

# BALERNO FORUM

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

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

## Casting a shadow over Balerno Post Office

**BCC is very concerned about the current threat to the future of Post Office services in Balerno.**

Most residents of Balerno will be aware of changes in the Post Office network over the years involving its separation from Royal Mail which was privatised in December 2013.

In January 2015 Post Office Ltd which is responsible for the Post Office network in the UK advertised it was 'looking for a successful retailer to incorporate a Post Office Local into their existing or proposed business' in Balerno. Expressions of interest were sought by 29 April 2015.

The Council contacted Post Office Ltd in February and has been assured that Post Office Ltd 'has no plans to close Balerno Post Office', Post Office Ltd say that they are aware of the place that the branch holds in the local community', and they also say that 'it is certainly not our intention to close the branch.'

The preference of Post Office under its Network Transformation Programme Ltd is however to locate Post Offices in larger retail outlet within the area.

The Network Transformation programme aims to integrate Post Offices with other host business, 'offering services from the retail position rather than a dedicated Post Office counter.' Post Office Ltd maintains that 'this often means services are available for much longer than before, in many cases from early morning until late at night, seven days a week.'

The Council recognises that there may be areas in which some Post Office customers might see advantages in location of the Post Office within a larger retail outlet as for example in longer opening hours. However, the Council is concerned that the Network Transformation policy is forcing change in traditional Post Offices and on communities without consultation. The Council believes that it is far from clear that a majority of customers, and in particular those in vulnerable groups, would in fact wish to see such changes.

The Council is also concerned that the conditions required by Post Office Ltd are such that operators of small Post Offices, which are, as in Balerno, highly valued by their communities, and are fully efficient, may be being ruled out of the Post Office network. The proposal currently being pursued by Post Office Ltd has not yet been the subject of local consultation. The Council is apprehensive that the policy is being pursued by Post Office Ltd simply because a greater return can be secured by them, and therefore, because the company is wholly owned by government, by government itself.

The Council is also aware that similar measures are proposed by Post Office Ltd in relation to Post Offices at Currie and Colinton.

If you are concerned about the potential impact of Post Office Ltd's Network Transformation policy on Balerno Post Office then write to Post Office Ltd, 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ.



### Why is Balerno Post Office under threat?

Post Office branches, along with the Royal Mail delivery service, used to be part of the General Post Office. Post Office Counters Ltd was created as a wholly owned subsidiary of Royal Mail in 1986, becoming Post Office Ltd in 2001, and it took over the Post Office branch network. However Post Office Ltd operated with significant losses, including £102M in 2008, and some 2500 Post Office branches were subsequently closed leading to considerable outcry in local communities.

Post Office Ltd was part of the Royal Mail Group but became independent of the Group in April 2012, before Royal Mail was privatised.

The UK Government holds a 30% stake in Royal Mail through Postal Services Holding Company Limited. The same holding company is also the parent of Post Office Ltd.

While Royal Mail was privatised in 2013 Post Office Ltd remains wholly owned by the UK Government, is state owned, and it continues to be responsible for the network of post offices across the country.

In November 2010, the government had committed £1.34 billion of funding up to 2015 to Post Office Ltd to enable it to modernise the Post Office network.

On 8 February 2013, Post Office Ltd announced it was planning to move around 70 of its Crown Post Offices into shops. This would reduce the Crown network, which it stated was losing £40 million a year, to around 300.

On 27 November 2013, the government committed an additional £640 million of funding for 2015 to 2018 to allow Post Office Ltd to complete its network modernisation.

The company has been implementing a Network Transformation policy for over two years now, and in February it turned its attention to Balerno Post Office. In January 2015 Post Office Ltd advertised under its Business Opportunities webpage that it is looking for a successful retailer to incorporate a Post Office Local into that retailer's existing or proposed business in Balerno.

Post Office Local is the name given to branches of the Post Office which are incorporated into retail businesses. Post Office Ltd requires that any such retail business should have a turnover of at least £4K per week before it will grant the PO franchise, thereby limiting the retailers which could successfully tender to provide the service.

Balerno Post Office is currently a sub-post office operating under a different contractual regime to that which would apply for the Post Office Local which Post Office Ltd are offering for Balerno. The outcome of Post Office Ltd's proposal could be that, while Balerno will retain a local post office it would lose its Post Office as currently provided for.

