



From Richard M Henderson,
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Dear Sirs,

**Choices for CityPlan2030
Response by Balerno Community Council**

This letter, including the accompanying Annex, sets out the comments of Balerno Community Council (the Council) in relation to City of Edinburgh Council's Choices for CityPlan2030 consultation. It should be read along with the vcomments submitted by the Council on-line; reference ANON-KU2U-GWG6-2

The consultation opened on 31 January and will now close on 30 April having been extended by one month in view of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Consultation has not been amended other than in terms of the period for response. In particular it has not been amended with reference to any change in circumstances envisaged as arising from the Covid-19 outbreak.

For the reasons set out below the Council considers that the consultation should be suspended pending the UK and Scottish Governments setting a date by which they would expect that current emergency restrictions will be removed.

Impact of Covid-19

This Council has no more idea than anyone else as to the precise impacts which will follow from the current Covid-19 outbreak. It is unrealistic to suppose that the Covid-19 outbreak will have no long-term impacts on Edinburgh.

The Fraser of Allander Institute [1] has estimated that so far as Scotland is concerned the construction sector could contract by 40-50%, production by 25-30%, services by 15-20% and that Scottish GDP could contract by about 20-25% overall. Services are said to be by far the largest part of the Scottish economy. It has been suggested that they will take a hit in retail and wholesale, transport and storage, and accommodation and food services, with the majority of the latter sector currently mothballed. But there could be a "modest expansion" in the public sector and a "fairly modest" contraction in real estate. The agricultural sector is predicted to grow by 2-5%, though even a 5% growth in this sector would add less than +0.1 to overall Scottish GDP.

Commentators suggest that social habits and practices will be fundamentally altered as a result of the outbreak. It could take a considerable period of time before people might wish to re-adopt old patterns of living and commuting. Home working may well become a preferred option leading to less pressure on transport to city centres and correspondingly less pressure on housing development in South East Scotland focussing on Edinburgh.



If that analysis is reasonable then to align transport and development policies for the next ten years to pre Covid-19 assumptions would be unwise. At the very least we should be arguing for a modification of the ten year planning perspective and looking at shorter periods for Local Plans as we emerge from Covid-19.

Planning for future development and transport provision for the next ten years in the current state of uncertainty will more resemble crystal ball gazing than anything else; it is simply not possible to conjecture with any degree of certainty what the state of the economy or of society is likely to be in one year's time far less ten.

In the circumstances the Council believes that preparation of CityPlan2030 should be suspended pending the conclusion of the current Covid-19 outbreak. If suspension required the continuation of the LDP then modifications of that would be necessary in particular in relation to issues of adequacy of housing land supply.

If for any reason the City were to consider that suspension of the CityPlan2030 process is at present impossible then the Council believes that a further period of consultation will be necessary to allow consideration of any provisional conclusions in advance of the City formulating its proposals.

The Council's observations on the specific issues raised in the on-line CityPlan2030 consultation as published have been submitted on-line but are set out below along with more general observations on the issues raised.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard M Henderson', is displayed on a light blue background.

Richard M Henderson
Chair, Balerno Community Council

Cc Cllrs Graeme Bruce, Neil Gardiner, Ricky Henderson and Susan Webber; Ian Hynd (BCC)
Tony Allen (BCC), Hugh Watt (BCC)



**ANNEX – Choices for CityPlan2030
Response by Balerno Community Council**

General Comments

Choices for CityPlan2030 (Choices) is one of two linked documents, the other being City Mobility Plan which together will set the context for the development planning strategy in the city to succeed the 2016 Local Development Plan (the 2016 Plan).

Both Choices and City Mobility Plan are set at a high level. They do not, at this stage, set out detail down to the level of our community. This narrative response addresses some detail issues to illustrate the issues of concern for the Council.

NOTE – The comments in this Annex do not take account of any probable impacts of the current Covid-19 outbreak.

These comments consider matters under the following headings;

1. An overview of Balerno; and
2. General comments on CityPlan2030 process and approach

An overview of Balerno

Location – Balerno is a historic village with conservation area. It is at the same time a growing community with significant house building currently being carried on at Newmills (Kingfisher Park) (@206 units) and Ravelrig (Ravelrig Heights) (@120units). The village is situated at the south western extremity of the City at @540ft to 600ft altitude, on the northern slopes of the Pentland Hills.

