

Balerno Forum

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A better future for Marchbank Park?



crocuses in Marchbank Park on 22 March; the day before lockdown

Parks and green spaces are immensely important for any community. As the books say 'they provide intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and recreation benefits', but that's a bit heavy really. The fact is that they can and should be places which help the community. But to meet expectations and fulfil their potential parks have to be looked after and communities have to be involved in that, and all of that applies just as much to communities which have direct and immediate access to hills and countryside open space as to anywhere else.

In total there are 141 parks in Edinburgh with 30 in the South West area alone, and Balerno is home to two of those; Marchbank and Malleny. While Malleny Park is now for the most part a sports ground with a 3G pitch occupying the majority of the space, Marchbank Park is a Community or Neighbourhood Park. There is an informal football pitch in the open field area within the park and a small playpark which is in need of some modernisation in one corner, but otherwise the park is an irregularly shaped open area with many old trees echoing the original layout of fields first laid down in the 18thC. In recent years there has been planting of daffodils and crocuses for spring colour and wildflower areas for summer. While the park boasts only one bench in the main field area at present, the potential for doing more to tempt people to linger and chat in different parts of the Park is certainly there.

Like most things parks are ranked in terms of quality with a Green Flag Award for the very best. Edinburgh is home to 34 of the 71 parks across Scotland which have been awarded a Green Flag, the park equivalent of the Blue Flag Award for beaches. The Edinburgh

list includes areas as diverse as the Pentland Hills Regional Park, Princes Street Gardens, Harrison Park and Muir Wood Park in Currie. Marchbank Park was ranked at 80= in terms of quality in the list of Edinburgh parks for the year to 2019. a fall of 4 places over the year the park has been better managed by CEC as the years have passed although it still sits at 21st out of 30 parks in SW Edinburgh in terms of quality.

Balerno's Community Plan of March 2019 recommended that Marchbank Park should be protected and maintained to a far higher standard than it is at present. While it didn't say how that might be done, steps which can be taken include both changing the status of the park to match that of many other public parks in Edinburgh which are highly rated for quality, and also encouraging public involvement in management of the Park.

So how would those help? Well, if the public are involved in management then you increase the chances of things being done to enhance the Park; apart from anything else you can agree a Management Plan with the City Council. The Friends of Muir Wood Park agreed a Plan with CEC in 2016 for the period to 2021, covering maintenance and development amongst other things. There are many Friends of the Parks groups across Edinburgh each helping to look after their own park.

Altering the status of Marchbank Park would increase the protection of a public asset which exists for the enjoyment of everybody. At least 33 of Edinburgh's Parks are held in trust. Inverleith Park, the Meadows and George V Playing Fields in Currie are just three examples. Most of Edinburgh's Green Flagged parks have special protections which ensure not only that they are there for the community at large, but that they can more readily be improved.

(contd p2)

Contact Balerno Community Council via FaceBook or at balernocc@gmail.com

Core paths? Safe for walking? Safe for cycling?

Please think of other path users



Back in late May Balerno Community Council promoted a poll of residents through its own Facebook pages and Balerno Cares asking for views on a number of options for safety improvements on local roads. The impetus was the City's 'paths for everyone' initiative. The response was fantastic with almost 600 votes being cast in support of the seven options canvassed, and the Community Council forwarded the proposals to the City at the end of May.

We also recorded those preferences on the City's interactive map which is open to anyone to access at; <https://edinburghspacesforpeople.commonplace.is/>

We asked CEC in particular for reduction in speed limits to 20mph for sections of road, for better road signage and for road markings.

We focused mainly on improving safety on Harlaw Road and Mansfield Road. There have been large increases in numbers of pedestrians and cyclists on those roads, which is not surprising given that they are the main routes for access to the Pentlands and to the Harlaw and Threipmuir reservoir walks. Both roads are designated by Edinburgh Council as Core Paths, and as such are the recommended main walking and cycling access routes to those areas. Cockburnhill Road is also part of the same designated Core Path 19 network, and that means it also is recommended by Edinburgh Council for walking and cycling.

So what's a Core Path and what's special about them? After the Land Reform Act way back in 2003, which granted everyone the right of responsible access, also known as the 'right to roam', every local authority in Scotland had to prepare a Core Paths Plan to identify a system of key routes for 'non-motorised access' throughout their area. That means that the emphasis is supposed to be on road users other than car drivers. Edinburgh Council's response was the Core Paths Plan of Spring 2008, and Core Path 19 of which the Plan said 'These quiet rural roads make an attractive cycling or walking circuit.'

(Marchbank Park; contd from p1) Marchbank Park is neither a Field in Trust, nor does it have the support of a Friends of the Park group. Nor is it amongst the Green Flagged Parks of Edinburgh. The truth is that much more could have been done to protect and enhance Marchbank Park over the years since it was formed when 'Bell's estate' was built in the late 60's and early 70's.