BCC meetings are at 7.30pm on the first Thursday of each month except July, and are held in Balerno High School. The remaining meetings in 2015 are on 2 April, 7 May, 4 June, 6 August, 3 September, 1 October, 5 November and 3 December.



## Police Matters

At its February meeting Balerno Community Council discussed recent press coverage which had suggested that Balerno was a hotspot for housebreaking.

The Council heard from the local police who reported that in the period between 5 December and 5 February, being the period between the last Police Report to the Council and the February meeting, there had been only one housebreaking in Balerno. A separate incident in the same period in which two vehicles had been stolen from a house in the village had resulted from a 'slip in' in which the thief got access through an unlocked door or window. A person had been arrested and charged in relation to that incident.

The Council has responded to a survey by Police Scotland as to public perception of current police provision. We have again expressed regret at the continuing absence of the public counter at Balerno Police Station.

## Local Development Plan

### *Two years late and counting*

We have been reporting on progress towards a new Local Development Plan for Edinburgh almost since the first edition of the Forum. BCC had anticipated that we would be moving considerably closer to a resolution of the current process in February of this year. However, in mid February, Edinburgh Council once again announced a delay in the process of agreeing a draft which they might send to the Scottish Ministers for approval.

The draft was to have been on the February agenda of the Planning Committee but was withdrawn in light of the failure on the part of the Council's coalition partners to agree which areas are to be recommended for housing development. CEC published its first scheme for preparation of the draft in the current LDP process in 2009; wisely it did not offer an end date for the process. In 2010 it published a revised scheme but wisely again did not offer any estimate for the completion date. In 2011 the City Council cautiously asserted that the LDP would be submitted by CEC to Scottish Ministers in the summer of 2013 and would be adopted by the end of 2014, unless of course there were any modifications.

By December 2012 CEC was suggesting that the then as yet unpublished draft LDP would be submitted to Scottish Ministers in June 2014, and that following the required examination the draft would be adopted by July 2015. That timetable predictably slipped again such that in October 2013 CEC was envisaging that the by then published first draft of the LDP might proceed through the remaining stages and be adopted in October 2015. But further slippage in 2013/14 meant that by June 2014 CEC were talking of submitting a revised draft LDP to Ministers in February 2015 with a view to the entire process being concluded by February 2016.

The February announcement meant that the draft LDP would not be put before the Planning Committee before 14 May of this year which is to say after the May General Election. This position was confirmed by the full Council on 12 March, when a move a call for an emergency meeting of the Planning Committee to produce an updated revised draft LDP2, was rejected.

In the meantime an appeal against the refusal of planning permission for housing development at Ravelrig Road was marked in early 2015 - case reference PPA-230-2140 (Planning Permission Appeal). The case has been allocated to a Reporter and is to be decided by site inspection. The Community Council has confirmed its objections to the Gladman proposals in writing to the Reporter. The target date for a decision is 17 April. The appellants, Gladman, maintain as the core of their argument that CEC has failed to provide an adequate supply of housing land as required by SESPlan.

## Friends of the Parks Scheme

Friends of the Parks are an initiative set up by Edinburgh Council which aims to help local communities to improve their local park areas. At its January meeting BCC had a presentation by CEC staff about Friends of the Parks and agreed that there is potential for the scheme to be applied in the Balerno area.



Friends of Parks are groups of volunteers who work closely with the Council and play a key role in enhancing and protecting local parks, woodlands and green spaces across Edinburgh. The groups volunteer their time and energy to get involved with a range of projects such as fundraising, clean-ups, tree planting, improving access, leading talks and walks and contributing to the management of the park. To some extent we have seen something of Friends of the Parks with the planting of bulbs in Main Street and of fruit trees around the village by the Village Trust.

At present there are some 40 Friends Groups across Edinburgh, with Friends of Muirwood Park and Friends of the Pentlands being the nearest to Balerno. Some park areas are very small, while others, like the Pentlands cover very large areas. Friends of Muirwood park meet four times each year and arrange events including bulb/wild flower planting, litter picking, bird/bat box installation and events for the children.

