

FREE

BALERNO FORUM

BALERNO COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S FREE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

<http://www.balernocommunitycouncil.org.uk>

Issue 4

Autumn 2012

More buses, less buses

It's not Lothian Buses fault that First Bus pulled the plug on the 44 route but there's no doubt that the service has suffered since June. Balerno Community Council are very concerned about the reports we have been receiving about passengers being passed by buses at stops because they are full up. When a driver is unable to pick up passengers due to capacity issues they do contact Lothian's Operational Control Room and this is logged in the records. We have asked Lothian for details of the number of such instances since June.

Our City Councillors have been pushing Lothian Buses for action. Lothian Buses attribute current difficulties to road works and increased demand from visitors to the City as well as an increase in the number of regular users following First Bus withdrawal. However they also promise a new timetable in October, although they also



indicate increased running times as well as extra buses. The extra buses however will not mean an increase in overall frequency of the 44 service. We are more likely to see three buses at the same time.

Lothian hope that "will make a significant positive impact on the overall reliability of the service, giving the residents of West-Edinburgh a bus service they can rely upon and have the confidence to use". The Community Council hope so too, but we will continue to monitor the situation.

The Community Council is also pursuing with Lothian Buses reports that an increasing number of 44 buses from Balerno in the evening, are terminating at Longstone. This is inconvenient for users and we think that if such a practice is developing then at the least it should be fully timetabled.

Round and round the roundabout

2012's summer was the wettest for over a hundred years, and was hardly the best time for grass cutting and ground maintenance.

While appreciating the difficulties which faced the City Council, the Community Council is nevertheless concerned about Edinburgh's performance so far as general upkeep of the green areas was concerned; and in particular areas which cannot be reached by tractor drawn mowers. It is continuing to press Edinburgh to allocate sufficient resources to address the problem and there have been signs of an increase in service especially in relation to jobs undertaken by the tractor drawn equipment.

The planted areas in Main Street continued to present problems for the City and by July they were a disgrace.

At that point and for a variety of reasons, some attempt was made to tidy up the area. Weeds, however, have an uncanny habit of growing, especially if you simply pull off the top growth rather than attacking the roots; more of that on page 3. Meanwhile the roundabout remained a complete disgrace. The Mares Tail had covered the shrubs planted last year by



the Council at great expense following the last attempt to make a presentable feature at the village centre. By early September it threatened to obscure the direction arrows and the whole thing looked completely abandoned. Then on September Farmers Market day a team from CEC carried out some clearance work removing the top growth.

Edinburgh Council is apparently keen to find a longer term solution for the roundabout, and two options are currently being considered. Both involve digging out the roundabout and effectively starting again.

The first option is to grass over the roundabout, possibly also planting a tree, although there are problems with the tree idea. The second would be to have a gravel or slab roundabout with tubs or sculpture, as for example, grindstones.

Either way however, the Community Council is not prepared to have the roundabout remain an eyesore which it was at the start of the autumn. The roundabout is after all, like it or not, a "signature" area of Balerno.

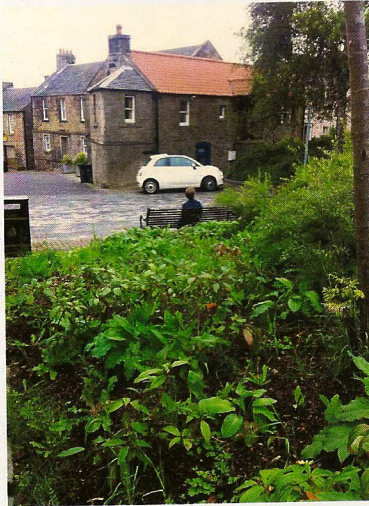
What do you think? What should be done so that Balerno could actually be proud of its roundabout?

Main Street—more of the same

The Community Council remains concerned about maintenance of the planted areas in Main Street despite work done by the City over the later summer.

The remedial work was undertaken after numerous approaches to the City including from Jack Kerr, who looks after environment maintenance issues for BCC, and from our local Councillors. In the event the work done by the City appeared to be purely cosmetic, involving simply the topping of weeds and then spreading a layer of bark or compost.

There seemed to be no attempt to remove the roots. By September the weeds were, predictably, back and looking stronger than ever. No remedial work was undertaken on the shrub area beside the car park at the south end of Main Street although the City Council now appears to see that as shrubs with a grass surround. All in all the Community Council is disappointed with the City's efforts.

