

BALERNO FORUM

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

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

The Greenbelt — Important to everyone

We all know that the Green Belt is not a permanent fixture; this map shows how it has shifted over the years since first proposed in 1949.

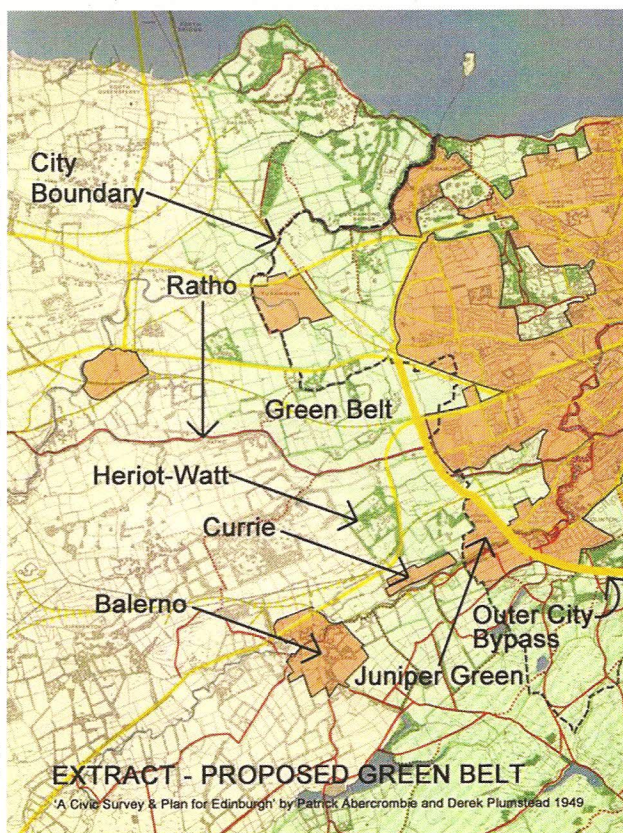
We know that over the 50 plus years since the first Edinburgh Green Belt was introduced in 1957 the boundaries have been moved out to take in whole swathes of new land, but only when the urban sprawl has moved out as well. In 1920 Edinburgh occupied 53 sq. miles; in 1975 with local government boundary changes, it occupied 75 sq. miles. As Archie Clark noted at the Currie Community Council meeting to discuss the Garden District proposals, with the coalescing of villages 'the physical boundaries between communities such as Slateford and Kingsknowe, Colinton and Juniper Green are indistinct. Before long, community participation in local events diminishes. 'But why is the Green Belt under threat? Again quoting Archie Clark 'the reason is that the SESplan Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) are being used to calculate the number of houses required. That is then converted into acres of land by Local Authorities and developers. The HNDA is based on scenarios, estimates and trends and comes with a warning from the General Register of Scotland that its figures are speculative. While Local Authorities have regard to the number of brownfield sites that await redevelopment, developers see these as difficult and costly ('non effective') whereas greenfield sites are easy to build on. Thus the brownfield sites are not being used up and developers' attention is focusing on undeveloped land.'

We have noted in our submissions to CEC and in the response to the Cockburn appeal that Scotland as a whole possesses only about 17% of good quality land for agriculture and only 8% of that is described as of prime quality.

The question for planners and politicians is how to meet the growing need for housing. One answer of course is to expand the city outwards; but we have seen what that means with Edinburgh expanding its built area over the past hundred years and more.

Parts of the Green Belt as originally envisaged lay east of what is now the City Bypass. BCC are quite clear that Balerno should not lose its Green Belt or its rural setting from which it draws its character.

BCC believe also that it is certainly now time for a more sophisticated look at how we do provide housing for the future what is left of our countryside and our rural economy disappears.



Council opposes Ravelrig Road application

Since the last issue of the Forum, in December, the Council and the community at large, has witnessed the lodging of a planning application by Gladman Developments for permission in principle to build up to 120 dwellings including 25% affordable homes on farmland at Ravelrig Road.