Muir Wood Park is described as "No more than an oasis of greenery in the centre of a housing estate, this tiny park is none the less a little wonderland to those who know it.' It is maintained now by Edinburgh Council, helped by its Friends Group, and it has been Green Flag accredited since 2011, marking out that 'little wonderland' as quality greenspace. Is there a lesson there for Balerno?

There are almost 30 criteria for award of Green Flag ranging from maintenance to signage to use of chemicals to community involvement to quality of information to control of dog fouling; but they are a useful checklist for what might be considered when we are looking at Balerno's park provision.

There are other Community Parks in Edinburgh which are not specially protected but both the Community Council and the Village Trust think that now is the time to put down a marker that parks in our community are important. The Community Council and the Village Trust are considering how best our community might both protect Marchbank Park and enhance it for the benefit of the entire community. That may very well involved development as a Field in Trust, and also trying to enhance community involvement. As part of that process we will be canvassing views across the community and we hope you will want to be involved. We want to develop a vision for Marchbank Park which meets the aspirations of the community, and we can start that here and now by inviting you to let us know what you think is important by completing the online survey at <https://tinyurl.com/marchbankpark>.

Let us know what you think!

The roads are no longer as quiet as they may have been, however, and many people might think twice before setting out to walk along them.

The Community Council has for many years argued for better access to the Pentlands for pedestrians and cyclists. Both Harlaw Road and Mansfield Road carry large amounts of traffic to car parks at the reservoir, which provide jumping off grounds for walking and cycling in and around the Pentland Hills. Neither, however, has a pavement or path alongside it, and they are therefore intrinsically dangerous for pedestrians. They are also narrow and in places steep and winding with blind bends; that probably makes them dangerous for both pedestrians and cyclists especially when taking into account that the speed limit is 60mph.

The Community Council has now also repeated its demand that a safe pathway to the Pentlands from Balerno for both pedestrians and cyclists must be developed

The Community Council has also suggested alterations at the Hannahfield Bends on the A70 and on the Water of Leith path. Hannahfield also suffers from there being no pavement or path at the double bends before the Balerno boundary. The A70 carries a very heavy traffic load especially during rush hours with a significant number of commuters from West Lothian and beyond. At least the speed limit at that point is 30mph at present, but again BCC has been asking for permanent improvement at that point for years. The measure for the Water of Leith path is simply for better signage to remind users that the path is a shared facility, and we are pleased that additional signage is being installed on that route and at access points to it, and we hope on other paths shared by cyclists and pedestrians.

Follow guidance
on physical distancing



Fairtrade Village Accreditation Renewed

Balerno's accreditation as a Fairtrade Village has been renewed until 2022. The village became a Fairtrade Village in 2013, and that status was previously renewed in 2014, 2016 and 2018.

The Community Council has supported each application, and we are pleased that the community's commitment to the Fairtrade principles has once again been recognised by the Fairtrade Foundation.

The Community Council has supported the continuing endeavours to have Gateway Signs put up on the A70 at the entrance to the village declaring its Fairtrade status and it will renew its requests to Edinburgh Council and other authorities for the signs to be installed.

The initial requests for installation of signage were made over 5 years ago.

There are signs on all major routes into Edinburgh proclaiming Edinburgh to be a Fairtrade City. It is time that the City Council allowed Balerno's signs to be put up.

Emergencies happen - resilience in Balerno

Over the past decade or so, the UK has experienced severe winter weather, flooding, travel disruption, fuel shortages, and the Covid-19 outbreak. In Balerno we know that weather can cause serious disruption, and we know that damage, thankfully mostly localised can be caused by flooding. We had however never seen anything like Covid-19.

Covid-19 has probably been the greatest challenge to our community both because of the length of time, the level of disruption to services and the underlying threat to each one of us. It has caused economic damage worse in overall terms than most of us have ever witnessed. And it was and is of course a threat across the entire country. Coronavirus is still with us and will be around for some time to come and so the challenges will also continue.

Emergencies can however come in all sorts of forms and in varying scale, bringing challenges of different types and degrees. When they arise the effect can be catastrophic in one area and completely absent in another.

When Balerno along with the rest of the country was locked down in March none of us had a handbook of what that would mean for the local community. None of us knew what, if anything, was expected of the local community, or what could be done by the community to respond to what we all knew was a crisis. In March, and as a community, we did not seem to be prepared for what followed. We relied on the City Council and central government to guide us through, and in that we were probably much like most other communities. The question is whether we could and should have been better prepared. Would it have made any difference and could we have made a difference?

In the event, very quickly, and as most people probably thought would be the case, local initiatives sprang up, and pretty soon it became clear that Balerno was getting on with life, people were rallying round and assistance was being provided across the community by the community. So is there a problem?

