

BALERNO FORUM

BALERNO COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S **FREE** QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

<http://www.balerno-communitycouncil.org.uk>

Local Development Plan - *Not quite there yet*

The Community Council was disappointed that publication of the draft Local Development Plan has once again been delayed giving rise to continued uncertainty.

It is now unlikely that the proposals for housing development sites will be agreed before February 2015, and this will inevitably create problems.

The City Council prepared the draft LDP on the basis of requirements set out in the strategic plan - SESPlan. The first SESPlan, published last year, dictated that for the period 2009-2019, Edinburgh would require 34,290 new homes. Under new proposals published in supplementary guidance earlier this year that figure would be reduced by 35% to 22,300. In the previous Plan, 14,200 more houses were to be built in Edinburgh between 2019 and 2024; that has been reduced by 50% to 7,210. The Guidance has however not yet been adopted by Scottish Ministers and until it is there is an argument that it would be premature for the City to publish its draft plan. The City was in fact reminded by Cammo Residents Association in early June that it would be incompetent for CEC to publish a draft plan before having received from Government the basic figures on housing need for the SESPlan area as a whole, and for Edinburgh's share of that.

BCC, along with neighbouring Community Councils, as part of the South West Consultative Forum, have been making that point also to the City Council. We also believe that unless the reduction in housing requirement is reflected in a reduction in the housing land requirement then the allocation of land for housing may be proceeding on the basis of a false premise.

We understand that significant growth indicators for Edinburgh city may have been down-graded by Scottish Government. The general grant to the city and provision for health across the city have been modified downwards. However a matching down-grade of housing numbers in the SESPlan Supplementary Guidance for the whole area has not occurred.

It is important that the whole LDP process should proceed on the basis of a proper assessment of actual housing need. A false basis now could affect future plans and that in turn could mean that more of the Green Belt may be eaten up unnecessarily.

We know that the draft LDP will now include at least one site in Balerno and that means that locally we are far from being out of the woods yet. BCC will be looking at the draft Plan and will respond in line with its published principles.

BCC also anticipates that it is likely that developer interest in sites around Balerno will now be reignited. We have already seen the Pilmuir site being the subject of a second PAN process, and the Harlaw Gait site also becoming the subject of a PAN application.

**NB - PLANNING APPLICATION NOTICE EXHIBITIONS
RE HARLAW GAIT BALERNO COMMUNITY CENTRE ON 23 AUGUST.
SEE BCC NOTICE BOARD FOR DETAILS**

BCC meetings are at 7.30pm on the second Thursday of each month except July, and are held in Balerno High School. The remaining meetings in 2014 are on 14 August, 11 September, 9 October, 13 November and 11 December.



RBS and Balerno

RBS announced in May that its Balerno branch will close on 1 August. BCC have made representations to the Bank about the process leading up to the decision and also about the possible effects of closure on the community.

The closure will also involve removal of the ATM and Night Safe facility. BCC asked RBS to consider retention of the ATM if possible with added cash deposit facilities. It also asked the Bank to consider part-time opening. However the Council was advised that the decision on closure was definite and that the branch would close on 1 August.

BCC are concerned about the effects both on individual customers and also separately on the business community. RBS are discussing new arrangements by which the Post Office might be able to accommodate RBS transactions through its branches. However agreement on that will not be in place before end August. We have suggested to RBS that to the extent that RBS believes that the effect of closure would be mitigated by availability of services through the Post Office then closure should be delayed until the arrangements with the Post Office are in place.

Following prompting by BCC, RBS have been in contact with the Balerno Post Office. BCC is also in touch with the Bank about its plans for the building in the event of closure proceeding. The Council will continue its contact with RBS and is hopeful that in the event of closure, arrangements will be made to ensure that the building will continue to be available for the benefit of the community.

Community Access to Schools

The Community Council met with City officials, on 3 April, on the eve of the Easter break, to outline concerns about the absence of consultation with the community and also the lack of clarity about the substance of the City Council's proposals. City officials said they would look at any alternative proposals which the community might wish to offer.