The application was lodged on 16 December and the period for lodging comments was extended in view of the Christmas shut down until 24 January. By the end of that period some 271 comments had been posted electronically on the CEC web portal. E-mail and letters with comments to Edinburgh Council will appear in due course.

The extended period for lodging of comments allowed the Council both to consider the issue at its meeting on 9 January, and also to convene a public meeting at Balerno Parish Church on 13 January to inform residents and to allow for discussion of the proposal.

At that meeting the Council outlined the background to the application and the planning considerations in issue, including in particular that the proposed development was inconsistent with Green Belt policies. The Council was disappointed that the applicants had cancelled a scheduled meeting on 5th December, for the reason that they preferred not to make a presentation to the Council with the public present.

Update on Cockburn Crescent Housing proposal

Balerno Community Council has restated its objection to housing development at Cockburn Crescent.

CEC's refusal on 21 November of David Wilson Homes application to build up to 280 houses at Cockburn Crescent has now been appealed by the developer. The appeal will be determined by a Reporter from the Scottish Government Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals.

BCC has submitted further representations, in addition to those which it had lodged opposing the application, and that can be seen on the BCC website. The period for lodging responses to the appeal expired on 13 February.

Separately David Wilson Homes lodged a new PAN process in December for part of the eastern part of the Cockburn Crescent site and held a public exhibition in Balerno Community Centre on 20 February. BCC are requesting information from the developers, given in particular that the public exhibition has, again taken place during a school holiday week. No details of the proposal were available at the time of writing.

No hiding place! Part 2

or how Balerno Community Council works

We promised in the last issue to give some more information about how the Council works and about some of the changes we are considering at present.

In essence we work through a monthly meeting at which there is always a Public Question Time where residents can bring up issues which are concerning them. The agenda for the monthly meeting is circulated usually about a week before the meeting itself and we intend to put that on the website with a hard copy in our notice board also at the same time if possible.

The agenda is made up on the basis of an assessment of the significant issues which are current from time to time. There are no prizes for guessing that planning is usually high on the list, but so is the state of paths and roads, the planted areas and generally, our environment. That is partly because one of the members of the Council specifically looks after Balerno Maintenance issues. He liaises with CEC departments about what they intend to do about particular matters. And even if there are times when CEC don't tell us in advance - as for example the Lanark Road night time closures last autumn - or barely in advance - like the Roundabout work in January - in general terms they do want to know what we think of matters before they start out.

We think that the model of sub-committees does work well - the Planning sub committee for instance meets regularly to assess the currently very substantial number of initiatives and individual applications. So we are going to experiment with that approach and put in place a number of portfolios and sub-committees which will monitor developments across a number of different areas. We have also decided that the best approach for that is to mirror the remits adopted by Edinburgh Council.

Update on Goodtrees

BCC understands that Miller Homes intend to submit a planning application for the Goodtrees Farm site before end April following a second public exhibition on an as yet undisclosed date in March.

Balerno Forum

This is the first issue of the Forum for 2014, which promises to be a busy year both locally and further afield. The turnout at the Meet Your Politicians event on 9 December in Currie indicates that there is real interest in local issues as well as national ones, and not simply on where new housing might be located.

BCC are anxious to ensure that as much information as possible is available to you so that you can both be aware of what is going on, and also draw attention to things that your local representatives may not know about.

That is why we are structuring the Council in a way in which we hope we will be better able to respond to issues as they emerge, and it's why we want to find the best ways of ensuring that you have the best opportunity of finding out what is going on.

A lot will happen over the coming twelve months. Planning issues will constantly demand attention, including at times we were not expecting. We know that the Local Development Plan will require our attention during May, but the consultation period is only six weeks and we do not yet know what may be in the draft. Both Ravelrig Road and Cockburn Crescent will demand attention. The latter importantly as a second application comes forward with a public exhibition in late February.