It is entirely up to Friends groups what level of activity they undertake. Some operate at a low level simply distributing information regarding the park, whilst others can be more active raising funds and organising events.

If you would like to set up a Friends Group for any of the greenspace areas in Balerno then BCC would be very glad to help or you can contact Edinburgh Council at the South West area office. The contact to call is Craig Dunlop on 0131 529 3716, or email at [Craig.dunlop@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Craig.dunlop@edinburgh.gov.uk).

## Applause for 2G / 3G but not for CATs

BCC congratulate all those who have been involved in the campaigns to secure the now almost complete 3G pitch at Malleny Park and to develop a 2G practice pitch at Balerno High School.

BCC first started campaigning for artificial pitch facilities in Balerno in summer 2012 when we posed the question in the Forum 'Why is there no all-weather pitch in Balerno?' It was a scandal that Balerno, alone amongst all Edinburgh areas, was denied proper facilities outdoor sports.

BCC applauds the community effort which is delivering the 2G pitch. We are worried however that it requires community effort to provide what we see as an essential community and education facility. Edinburgh Council noted in May 2013 in its Review of Community Access to Schools that 'the Currie/Balerno area has been identified as an area with a shortage of community facilities', since when after considerable pressure the 3G pitch was commissioned. But that, in our view, is not the end of the matter. BCC wrote to CEC in February about continuing dissatisfaction with aspects of Edinburgh Council's Community Access to Schools initiative, including in relation to the position of long term lets and requirements for 'up front' annual payments. BCC is satisfied that CEC are aware of the issues, and have been assured in relation to the former that if current let holders are to be impacted by CATs then they will be informed and consulted by CEC.

## Greenfield v Brownfield

**Why are there so many applications for planning permission on Greenfield sites when there's so much brownfield land already allocated?**

BCC has argued for some time that developers should be directed by planning authorities to develop on sites which have already seen development in the past rather than use up more and more Greenfield land. Investigations with the Hutton Institute by the South West Edinburgh Communities Forum of which the Council is a member, suggest that only 7% of Scotland is classified as prime quality farmland and supposedly protected from development. However it is that prime quality land which is often targeted for development.

The Council has learned however that once land is identified in a Development Plan then there is a presumption in favour of development. There is no legislative provision that allows a planning authority to refuse planning permission on a Greenfield site on the basis that there is a preferable brownfield site



## Thanks to Round Table!

BCC want to say a big thank you to Currie Balerno and District Round Table (or CBDRT as they may be better known now), for their very generous support for the Council in donating £300 for our general use.



Richard Henderson and Hugh Watt of BCC with James Archer of Currie, Balerno and District Round Table (CBDRT)

Thanks to CBDRT BCC will be able to produce editions of the Forum during 2015, and that means that the Council will be better able to ensure that the residents of Balerno can have a better chance of knowing what the Council is doing.

For those who may not know about CBDRT, they have a very simple ethos: to give something back to the community, while having fun and building friendships.

And they have been doing this since the Currie and Balerno Round Table was founded in 1974, raising money for local charities and other good causes, and promoting events in the community to make it a better place to live for everyone. CBDRT now run a number of local events which have become firm favourites including the Currie Fireworks display, Santa's Sleigh, and the stunningly popular Currie Beer Festival. If you would like to know more about CBDRT then look at their website at <http://www.cbdrt.com>.

## The Lord Provost's Fair Trade Awards 2015

The Council congratulates Balerno resident Steph Taylor on winning one of the Lord Provost's Fair Trade awards at a ceremony on 2 March in the City Chambers.

Now in their ninth year, the awards recognise the difference that residents, businesses and schools make in promoting fair trade in Edinburgh. Awards can be made in four categories – Achievement Award; Small is Beautiful Award, Faith Community Award and Fair Trade Schools Award.

The Small is Beautiful Award for 2015 went to 'Vanilla Pod', Steph's coffee and crepe business which she started in July 2014 and which she operates at weekends from outside the Harlaw Rangers House, with the help of husband Keith.

This is the second year running when Balerno has featured in the awards. Dean Park School were joint winners of the 2014 Primary Schools award. Balerno was awarded Fairtrade Village status in 2013.

It's time to talk about getting Balerno's Fairtrade Village status acknowledged on the village signs!