BCC thereafter wrote to the Chief Executive of CEC on 16 May expressing support for a proposal put forward by Balerno High School Parent Council on the same day.

The City Council's Education, Children and Families Committee discussed a report on CATS on 20 May, and agreed to continue with development of the initiative.

While BCC received responses to its correspondence of 16 May on 13 June, there is regrettably little in those to suggest that the City are in fact either listening to local opinion in Balerno, or interested in significant consultation with the community on this matter.

Nor, so far as BCC are concerned, did the report discussed by CEC on 20 May provide any real information on precisely what CATS will look like when implemented.

CEC have sought to link the development of the All Weather Pitch facility at Malleny Park with the CATS initiative. BCC have always believed that the development of that facility was no more than this community was entitled to expect from the local authority. BCC are pleased that work should have started by the time this issue is published, and we congratulate local Councillors again for all their work in securing it for the community.

BCC will however continue to press for CEC for information on CATS and for consultation by CEC in advance of the introduction of any changes to Community Access to Schools in the Balerno area.

But not so good however on grass cutting maintenance

Unfortunately we are unable to be quite so congratulatory so far as the City Council's efforts in ground maintenance around the village are concerned.

The Community Council has once again had to complain to the City Council about the standards of ground maintenance particularly at Marchbank Park where an overdue visit by the grass cutting team on 3 June left the area looking like a badly harvested field with some areas retaining over a foot high growth.

Comments to the Community Council from residents have included some to the effect that no other park nearer the city centre would be allowed to be left in this state. The Council has regularly had to draw to the attention of the City that leaving grass uncut can create a real environmental problem especially in a children's playing area like Marchbank Park. A meeting between BCC and the City Council along with local City councillors took place on 12 June

Where grass is allowed to grow to say 12", as it is on Marchbank Park, it is impossible to remove dog waste, assuming that it can be located. Dog waste produces real risks of infection for children, including toxocara canis, which can cause stomach upsets, sore throats, asthma and in rare cases blindness.

Naturally we would prefer that dogs were not allowed by their owners to foul in public areas and especially in children's play areas, but it is a fact of life that not all owners will clean up after their pets.

Well done, City Council on weed clearance;

But is the problem really solved?

The clearance of weeds by the City Council from the area between Mansfield Road and the car park to the south of Main Street is welcome.

The area has been an eyesore with its unkempt appearance making the area look derelict and abandoned, and BCC congratulates the City on the improvements. However BCC are cautious about the longer term value of the steps taken by CEC to ensure that the problem does not recur.



CEC's team were on site on 26 and 27 May preparing the ground while having spent time earlier in the year clearing the site. The area was dug over and fresh weeds removed.

BCC had been led to believe however that the plans had included placing a membrane over the affected area as a weed inhibitor.

The Community Council contacted CEC immediately it became clear that no membrane was to be installed. The City Council readily agreed that a membrane was the best answer for the site, but that the cost was prohibitive. However they have installed a bark layer which is sufficiently dense they think to provide an effective weed barrier. We hope that they are right.

Weeding the Main Street

Last summer a team organised by Balerno Village Trust weeded the flower beds in the Main Street and in June BVT started once again. BCC hope that they will continue this valuable contribution to making Balerno beautiful. We are sure that if anyone would like to be involved in helping with this work then BVT would welcome them. Simply ask at the BVT stall at the monthly Farmers Market. BCC



share that stall and so you can raise any issues you wish with BCC members on duty at the stall.

Fairtrade Village Status confirmed

BCC are delighted to be able to congratulate Balerno on reaccreditation as a Fairtrade Village. The arrangement for grant of Fairtrade Village status involve an initial grant for one year followed by a reaccreditation process which if successful will lead to confirmation of the status for a further two years. Well done to everyone who was involved. BCC are still investigating with CEC questions about how Fairtrade Village status can be suitably acknowledged in terms of road signage. There are several communities around Scotland which are acknowledged on road signs as Fairtrade Towns or Villages and BCC would be keen to see Balerno's achievement acknowledged also.