On the plus side the new all-weather pitch - see p3 - will be a colossal boost to the area, while the refurbished roundabout promises, we hope, an end to the unkempt and jungle-like approach to the village. And we are also grateful on your behalf to the volunteers who are keeping the Main Street flower beds tidy.

The Meet Your Politicians event started with a debate about local communities, with the question almost seeking to compare one with another. We are proud of our village and community although we also see it as part of the wider community with immediate neighbours in the Water of Leith Valley, and we will work with them to try to ensure that development of area is in the interests of all.

But we should not be complacent and assume that Balerno can always continue to be as successful as it is. What makes Balerno a place to be proud of really is the mass of volunteers who do so much right across the spectrum of activities. They ensure that people will look at us as a community that does work; part of BCC's job is to ensure that that spirit can continue to flourish in Balerno.

Community Access to Schools

Balerno's schools are not only excellent in the educational opportunities they offer to their pupils and students, but also in the access they offer to the community at large. BCC supports the initiatives which our schools are pursuing and also the work of the Parent Councils in representing parent and students views. About two years ago CEC began a process which would see significant changes in the way in which Community Access to Schools (CATS) will be delivered across the City. BCC is seriously concerned about the way in which that initiative has been developed and about the effect which it may have on the delivery of Community Access in Balerno.

At present CATS - for sport, lifelong learning, adult education, youth work and to provide support to community groups - is supported by four separate systems, i.e. Primary Schools, designated Community High Schools, other Secondary Schools and the school based Adult Education programme. CEC's aim is to develop a single system, centrally managed and resourced; CEC say it would be both more efficient, and less costly, and that there would be consistency of approach throughout the city that would further enhance the place of schools at the heart of local communities.

BCC understands that a central aspect of the CATS initiative is that individual school's income target responsibility is transferred to the Community Learning and Development Service, along with the additional resources which support CATS in the eight Community High Schools. The resources would be used to increase Community Access in all schools. This means that Balerno High School is likely to lose resources, while at the same time also losing the ability to respond to local demand.

A specific review of Balerno High School to test better collaboration to maximise access to facilities, similar to tests carried out at Gracemount and Queensferry did not take place. Currie/Balerno was identified by CEC as an area with a shortage of community facilities; efforts were focused - in the event successfully - on the need to provide a 3G synthetic pitch suitable for both rugby and football.

BCC can understand CEC's overall policy intention. However BCC is concerned about the process applied by CEC in developing a policy which could have a serious impact on this community. At the very least CEC should have included an open public consultation. We also take the view that if CEC intended to review the Balerno situation separately, and if it has not done so, then it ought not to make decisions until such time as such a review has been completed.

We are also deeply sceptical about an initiative which would remove resources from Balerno, but as yet we do not have access to sufficient information to enable us to make a proper analysis.

A copy of BCC's letter to CEC on this subject is on our website.

Sporting chance

All go for new all weather pitch

There was more good news for another of BCC's campaigns, with the confirmation in December that Balerno will get an all-weather pitch.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill made the announcement of a £300K investment on a bitterly cold day at Malleny Park. The funding comes partly from the Scottish Government's Cashback for Communities to build new, full-sized 3G pitches. The Malleny Park announcement was one of the first wave of funding allocations from a pot of £3.15 million made up from the CashBack for Communities programme, coupled with £1 million from Sportscotland and £150,000 from WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Limited). £50K of the Malleny fund comes from WREN.

BCC recognise that the development will mean some restriction on access to the Malleny Park as it currently stands but considers that the benefit to the community overall from the development outweighs any disadvantages.

BCC joined with others two years ago in arguing for an all weather pitch for Balerno. Balerno High is the only secondary school in Edinburgh which does not have such a facility.

We hope that the pitch can become a reality in time for the autumn.



What a difference!