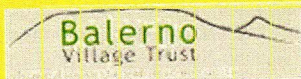


The Community Council thinks that maintenance of the Main Street is and must remain the responsibility of the City Council. However it also realises that the City is unlikely to have, or at least be prepared to commit the necessary resources to this job in view of the current economic situation and impending cuts in budgets. The Community Council therefore, at its August meeting, welcomed an informal approach by Sustain Balerno to assist in the maintenance of the Main Street planted areas and is in discussion with Sustain Balerno about how they might best be involved.

The Community Council does not intend however to let the City Council off the hook and will continue to press the City for proper resourcing for and scheduling of work in maintaining the green areas within Balerno

Congratulations to BVT

At its meeting in August the Community Council congratulated Balerno Village Trust on the award of charitable status by the Scottish Charities Regulator. The grant of charitable status is another step on the way to BVT fulfilling its original aim of assisting in the regeneration of the Balerno area, an aim which will also be taken forward by the proposed formation by the Company of Harlaw Hydro. The Council were updated by BVT at the meeting on the intention to seek to incorporate Harlaw Hydro as an Industrial and Friendly Society designed specifically to develop a micro hydro power scheme at Harlaw Reservoir. Once running, which BVT hopes may be in 2014, Harlaw Hydro will sell electricity to the National Grid with the profit going to BVT for application in accordance with BVT's charitable purposes. Before it can be built, however, Harlaw Hydro will have to raise capital of around £300K, and it is likely that the Society once established will launch a share issue over the autumn.



All weather pitch

In the Summer issue of Forum we drew attention to the fact that Balerno was alone in Edinburgh as a community without an all weather playing surface. The Community Council is considering what further steps it can take to rectify this situation and will be convening a meeting of interested groups in October.

Footpath repairs—keeping the way safe ?

In the spring 2012 issue we reported on work to improve Balerno's pavements and footpaths and congratulated Edinburgh Council on the work it was doing in the Marchbank area. However we are concerned about the prospect of further remedial work being carried out since the prioritisation of Balerno's footpaths in common with other low use, or rural, footpaths is unlikely to score highly on the City's scale. However we understand that that scale may at times fail to prioritise repairs which are assessed as necessary to avoid injury. Balerno Community Council would be seriously concerned if decisions were taken not to prioritise repairs where the assessment of the need included recognition of an increased risk of injury if repairs are not undertaken. We will be monitoring this situation closely.

Update on crossing on Mansfield Road

The Spring issue of the Forum featured the Council's support for work to introduce a crossing on Mansfield Road. At its September meeting the Council heard about plans being developed by Deanpark PTA and expressed continuing support for introduction of a crossing. BCC believes that road safety is of paramount importance and will continue to press for progress on this important issue.

Clochemerle no more



Many years ago Balerno had a public toilet block. It was insanitary and badly sited, at the foot of Main Street and effectively in the primary school playground. Few mourned its passing but the failure to replace it means that Balerno is the only community in the Water of Leith Valley which cannot offer visitors the certainty of a comfort break.

The absence of a public convenience means not only that Balerno must be seen as less than completing welcoming to those who have trekked or are about to set out across the Pentlands, but more importantly that traders in the village are in effect expected to provide this service free gratis and for nothing. The Community Council is investigating the options although a Clochemerle style facility is not on the agenda - just as a row of porta-loos would be equally off limits. Your thoughts on this perennial and at times pressing problem would be very welcome.



Holyrood and Westminster

A number of my constituents have written to me to express concern about the possible development of the new barracks at Kirknewton on the Lanark Road. At the moment this airfield is used by light aircraft and is largely undeveloped.

The government's original plan was to close Redford and Dregghorn barracks and relocate all the activities to Kirknewton. The reasoning was that the land at Dregghorn and Redford was far more valuable and with the cash received a new purpose-built development could be put in place.

Anyone who has visited the barracks will know that the accommodation is not ideal and, although some money has been spent on it, it is hardly suitable for men and women who are being asked to make huge sacrifices to defend us.

The problem is, it turns out, that when the government made this announcement in 2010, it based its calculations on property valuations made in the mid part of the last decade when property prices were much higher. On top of that, Redford in particular has a large number of listed buildings which cannot be altered to any great extent.

Despite having raised the matter in parliament through questions on a number of occasions, the government cannot say what or when the decision will be.