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Gordon Macdonald MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament for
Edinburgh Pentlands Constituency

Pentlands MSP - ADVICE SURGERIES

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|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Wester Hailes Library | 1 st Monday of the Month at 6.30pm |
| Carrickvale Community Centre | 2 nd Monday of the Month at 6.30pm |
| Currie Library | 3 rd Monday of the Month at 6.30pm |
| Pentland Community Centre | 4 th Monday of the Month at 6.30pm |
| Ratho Community Centre | 5 th Monday of the Month at 6.30pm |

See details @ www.gordonmacdonaldmsp.info

Balerno Forum

Planning has once again been at the forefront of Council business, and it is likely to remain so for some time to come. Rumours have flown around about whether Balerno will be affected by the LDP and we now have the proposals which would include a site at Newmills. We are grateful for the efforts of all our Councillors but we now face a fight to ensure that Balerno's Green Belt is protected and also that the Lanark Road does not turn into a log jam. We encourage all residents to respond to the consultation which will be open for 6 weeks. Whether you support the draft LDP or whether you would like to see something else either being left out or being included, we encourage you to respond to the consultation process. So far as the Community Council is concerned we will be responding in line with the policy we have held to over the past two years; that the Green Belt should not be used for housing development especially where there is unused brown field building land available.

Council AGM

The following is an abbreviated version of the report given by the Chair to the Council's AGM on Thursday 5 June.

The delayed triennial elections to the Community Council were held in September 2013, having been postponed from 2012 at the direction of the City Council to avoid clashing with the local government elections of that year.

The office bearer team has since November comprised Richard Henderson (Chair), Jack Kerr (Vice Chair), Hugh Watt (Treasurer), Trudy Allen (Secretary) and David Brewster (Minutes Secretary).

Local councillors for the Balerno area are *ex officio* members of the Council and contribute significantly to our work along with our MSP and MP who are also *ex officio* members.

During the year to 31 May 2014 the Council met on 6 JUNE, 15 AUGUST, 5 SEPTEMBER, 3 OCTOBER, 7 NOVEMBER and 5 DECEMBER 2013, and on 9 JANUARY, 6 FEBRUARY, 6 MARCH, 3 APRIL and 1 MAY 2014. In addition the Council convened two public meetings during the course of the year to allow for public discussion in relation to two planning applications. Both meetings were held at Balerno Parish Church. The first, on 13 August 2013 dealt with the Cockburn Crescent case, and the second, on 13 January 2014, with the Ravelrig Road/Pilmuir case. Attendance at each public meeting numbered around 200. Communication with the public is at the heart of the Council's work. If the Council is not in contact with the community then it cannot hope to represent it. Communication with CEC and other public bodies is also an important aspect of our work. The Council published three issues of Balerno Forum over the past year in August and November 2013 and also in March 2014. While we have not yet managed a systematic assessment of how it is received by the public, informal feedback suggests that it is appreciated. Publication is however an expensive undertaking and the Council is considering how best to finance the continued publication. It is likely that the frequency of publication at the least will have to be reduced to a four monthly cycle.

In March the Council secured a grant from the Pentland Neighbourhood Partnership to allow for the replacement of the current Council Notice Board outside the Post Office. We hope that this can be installed by summer 2014, and that it will provide a more effective base for Council communications.

BCC is a member of the Pentlands Neighbourhood Partnership and is represented on the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum, two bodies convened by City of Edinburgh Council. It is also a member of the South West Communities Forum, along with Juniper Green, Currie, Ratho Community Councils and Colinton Amenity Association. The Forum is endeavouring, amongst other things, to develop common positions amongst local community councils and analogous bodies in relation to planning matters affecting the SW Edinburgh area highlighted through the Local Development Plan process.

Planning - Planning is always one of the most important areas of activity for the Council, and we have benefitted over the past year through having the services of the Planning Sub-Committee, ably chaired by Ken Shade, helping the Council both through delegation to it of certain decisions and also through access to expert advice on individual cases.