In the December issue we asked the question whether we were about to see something at the roundabout and in January we certainly did. Granted, yet again CEC did go ahead without really involving the Community Council but at least something has been done and the eyesore has been addressed. BCC has been campaigning for some considerable time for the earth to be completely removed, and that has now been done. A weed inhibitor was put down and 100mm of concrete poured on top followed by resin bonded surface membrane replacement with a concrete base and resin-bonded surface. Three dwarf firs - growth rate of less than 1" per year - complete the job, and the Council is grateful to CEC for eventually getting this job done.



Police matters

Police Scotland confirmed on 7th February that the public counter at Balerno Police Station will close with effect from 3 March.

Closure follows a review in the autumn of 2013 in which closure of several public counters was proposed along with the reduction of opening hours at other stations. In the event the number of stations which will lose public counter service has been reduced to two, namely Balerno and Oxfangs.

BCC is seeking further information from Police Scotland as to the basis for the decision. BCC receives an oral report every month about reported crime in the Balerno area, and the police answer questions both about crime levels and precautions which can be taken. They tell us that many people are reluctant to report suspicions they have about possible criminal activity. Reporting your suspicions can prevent crime and can lead to solving of crime; the police have asked BCC actively to encourage residents to report anything which strikes them as suspicious.

You can get details of the police monthly crime reports to BCC on our website.

Keeping in touch

Do you ever think 'I wish I'd known about that', or 'Why don't they do something about that'. Along with CEC Community Learning and Development, BCC are looking at ways to ensure that more people can have a better chance of knowing the things that are going on in our community. The C&B does a great job but we think there may be ways in which we can improve the various networks on which any community depends.

One of the things we are looking at is the use of notice boards, and that in turn led us to look at the availability of notice board space.

BCC are very grateful to the Community Centre which makes available the use made of both the main window in the hallway and also the walls of the entrance hall, but we also believe that the extent to which that use has grown over recent past indicates that there is a real need for an increase in the total available space.

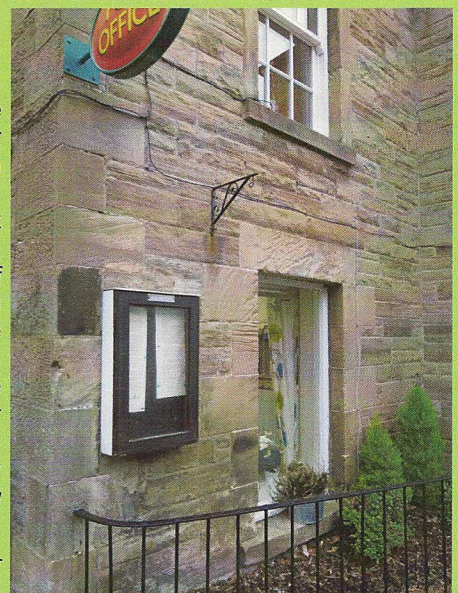
BCC are therefore looking at how we can offer more space in places where people will be able to pick up information about local events and news. We are looking for your help in identifying places which might be suitable in the village centre.

BCC already has a notice board outside the Post Office and we are looking into both how we can replace that - it is over thirty years old and looking a little sad - and also how we can ensure that you can have best access to information both there and elsewhere.

If you have ideas about where notices could be posted then let us know by e-mailing us or by speaking to members when you see them around.

Separately we need to know how best to ensure we know what you want to see happening. Our meetings are always open to the public and we also have a working website which is regularly monitored for incoming mail, but we need to know whether there are other ways you would like to be able to contact us, like letter boxes in the Mill, or the Library for instance.

So let us know what you think about what might be useful and how we can meet that.





Ricky Henderson's column

Council Budget / Public Services

Edinburgh Council set its budget for 2014/15 on 13th February. Funding for public services is reducing and this is placing increased pressure on the Council to deliver effective, good quality local services. The Council has £940m to spend in the next financial year but has also had to find £36m of savings. The stark reality is that Council funding is reducing while at the same time the demand for services is increasing and so are costs.

Nevertheless, following a lengthy public consultation exercise towards the end of last year I think the Council has managed to identify areas that are most important to local people in Balerno and beyond, and protect those front line services, as far as possible. Education and schools, caring for the elderly and vulnerable and maintaining roads and pavements are key priorities and, where possible, savings have been made through "back office" and management changes.

