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# Sir Alex Ferguson cuts links with sports academy project

SIR Alex Ferguson is resigning as a patron of the Norrie McCathie Benevolent Fund after his name become entangled in a controversial planning application.

The legendary Manchester United manager and former Pars player accepted an invitation to be a patron of the group involved in plans for a "£5 million-plus sports academy" in Inverkeithing.

However, Sir Alex was unaware that the facility, on a four-acre site complete with indoor astroturf pitch, depended on developers receiving planning permission to build a housing development on farmland, east of Inverkeithing.

There were claims that the academy was to be based on those run by clubs such as Ajax but the local community council has always been against the project.

The Alfred Stewart Property Foundation issued a blunt warning that it would "walk away" from the town if they did not get backing for their housing plans.

Sir Alex's solicitor, Les Dalgarno, said, "He's not going to be involved any more. He was origi-

nally asked to be a patron and said 'yes' because he likes the idea of anything that promotes youth football but he never knew anything about a planning application.

"He's never supported this application and would never get involved in anything like that.

"It's seem unfair that his good name and goodwill have been used in this way if that's what has happened."

A decision is expected from Fife Council on the plans next month when the local plan will be finalised.

John Wilson, chair of the Norrie McCathie Benevolent Fund, said he did not want to comment at this stage but would do so once he had made inquiries. When the project was first publicised there was confusion over whether the Alfred Stewart trust had charitable status. Local campaigner Tom Minogue eventually received confirmation that it was not a charity.

Roano Pierotti, spokesperson for the Alfred Stewart Property Foundation, claims there is widespread local support for the plans after over 250 at-

tended a display held at the Inverkeithing Highland Games in August.

Mr Pierotti said, "The public exhibition ensured that the local community had the opportunity to learn about our plans to create affordable housing, quality homes and improved sporting facilities at Spencerfield, Inverkeithing, and we are extremely happy with the positive response we have received from the public and council planning officers.

"Ninety per cent of respondents support our proposals to deliver a new quality housing development with a neighbourhood centre in Inverkeithing and 86 per cent believe the improved sporting facilities in Inverkeithing will benefit the local community and clubs.

"Our proposals meet the need outlined in the Fife Structure Plan that a minimum of 400 houses are developed in Inverkeithing by 2026 and in addition will also help regenerate Inverkeithing through the creation of a public fund, which will improve access to sporting, social facilities and other regeneration projects.

"The majority of respondents have indicated that

they would like the fund used for regeneration of Ballast Bank and we share the community's enthusiasm to see that these needs are met."

However, Shirley Currie, chair of Inverkeithing Community Council, said, "We don't approve of these plans at all.

"I know they had a wee stall at the Highland Games but did the people who were saying they were in favour of it actually live in the area?

"About 18 months we carried out a survey and had just under 300 people responding. There were 87 per cent of local people against building houses on that area.

"We're sceptical because there's no money up front for the sports facilities. We've met the developers twice at their request but were not convinced by them.

"There have been promises about improvements to Ballast Bank and then it was Fraser Avenue. They seem to be happy to jump on to any bandwagon."

The late Mr Stewart was a well-known West Fife developer who gave large donations to cancer charities in his later life.