The problem with Kirknewton is that, if it is to be developed, there is precious little in the way of Infrastructure like water supply, or housing, let alone schools and shops which would be needed to accommodate quite a large number of people and it is bound to have some impact on the traffic on Lanark Road.

All this uncertainty is highly unsatisfactory. Nobody, I think, would argue that nothing needs to be done. The decision will have to be made sooner rather than later.

I shall keep you informed.

Alistair Darling MP

Parliament is back after the recess and the legislative programme announced by the Scottish Government will see 15 bills introduced to the Scottish Parliament, including a flagship bill to enable the coming referendum on an independent Scotland.



The Post-16 Education Reform Bill will provide an underpinning legal basis for some aspects of the Scottish Government's ambitious programme of post-16 learning reform. It will support the development of a system that is better aligned to meet the needs of learners and employers, and therefore help drive jobs and growth. It will address key issues such as college and university structure and provision, college regionalisation and widening access.

The Bankruptcy Bill will modernise bankruptcy law for the 21st century. It will ensure access to fair and just processes of debt relief and debt management for the people of Scotland, which takes account of the rights and interests of those involved. It will ensure Scottish debt solutions are fair to both the indebted individual and creditor, returning as much as possible to creditors.

One controversial piece of legislation is the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill which will allow same sex couples to marry and allow civil partnerships to be registered through a religious ceremony. The bill will ensure no religious bodies and celebrants have to take part in same-sex ceremonies, unless they wish to do so.

Other key pieces of legislation include bills to provide 600 hours of childcare for three and four year olds and looked after two year olds; greater support for victims of crime; and the introduction of a legal framework for sustainable public procurement.

As you can see the next 12 months are going to be busy for the Parliament as we scrutinise the 15 Bills as they proceed through the legislative process.

Gordon Macdonald MSP

Balerno Forum

Balerno Forum is the newsletter of the Balerno Community Council, aiming to keep you in touch with what the Council is doing and also with what Edinburgh Council and other relevant authorities may be doing which might directly affect Balerno.

The Community Council meets once a month, on the first Thursday of the month, at 7.30pm. in Balerno High School. Our meetings are open to the public and we welcome your contributions especially during our regular agenda item, Public Question Time. While we are unlikely to be able to answer every question fired at us we will always look into issues brought to our attention, and will get back to you with the answer when we have solved the problem.

In previous issues of this newsletter we have asked for feedback and comment and we have had a number of comments both to the website and also direct to members of the Council at the monthly Balerno Farmers Market where the Community Council has been sharing a stall with Balerno Village Trust for the past few months.

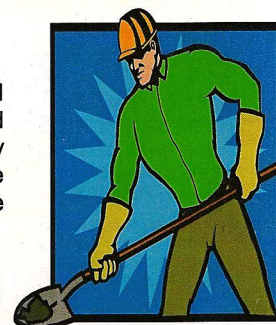
Since we started publishing the Forum we have been telling you what has been happening and asking for your comments. Now we need to know what you think about things which might be suggested for the future. In the summer issue Cllr Bill Henderson drew attention to the Edinburgh and the Lothian's Structure Plan, and the possibility of further large scale development in Balerno. Balerno Community Council does not think that the large scale developments referred to in Bill Henderson's column are in the best interests of this community. But we need to know whether you agree with that line. We need you to let us know what you think about the issue of what Balerno should look like in twenty years time. Get in touch and tell us.

They're digging up the roads again, or so it seems

Do you wonder why it always seems that the roads are always being dug up and no sooner are they fixed than they're dug up again by another agency? Well BCC recently had occasion to look into this area and discovered that Local Authorities have a duty under law to coordinate road works between the various utility companies etc. This stems apparently from Section 118 of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991. One of the main instruments for the coordination is the Scottish Roadworks Register which you can find via the Scottish Road Works Commissioner's website at <http://www.roadworksscotland.org>.

So now you know.

There's never a dull moment with the BCC.





Ricky Henderson's column

I continue to receive complaints from local residents and businesses about litter in and around the village at lunch time. It has been suggested that the source of the problem may be young people from the High School. I find it hard to believe that young people would be guilty of such a disregard for their local environment and community, my experience is quite the opposite, but perhaps if you do have some influence over a young person close to you, a gentle reminder about not dropping litter might help towards finding a solution.