In 2011 after a run of bad winters the Scottish Government started thinking about how communities could be better prepared to respond to emergencies such as flooding, severe weather or power failure and they came up with the idea of Community Emergency Planning.

In its 'Guide to Emergency Planning for Community Groups' the government posed the question -

'Imagine, for example the impact of a single school closure. If parents can't go to work because they need to look after their children at short notice this will have a significant impact on the work that they would otherwise have been doing. If all the

Ready Scotland

schools in Scotland were to close, over 360,000 primary school children alone need to be cared for.'

Well, now we know, and we can take off our hats to those who have organised on those mega issues. But we can and should also acknowledge the difference made across our community by different groups and individuals.

In 2011 the Scottish Government wrote that 'how communities organise themselves to prepare for emergencies can make a big difference. Making a Community Emergency Plan is about how communities can make that difference by coming together to support each other.'

Quickest out of the blocks at lockdown was Balerno Cares, immediately showing the incredible value in a crisis of social media, quickly gathering over 1500 members (now almost 1700) and providing the touchstone for WhatsApp groups springing up around the village providing points of contact, around which smaller communities gathered. Electronic communication has enabled people to stay in touch and to develop systems for responding to the crisis.

At the heart of how communities get through emergencies is how "resilient" they are - this means, according to the government advice, how well they can use their strengths to: prepare for, respond to; and recover from emergencies.

That in turn involves being aware of the risks which are likely to face the community, knowing its strengths, skills and resources and working out how to relate to the first responders like police fire and ambulance.

Every day in Scotland thousands of people need to attend hospital for life-saving treatments like dialysis. If ice and snow caused a problem getting someone from their home to their hospital transport, could Balerno community get together to help?

The answer is almost certainly yes. But the process of arriving at that conclusion is so much simpler if that scenario is identified in advance as a risk and planned for.

That risk, however slight it may seem, along with almost all others we can envisage, are better planned for if we know how the community can respond.

That is partly why BCC has carried out a partial survey of local organisations in an attempt to begin to understand how we would as a community respond to tomorrow's emergencies.

We will be pursuing that with those organisations but if you'd like to help the Community Council in developing a Community Emergency Plan then please contact us.

explore Balerno Gateway to the Pentlands

Balerno Community Council's Pathways Group was set up in 2019 to see what could be done to improve the various pathways which connect our community. The impetus for the group developed originally from the state of the Green Bridge and the realisation that, whatever else, that provided a major point of entry to the Balerno Paths Network from the village centre. We are committed to ensuring that the bridge is replaced.

We're also committed to improving signage around the area and making information generally about the village and the history of our community more accessible. We have recently received two small grant for developments of the Pathways project and we are looking at using that for signage probably within the village, in Main Street in the first instance.

Members of the group have also been walking some of the routes to look at their condition and their accessibility particularly for those who may be disabled in any way. We hope to be able to put some notes together and publish those on-line before long.

We have also produced a couple of information leaflets on Main Street and the surrounding area under the **explore Balerno** label. They can be found on the BCC website, www://balerno-communitycouncil.org.uk.

Why is Orrvale called Orrvale?
What was Balerno known as in the 13thC?
Where was Balerno's first Post Office?

explore Balerno

read about Main Street, about Ladycroft, Orrvale and Society and about Malleny Woods in three new leaflets

on

www://balerno-communitycouncil.org.uk

explore Balerno
Gateway to the Pentlands



three new leaflets now available on

www://balerno-communitycouncil.org.uk

Planning issues

The Community Council is statutorily entitled to comment on planning applications considers planning applications and receives notice each week of applications in the Balerno area. It considers planning matters first in a Planning Sub Committee which meets as required but disposes of most of its business via e-mail.

The Council does not for the most part comment on what are called householder applications which relate for the most part to minor alterations, although given that Balerno has a Conservation Area and that it is substantially surrounded by Green Belt issues may arise which may raise general concerns on which comment is appropriate.

Rapleys Proposal of Application Notice for development at Ravelrig Road

Most residents of Balerno received a leaflet in June from Messrs Rapleys concerning a consultation which they were pursuing preparatory to lodging a Planning Application for permission to develop a site on both sides of Ravelrig Road, to the north of Dalmahoy Crescent and Ravelrig Heights.

Rapleys intended a development of 350 houses with doctors surgery and community hub, if permission were to be granted. They also intended an extension to a bus route to a terminus in the development.

The Community Council posted comments on the Council's Facebook page in advance of Fri 12 June when Rapleys had indicated there would be interactive sessions via ZOOM. Rapleys consultation was open until 26 June.

The Council wrote to the City Council after 12 June commenting on the arrangements for the consultation. The Council considered that an invitation to a meeting to take place less than a week after delivery of the invitation indicated inadequate notice. The Council had also received complaints that not all households had received the invitation. It also thought that a meeting by ZOOM was likely to exclude people for whom electronic access may not be a practical proposition.