The Sub-Committee and the Council have been faced with an avalanche of large scale planning applications over the past year as the procedures for finalising SESPlan and Edinburgh Council's Local Development Plan progressed. The volume of work in this area has been significant and has absorbed a lot of time and energy across the Council both on strategic issues and also on detail applications. Over the past 18 months BCC has seen numerous expressions of interest by developers in promoting housing development in the area, and there have also been formal planning applications for over ten sites around the village. It is likely that these will be restated when the draft LDP goes to a Public Inquiry.

Education, Childrens and Families - The Council has been in protracted correspondence with CEC since early 2014 in connection with proposals by the City Council to adjust the arrangements for Community Access to Schools across the city. The Council was asked to intervene by Balerno High School Parent Council both because of the opacity of the CEC proposals and the failure of the City adequately to consult with the community on its proposals. The Council believes that there are real issues which require an answer as to the precise effects of the proposals on the community of Balerno. The Council met with CEC officials in April but did not receive satisfactory responses, and believes that the matter remains unresolved at the date of writing.

Sport and Culture - We are very happy to be able to report that the Council's representations on the absence of all weather playing pitches in Balerno have eventually borne fruit, and that construction of the 3G pitch at Malleny Park is scheduled to start in June.

Police & Fire - The Council was in correspondence with Police Scotland in connection with the proposal which emerged in late 2013 for the closure of the public counter at Balerno Police Station. The public counter closed for business in April. The Council continues to receive regular updates from Police Scotland on issues affecting Balerno.

Maintenance - It is good to be able to report positively on long-standing and seemingly intractable issues, and in this report I can record that the long awaited refurbishment of the Balerno roundabout was completed over the winter. Most people agree that first impressions tend to be the most important, and if so then getting rid of an eyesore and replacing it with something which has a certain elegance is a good thing. It is just possible that for this year at least those approaching the roundabout will not be confronted by a horsetail field instead, and that will we think shape impressions of the village. Many have appreciated the rebuilt roundabout and I would like to congratulate CEC on this outcome along with Jack Kerr who looks after Environment and Maintenance issues for the Council. In summer 2013 the Council was approached by Balerno Village Trust to see whether the Trust might be able to assist in maintenance of the flower beds in Main Street, and the Council was pleased to see the improvement which local volunteers were able to bring to the area. The area remains the responsibility of CEC and the Council has continued to press the City Council for proper allocation of resources for that.

Other issues - The Council has of course dealt with many other issues throughout the year, some perhaps minor and routine while others are potentially very significant. The Council has for example been in discussion with RBS about the proposals for closure of the Balerno Branch, and that conversation is likely to continue for some little time yet although we do not see retention of the branch by RBS as a likely outcome. Such an issue affects a large sector of the population. No less important perhaps for affected individuals, the Council has also dealt with issues relating to proposals for acquisition of council land in the village. We realize that our recommendations cannot please everyone but we think that the balance we have struck is probably about right. Problems relating to grass cutting, issues of litter and dog fouling are probably perennial but dealing with them is no less important if we are to maintain our environment and encourage pride in our village.



Ricky Henderson's Column

Following a lengthy technical and legal process, the latest incarnation of the Local Development Plan has been produced and agreed by the Council's Planning Committee. In summary, the draft LDP has been produced by Planners following Scottish Planning Policy and will now be subject to a period of further representations before being considered by the Scottish Government Reporter and then returned to the Council, probably in February 2015.

It's disappointing to note that four sites in the Pentland Hills ward have been identified for potential development. They are – Newmills Road (approx 210 units), Curriehill Road (60), Riccarton Mains Road (30) and Curriemuirend Park (165).

However, the Council's Capital Coalition submitted and agreed a motion at the Planning Committee, the effect of which is to instruct planners to reassess a large site to the south west of the Gogarburn roundabout which is within the West Edinburgh Strategic Development Area and likely to be developed in the future.

If the reassessment concludes that development can be brought forward for this site (approx. 1000 units) a case could be made for substituting this site, not currently within the LDP, and removing other more sensitive sites, including the ones I've outlined above.

