by which the substantial property overhead costs which the whole SAC business carries could be significantly reduced, to secure the financial future of the business.
- 2.2** The outcome of the study was that in April / May 2003 it was announced that the SAC Board would be considering the consultant's recommendation that the current configuration of the college's teaching facilities be rationalised, with its main education and research facilities being consolidated on a single site in the Edinburgh area. The final decision was scheduled to be taken by the SAC Board in July /August 2003.
- 2.3** The anticipated loss of the teaching and research facility at Auchincruive was recognised as a potentially major blow to the economies of Ayrshire and the south-west of Scotland. It was also recognised as a significant loss of educational facilities for agriculture and land based industries.
- 2.4** It is recognised however, that the SAC Board do not propose to withdraw completely from the Auchincruive campus as it is intended that the advisory services to farmers; veterinary service to vets in practice, livestock disease surveillance services to Government, specialist consultancies in economics and building design and sub-degree level teaching in a wide range of subjects

associated with horticulture, land management tourism and rural industries will be retained at that location.

- 2.5** Under the SAC proposals, there will be a surplus of buildings and facilities at the Auchincruive campus which are currently largely devoted to the teaching function.
- 2.6** In the light of local concerns about the proposed loss of the “high level” agricultural education facility, an Ayrshire Working Group was established to formulate a response to the proposals and to investigate alternative future uses for the Auchincruive Estate.

The Working Party, chaired by the Leader of South Ayrshire Council (Councillor Andy Hill) is administered by officers of South Ayrshire Council and comprises :

- the Ayrshire Members of the European, UK and Scottish Parliaments;
- Elected Members from each of the three Ayrshire Councils (East Ayrshire Council is represented by Councillor Eric Jackson);
- Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire; and
- the National Farmers Union.

3 ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE WORKING PARTY

- 3.1** A Written Submission was made to the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Development Committee on 25 June 2003. Councillor Hill and others attended the meeting of the Committee and Councillor Hill was afforded a brief opportunity to speak in the debate.
- 3.2** Emergency Motions urging the Scottish Executive to initiate a thorough inquiry into the proposals were passed by South Ayrshire Council on 20 May 2003 and by East Ayrshire Council on 26 June 2003 and were sent to the Minister for Environment and Rural Development.
- 3.3** Representations have been made by the Working Group to the Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Scottish Agricultural College regarding the SAC proposals and seeking a face to face meeting to discuss them.
- 3.4** A meeting was held by video-conference between Auchincruive and Edinburgh on 8 July 2003. The outcome of the meeting was considered to be positive and a programme for collaborative development of a strategy was agreed, involving :
- A review of the physical assets of the Auchincruive campus – this is being undertaken as a third phase of the Deloitte & Touche commission and is anticipated to be available by the end of August 2003;
 - A review of the “intellectual assets” of the staff;

- A review of alternative development futures for Auchincruive and a realistic assessment of the extent to which existing core activities could be retained at the site.

3.5 An officer working group has been established to take forward a master-planning exercise for the Auchincruive which had commenced previously but which had been put on hold due to the review being undertaken by Deloitte & Touche.

The group comprises representatives of SAC Auchincruive, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, North Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Council and has the remit to prepare a master-plan driven by the twin objectives of :

- Reducing the SAC property overhead to improve the viability of the organisation; and
- Maximising the contribution that the development of the Auchincruive estate can make to the local economy.

The work of this group will proceed when the outcome of the third phase of the Deloitte & Touche study becomes available.

4 FINANCIAL, LEGAL, PERSONNEL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no immediate implications for East Ayrshire Council under the above headings.

5 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 That the Committee notes the terms of this report which represents the current situation and requests the Director of Development Services to bring a further report to Committee in due course.

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

12 August 2003/SC/jrs

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Written Submission to the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Development Committee on 25 June 2003

For further information please contact JOHN SPOONER, Business Development Manager on Extension 6143.

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