The Council had also received complaints from residents about Rapleys on-line survey. Concerns expressed to the Council by residents included that the questions were 'really biased' and that for some a meaningful engagement with Rapleys was impossible.

On the basis of the comments received the Community Council advised the City Council that in its view,

- o The proposals set out in the PAN process were not sufficiently developed such as to allow for a meaningful proportionate engagement;
- o Documentation available was incomplete and in any event insufficient to secure such engagement;
- o The on-line questionnaire was unsatisfactory to an extent that it did not secure universal confidence and therefore could not secure such engagement.

Messrs Rapleys have not so far reported on the consultation to CEC.

CityPlan2030 & City Mobility Plan

The Council submitted comments to CEC in late April in relation to the consultation on the City's new local development Plan, CityPlan2030. Immediately before the closing date for comments Scottish Ministers granted permission for building at the Garden District thereby significantly altering the background context within which CityPlan2030 was to be designed.

In August CEC indicated that in the next stage of preparation the proposed draft CityPlan2030 would be published in December for a 6 week consultation, with a view to finalisation in 2021.

BCC Meetings

Balerno Community Council ordinarily meets once a month, except in July, on the first Thursday of the month at Balerno High School. All meetings are ordinarily held in public. However CEC have advised that our monthly meetings cannot be held in public because of the Covid-19 crisis. The Council hopes that monthly meetings in public may be able to resume in the New Year but we are dependent on relaxation of the current restrictions for that to happen.

The Council operates a website along with Facebook and Twitter, and our Notice Board outside the Post Office. We aim to keep the community abreast of such initiatives and discussions as we are able to conduct at present, but we are not able to conduct open sessions unfortunately.

We try to post news regularly on our e-outlets and we welcome feedback. We look forward to hearing from you!

Problems at Harlaw and Threipmuir

The Council was represented at a virtual meeting on 5th August convened by Cllr Neil Gardiner and attended also by ward councillors, Police Scotland, and stakeholder groups. The meeting had been called to consider the problems of anti social behaviour at the reservoirs and in particular around Harlaw since mid July.

From 15 July Covid-19 regulations had been relaxed under phase 3 of the Government's route map. This led to a significant increase in wild camping, beyond the numbers in a normal summer. There were reports, for example, of around 40 tents pitched overnight on Saturday 18th July at Harlaw reservoir.

Most residents will be aware that over the period since mid July there have been widespread similar problems across many areas of the country. Campers have been reportedly travelling some distance to beauty spots around Scotland. Campers at Harlaw are known to have travelled from Glasgow and Dundee

Reports have also indicated that many campers are not camping responsibly, and were leaving large quantities of litter, including human waste, sanitary items and toilet paper. Photos have been widely circulated on social media. They were also cutting down trees for firewood and interfering with angling.

Increased police patrols were to be introduced following the meeting and consideration will be given by CEC to introduction of more enforceable management rules in the area.

While the City Council have since 15 July reopened some public toilets, the single toilet in the Harlaw Visitor Centre remains closed and in any event is not open 24 hours. Nor are there any other public toilet facilities in the Upper Water of Leith valley apart from Currie Library which is also currently still closed.

The Community Council has frequently complained to CEC about the absence of public toilet facilities at Harlaw. This affects not only campers but also those, including in particular the elderly, who simply want to walk and enjoy the Pentland Hills.

The 5th August meeting also considered the increasing problem of parking at the reservoirs and on access roads, the latter in particular causing severe problems for farmers. The meeting also discussed access routes to Harlaw and Threipmuir. As noted on p2 in connection with Core Paths the Council continues to press for improvements to both Harlaw and Mansfield Roads including for reduction in the speed limit from the current 60mph beyond the derestriction signs.

Balerno gets a 5th defibrillator

Defibrillators are immensely important to first aid; when a defibrillator is used within 3-5 minutes of a cardiac arrest the patient's chances of survival are increased by up to 74%. So the more defibrillators there are which are accessible the better it is for everyone.

With the commissioning of a new Phillips HeartStart FRx model at St Joseph's Centre Balerno now has five defibrillators. The new equipment has single-use defibrillator pads and a key which enables the unit to work correctly if the victim of a cardiac arrest is a child. The storage cabinet is heated for winter protection and contains a basic First Aid pack.

Quick access is by means of the combination lock and is authorised through a 999 call, quoting the emergency location code on the cabinet.

Balerno's other defibrillator stations are at

- Balerno High School,
- Dean Park Primary School,
- Balerno Bowling Club, and
- Currie Chieftains clubhouse at Malleny Park.

The St Joseph's device has been generously supplied by Balerno Parish Church along with Edinburgh Presbytery, and also by Balerno Children's Gala.