Because this plan is regarded as new, previous representations can't be carried forward so new representations to the draft LDP must be made. All who responded first time will be contacted regarding the next representation period which will run from 22 August to 3 October 2014.

Myself and your other two councillors shall be discussing this with community representatives over the next few weeks and I expect we will wish to agree a way forward that could help towards having the 4 sites removed from the LDP.

A message from Bill Henderson



Balerno – Environmental Centre of Excellence?

With the Harlaw Hydro project about to become a reality and the employment of a new Balerno Village Trust Development Manager, Shona MacMillan starting next week, followed by the new Administrator, Clare Flenley towards the end of July, thoughts have moved towards the future. Balerno is a hive of activity and innovation. We have at present, in addition to the Hydro, many excellent schemes and projects such as the Music Festival, Village Screen, Farmer's Market combined with Fairtrade Village status with more in the pipeline e.g. the walled garden. This is all symptomatic of a vibrant community but where do we go from here?

I recently visited a solar house in Dundee which uses renewable technology and acts as an advice centre. The house was a former janitor's house which had fallen into disrepair and was upgraded to the best standard of the time (see <http://www.solarcitiesscotland.org.uk/>). This got me thinking, could do the same or better in Balerno? There is a desperate need to have a base for the various community projects and where better than the disused janitor's house at the high school. Could we turn this run down building into an environmental centre showcasing the best in building insulation, solar energy, wind power and hydro electricity generation? Using the expertise & knowledge available locally we could turn this building into a visitor, advice & educational centre for Edinburgh and at the same time have a base for community projects? I believe we can.

The adaptation of the janitor's house to be a well insulated building powered by solar, hydro or heat pump technology should be achievable with the expertise we have on our doorstep. By expertise I mean using the knowledge of the people involved in the Hydro Project, hopefully Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh Council, school pupils & others. The ability to have educational tours to see not just how the hydro scheme works but to visit the walled garden to see community gardens and allotments, visit the beehives and see how bees have a major impact on food production, access to the Pentland Hills seeing a working park where farmers farm side by side with recreational activities, to be able to showcase the work of SASA in crop diseases, raptor poisoning and so much more would be amazing.

On the practical side people interested in renewable energy could pop in for advice and let's not forget the fair-trade aspect. The benefits of paying a fair price for produce could be highlighted. A win-win situation.



Dominic Heslop writes

Labour and SNP Councillors on the Planning Committee voted *en masse* to accept the Local Development Plan as put forward by officials. This means the Greenfield and the Greenbelt areas across the City continue to be threatened by the aspirations of housing developers.

It also means that sites identified in the LDP in the Pentland Hills Ward remain more than ever vulnerable.

The Lab/SNP Administration motion approving the LDP included a meaningless clause which asks 'officials' to look at other sites in the City before a final decision is made in February.

This is the biggest fudge I have ever seen; manufactured to hold together this tawdry coalition rather than the future of the City of Edinburgh. I do wonder if this has more to do with September's crucial vote than anything else.

This LDP put to the people of Edinburgh is an utter disgrace which flouts the views of people from across the City who have genuine fears regarding proposals in the West, such as Maybury and Cammo and to the East with places like Brunstane.

The genesis of this flawed planning process rests with the SNP Scottish Government which has been waging an aggressive housing policy based on fanciful figures for both housing need and demand.

In Balerno, we have seen local residents continually put under pressure by threats of large-scale housing developments in the Green Belt. And now we see applications coming in such as Harlaw Gait.

One of the 'compromises' reached by Labour and SNP Councillors is to look again at part of the proposed Garden District plan. Little comfort for the residents of Currie.

The idea of approving the LDP but allowing 'further consideration' until February is nothing short of arrant nonsense. What it means is that during that period developers can still make applications which could potentially be rejected by the Planning Committee, only for them to be overturned by the Reporter as these sites have been identified in the LDP.

This planning process is woefully inadequate and needs to change immediately. Those responsible for accepting this dubious LDP should be ashamed.