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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

## Pentlands MSP - ADVICE SURGERIES

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

See details @ [www.gordonmacdonaldmsp.info](http://www.gordonmacdonaldmsp.info)

## Balerno Forum

Much has happened since our last newsletter, in summer 2014, when we led with the threat of closure of the RBS branch and the continuing saga of the Local Development Plan.

Some things are constant, and the saga of the Local Development Plan again appears in this issue although not on the front page this time. The front page is devoted however to another emerging story of threat to our local facilities, this time the Post Office.

As you will see from page 2 of this newsletter, the Local Development Plan has again been delayed with no good explanation, this time until after the General Election. The effect is continuing uncertainty for residents, along with risks of the planning process being conducted without any overall local plan to set the general guidelines. This situation is unfair to the population at large; in increasing the risks of *ad hoc* decisions it is also a threat to good government.

The situation surrounding the future of our Post Office is also to be deplored. The system of sub-Post Offices has been established over decades and is at the heart of the fabric of rural and semi-rural communities. Royal Mail privatisation has brought a harder commercial edge into the equation, and we now see Post Office Ltd, while still a state owned enterprise, introducing a new brand into the lexicon - Post Office Local. While locating Post Office counters under this brand in big retail premises and introducing longer opening hours may enhance services in some senses, what it also brings is the loss of the Post Office as it is known and appreciated in small communities, like ours.

But the main argument against Post Office Local is the strike at the heart of communities; by locating a post office counter in a retail outlet we risk reduction in the scale of commercial activity within the community, reduction rather than enhancement of choice, and we see further threats to economic regeneration in small communities. We believe that Post Office Ltd, as an arm of government even if clothed as a private company, ought not to ride roughshod over the preferences of communities and certainly ought to consult fully before embarking on processes which affect small communities fundamentally. Our Post Office is an essential part of local life and we should fight hard to ensure its continuation and success.

There are times however, when problems like these pale into insignificance, and we see the world with a different and better perspective. The untimely death of Louise Duncan on 10 February compels us to stop and reflect. Her passing is first and foremost a devastating loss for her family to whom we extend our heartfelt condolences. But it is also grievous for us all, for Louise was much loved across the community, and was a true leader and inspiration for each one of us. Louise came to Balerno only in 2010 taking up her calling as Minister of Balerno Parish Church with energy, and vision and as importantly, real warmth for all. She led and championed a new engagement for Church and society, and her passing causes us to stop and reflect not only on her life and contribution but what we can and should now do to continue her work. Close on 1000 mourners packed the Parish Church and its associated halls, and also the concourse of the High School on 28 February, at a Thanksgiving Service to mark her passing and to celebrate her life. Our community is profoundly richer for Louise's life and work amongst us, and she will be greatly missed; it is no exaggeration to say that she changed this community for the better during her short time with us. This Council honours her for all that she did and all that she was to so many people.

## BCC complaint to CEC

BCC have submitted a complaint to City of Edinburgh Council in relation to the City's handling of a planning application for development within the village conservation area.

The core of the BCC complaint is that the City Council failed to comply with its own published guidelines for consideration of a development within that area. BCC does not ordinarily intervene in such issues but is concerned to ensure that the City Council should comply with its own published processes.



## Ricky Henderson's Column

### Local Development Plan Update

Balerno Forum readers will be aware by now that a final decision on the LDP has been delayed pending an outcome on the decision by the Scottish Government to "call in" a planning application to build around 600 houses at Cammo. While this site is well outside our area it is very relevant to the final shape of the LDP as the inclusion or exclusion of 600 houses will clearly have a bearing on decisions about other sites. Myself and my ward colleagues have consistently argued for the protection of existing Green Belt policy and boundaries and no doubt, will continue to do so. It would also be helpful if the Scottish Government were able to incentivise the development of brown-field sites before green field, or granting the powers to Councils to allow them to develop appropriate local policies that would have the same effect, but this doesn't look likely in the short term.

### Council Budget

After a lengthy period of consultation Edinburgh Council set its budget for 2015/16 on 12 February. As previously reported, public services are under greater strain than ever with the mantra of "doing more with less" becoming a little threadbare. £22m of savings had to be found from existing budgets while at the same time protecting front line services as much as possible. The challenge in the year ahead will be to use resources as efficiently as possible but still cope with ever increasing demands on the Council and our partners in the public and third sectors. We may see some evidence of the impacts locally.