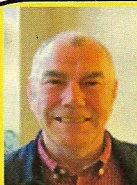
A combination of First's withdrawal, the Festival and city centre tram works resulted in a less than perfect service from the normally reliable 44 bus during the summer (?) months. I believe Lothian Buses may not have been completely prepared for the impact for First Buses decision to abandon the route and, combined with the other factors mentioned this led to buses being overcrowded and not running to schedule. I'm pleased to report that Lothian have acknowledged that there was a problem and are taking steps to rectify this by increasing service frequency. By October we will hopefully have experienced a recognisable improvement.

At the end of August I was delighted to accept an invitation to the AGM of the 51st Pentlands Balerno Scout Group. A packed hall received reports on the year's activities and the heartening news that numbers of beavers, cubs and scouts are steadily increasing year on year. Pretty impressive these days to see local groups that rely on volunteers going from strength to strength. Doesn't happen by accident of course and there is a band of very committed people who carry out all the behind the scenes tasks that are necessary to keep things going. I also learned why Scouts have a left-handed handshake. Very interesting....

Dominic Heslop writes



As the summer comes to an end for another year once again we have seen horrendous downpours leading to extensive flooding in parts of Edinburgh South West, especially in Baberton Mains. But that doesn't mean the Council can be excused from all its other responsibilities and the big bugbear over the last few months has been the vexed issue of grass cutting, or rather the lack of it, on our open spaces. Pentland Hills Councillor Dominic Heslop has been asking questions and one of the most striking figures obtained is that since January alone there have been 570 recorded complaints in the South West neighbourhood area regarding grounds maintenance. That is why Dominic and his colleagues has sought an urgent briefing from officials so that next year we do not have to go through this again. Thankfully the Council has agreed to this and such a briefing will take place at the end of October by which time the Council's budgeting resource exercise should have been completed and hopefully there can be a redistribution of staff and other aspects properly reviewed. Commenting Dominic said "From Baberton Mains Wood to the Deanpark/Crosswood area of Balerno people are frustrated by the lack of attention to our green spaces. The Council successfully put in place a management scheme to avert previous problems we have had with snow during the winter months. What we now need to see are similar measures for grass cutting during the summer months "People in our part of the world take pride in their area and badly-maintained grounds maintenance is a major source of irritation especially when the grass reaches 6 feet! We pay our Council Tax to get the services we require and expect from the Council. So let's see some action!"



A message from Bill Henderson

Are Cooperatives the way forward?

I recently attended a presentation entitled "A Cooperative Edinburgh - will the Council join in?" At this presentation the view was expressed that Council services need to be transformed by *shifting* power; so that the Council is working much more 'in partnership' with the local people it is ultimately here to serve. This could be a total transformation on how services are provided. Many cooperatives could be set up covering many key areas such as Energy, Housing, Childcare & Social Care.

So how could a cooperative work? I attended an energy workshop where examples were given on hydro, wind and solar cooperatives. There are several school solar energy cooperatives where people join together to put in place solar panels on schools to generate electricity. The solar panels then generate electricity which is used to reduce electricity bills for the school and excess electricity is fed back into the grid with a feed in tariff paid to the cooperative. The capital to fit the panels is raised through a share offer which pays a dividend to the shareholder with surplus cash used for the benefit of the school. All shareholders have one vote irrespective of amount invested on decisions affecting the cooperative.

This is just one example of a cooperative. Others could be for nursery provision, housing allotments or even our neglected green spaces. Could the council supply the machinery, funding and tools for locals to make improvements to clear up overgrown areas, form community gardens or play areas? It's an idea worth thinking about. More information will be coming out in the future as to how the council will play its part. It's an exciting concept. In Balerno there is an excellent example of this cooperative approach with the Balerno Hydro Project. Personally I'm keen to see this project up and running as soon as possible.

In the meantime more information on cooperatives can be found at

www.cdscotland.co.uk

Balerno Community Council

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Richard Henderson
Balerno Parish Church

Ex officio members

Alistair Darling MP
Gordon MacDonald MSP
Cllr Bill Henderson
Cllr Ricky Henderson
Cllr Dominic Heslop

**Meet BCC at the Balerno Farmers Market
on the 2nd Saturday each month**

Important contact information

Police	0131 331 3131
Pentland Medical Centre	0131 449 2142
Balerno High School	0131 477 7788
Deanpark Primary School	0131 449 4529
Balerno Library	0131 529 5500
City of Edinburgh Council	0131 200 2327
Lothian Transport	0131 554 3269
Social Services	0131 469 2801
St. John's Hospital	01506 523000