Looking forward, the financial challenges will continue to grow and many difficult decisions will be faced. As always, I welcome feedback on specific services, or the more general debate about public services in Scotland and how they should be funded.

Contact Details – If you want to raise any issues with me I can be contacted by telephone on 0131 529 3269 or by e-mail at ricky.henderson@edinburgh.gov.uk – or in writing at the City of Edinburgh Council, City Chambers, High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1YJ.

Keep Balerno Beautiful

We have been asked to remind readers that it is an offence to dump waste other than at recycling sites. Please report fly tipping to the Neighbourhood Office at 0131 527 3800. Remember also that you can dump waste for recycling at local bins in the upper car park in the village or at CEC's recycling centres.

A message from Bill Henderson

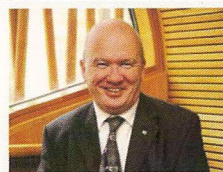


The roads & footpaths in the Balerno area, as with the majority of Pentland Hills Ward, have suffered from years of neglect. Following a prioritisation review this is about to change. A separate allocation of funds for type 3 & type 4 roads should mean that more of our rural roads will at least have a chance of being resurfaced properly. This won't happen overnight; in fact it will take several years for some of our roads to reach the top. This year for example the only road within the whole of Pentland Hills Ward which scores high enough is Kingsknowe Road South. If you consider the size of Pentland Hills Ward, which covers Ratho, Balerno, Currie, Hermiston, Juniper Green, Baberton Mains, Clovenstone, Kingsknowe & part of Wester Hailes you can see the scale of the problem.

There is better news for Balerno on what is classified as local roads i.e. roads in housing estates. In the next financial year resurfacing work should be carried out in Deanpark Place, Marchbank Drive, Marchbank Place, Newmills Road and Newmills Avenue. I have checked and it is also proposed that Marchbank Grove will also be resurfaced.

The only pavement in Balerno proposed for resurfacing is Newmills Road.

In the meantime whilst we await proper resurfacing it is important that potholes are reported as quickly as possible. This not only stops the deterioration but makes it safer for all road users particularly cyclists & pedestrians. You can report potholes and other defects to CLARENCE by e-mail clarence@edinburgh.gov.uk or by phoning 0800 232323 which is a Freephone number.



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 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



Dominic Heslop writes

I read with great interest the last edition of *Balerno Forum* with its emphasis on the plethora of planning applications coming forward for this area. Readers will yet again appreciate that, as a member of the Planning Committee, I cannot comment on individual applications as this would prejudice my position prior to them coming before the Committee. This could then lead to me potentially losing my vote and not being able to have a say on developments facing Balerno.

That, however, does not prohibit me from writing about planning in general terms!

Having been on the Planning Committee for almost two years I don't mind admitting that I continue to be perplexed by inconsistencies in the planning process administered by City of Edinburgh Council. In particular, I find it very difficult to understand how what can be acceptable or not acceptable in one year is able to change almost the following year. I think of an application not far from us, whereby a person applied for permission to alter his front garden, which had no fencing or gates, into a gravel pitch so that he could park his car and therefore alleviate on-street parking, something many people have concerns about. I will make no comments on the merits or the defects associated with such an idea, as the person making this application lived next door to a chap who had done the same thing. This application was refused. I am sure you can imagine how confused I was by this decision by the planning department, but nowhere near as confused as the applicant!

I am aware of similar cases in Balerno with regard to a lack of consistency, for example people wanting to buy adjoining Council owned land where some were approved and others refused! Generally, the Council needs to consider whether its existing policies regarding Council owned land sales are in keeping with their requirement for housing in the city, when we see brownfield sites sold to commercial operations.

Until the planning department on CEC apply some consistency in their approach to applications, I am sure all of us will have concerns for the future of Balerno and the rest of the city.