It is becoming increasingly clear that local government finance is broken and a debate is required about the type of public services we want for our communities and, more crucially, how we wish to pay for them. I suspect this debate will develop over the months ahead and I hope some consensus can be achieved on the way forward. After all, we all want good schools, libraries, roads, pavements, refuse collection, care services and countless other things and we also want to be confident that the most vulnerable in our society get the support and help they need when necessary. A fair funding mechanism that reflects these needs and aspirations needs to be found.

### Louise Duncan

Everyone in Balerno has been touched by the tragic loss of Louise Duncan. First and foremost her family will endure the greatest sense of loss but the wider community too have lost a great friend and loyal and dedicated servant. It was an honour to attend Louise's Thanksgiving Service to share memories and reflect on a life too short but packed with love and achievement.

## A message from Bill Henderson



Along with eleven hundred others I attended the Thanksgiving Service for the life of Louise Duncan on 28 February. I was in the Concourse of the High School. There were hundreds of other mourners in the Parish Church and the Ogston and St Joseph's Halls. This was a service quite unlike anything I have ever attended anywhere. It was quite extraordinary, and this was fitting since we were there to pay tribute to an extraordinary person who spent far too short a time with us, but who in that time changed the face and the future of this community.

The fact that so many were there is testimony to the reach that her personality and ministry had even in an age in which many see no appeal in organised religion. But her message during her life was clear. For her, community was important, and even if you didn't agree that the Church was a central part of life, you could not deny that she put the Church at the heart of the community where she believed it should be.

Her passing is a loss first and foremost to her family, and we mourn with them. But she will also be so much missed by the wider community to whom she gave so much, and the job for all of us now is not just to mourn her passing, but to ensure that what she believed in, and what we all know is important, is continued in this community and beyond.

I attended the Balerno Village Fairtrade Group's annual Coffee and Craft morning on 7 March. Louise believed in justice and fairness. She recognised that justice and fairness is achieved through many routes and that Fair Trade was one of them. I was pleased to see so many people from across the generations attending that event, and in so doing honouring her memory. This was a community coming together, and it gave me confidence that we will not only overcome our loss but that we will also never forget the contribution of an extraordinary person who we have all been privileged to have live among us.

Events and politics do not stop even in such sad circumstances, and issues such as those aired elsewhere in this newsletter will continue to demand our attention. For now, though, I am not going to single out any specific item other than one: the coming election.

We are living in interesting times and the election process will bring challenges for us all. People will get annoyed and frustrated; that is politics. There is a time for the debate and when that time comes I will be part of it, and I hope that you, whatever your persuasion, will also want to be part of it. I would simply ask that we remember that debate and discussion are the right way for issues to be resolved, and that we remember that democracy is a precious gift which we all have a duty to safeguard.

## The Balerno Walkabouts

BCC meet regularly with CEC officials every three months to discuss the state of roads, pavements, grassed areas and our environment in general.

Usually the meeting which is always 'on site' takes the form of a 'walkabout' when we can point out potholes and the like, and usually the officials take a note and try to get something done about it. But because the meeting is normally only timetabled for about an hour there's a pretty severe limit to how far we can 'walkabout', and again the usual route is therefore pretty much around the village centre, and yes we have noticed that Council street cleaning may have made appearances just in advance of the walkabouts.

So we really do need your help so that we know where the potholes, uneven pavements, cracked manhole covers, dog poo sites and the likes are. Please therefore help us by sending e-mail to us at

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

## General Election Hustings 2015

Balerno Community Council will host an election hustings with Currie and Juniper Green Community Councils at Juniper Green Parish Church on the evening of Thursday 30th April. We hope to have all candidates in the Edinburgh South West constituency election present that evening. Further information will be available nearer the time on the Community Council website and also in the April C&B News.

We are grateful to C&B News for once again sponsoring the hustings.

the three valley Community Councils have hosted election hustings for the main elections over the past few years, and we are keen to promote and support the process by which electors can hear the various candidates advance their causes and defend their positions in advance of the poll.