Balerno identifies as a strong community feeling, with a good sense of neighbourhood. While in employment terms most opportunity is outside of the village, and therefore it is in a sense a commuter suburb of Edinburgh, that does not disable the overall sense of living in an identifiable community. The fabric of the community has however been put under strain by the scale and rate of recent expansion coupled to absence of investment in public infrastructure over much of the past thirty years or so.

Balerno's western boundary abuts on to Kirknewton, 5 miles away. Its southern boundary is with Penicuik and Midlothian on the northern flanks of the Pentland Hills while to the north is Ratho, again 5 miles distant. Balerno's eastern boundary is with Currie and its focus, for employment, commerce and leisure tends to be to the east, to Edinburgh city centre 8 miles away along the continuously built up A70 Lanark Road West. East is the only direction in which travel by public transport is possible, which means that there is a public transport barrier to accessing the public, and particularly hospital, facilities provided by Livingston only 7miles away. Balerno residents work across the whole of Edinburgh and its hinterland, including, its centre, its northern and southern sectors, as well as to the east and west.

Population – Balerno's population was noted at 6031in 2001. The Balerno boundary was moved in 2017 on the introduction of multi member City Council constituencies, leading in our estimate to the transfer of some 1200 residents to the Currie CC area. On that basis the figure for 2007 might have been @4900.



Estimates vary and are difficult given changes in boundaries and the vagaries of census districts. However, the ONS 2014 Mid-Year Estimate suggested a population of 5915, while the 2011 census figure is 5927. We estimate that since 2014 the population may have increased by <@1000 given housing developments at Ravelrig and Newmills.

Within the population the over 65's cohort, at 16.9%, is higher than the Edinburgh average of 12.%. There are no community facilities for elderly to meet together in Balerno other than the St Joseph's Centre, part of Balerno Parish Church.

Surgery – While Balerno does host a dental practice, the local medical surgery is in Currie, close to the bus route, but @3miles from the Balerno bus terminus; much of Balerno is situated more than 0.5 miles from the nearest bus stop.

Infrastructure – Balerno hosts two inns, two carry out food outlets, one bistro/café and one community café.

There are some commercial/industrial enterprises including two small supermarkets and one small hardware store. There are three hairdressers and one nail bar. While there are a number of locally based building and service trades, we do not have any detailed information on numbers. There are two garages. The Post Office is located with the bistro as a Post Office Local model. Main Street, Balerno is designated as a Local Centre in the 2016 Local Development Plan. The Library is located in Main Street. The public counter at the Police Station was closed in 2016.

Education, youth provision & social clubs – Balerno hosts Balerno High School and Dean Park Primary School both of which currently require serious investment. The High School feeder primaries apart from DPPS are Ratho PS and Kirknewton PS. There are three of four nurseries/playgroups and at least two after school and breakfast clubs.

Having in the past had a thriving and extensive programme, there is now little or no formal adult education provision in Balerno.

Balerno Bowling Club and Balerno Tennis Club are located in the middle of the village as is Currie Rugby Football Club (Currie Chieftains). All of which provide social facilities. Currie RFC has a youth operation catering for over 280 young players.

The Scout Group occupies the Scout Hall and provides activities for over 250 young people.

2 General comment on the CityPlan2030 process and approach

These comments supplement Balerno Community Council's responses to the CityPlan2030 questionnaire.

There is too great focus in the process on the City Centre

The draft CityPlan 2030 does not impact on Balerno as much as it does on some areas, but the Community Council believe that the Choices document fails to address the fall-out from earlier plans. The Plan is heavily focused on Edinburgh's city centre or at least its inner core. While the reasons for this may be discernible the approach tends to reduce the fullest consideration of the issues which affect the periphery of the city, and it undermines the 'one place' concept that is fundamental to achieving a thriving and successful Edinburgh city region.

Whilst we see logic in the development of central Edinburgh as a regional resource, the hub and spoke model underpinning the CityPlan 2030 is unsustainable in a low-carbon context, unless it is coupled with a planned creation of networks of village communities that are themselves self-sustaining in the provision of community resources.



Over the past ten years or so there has been substantial expansion in housebuilding across Edinburgh. Driven by the requirements of SESPlan and the associated Supplementary Guidance this has led to a need for a constant supply of housing land. The result was that planning permissions, not all of which had been anticipated in the Local Development Plan, distorted community planning, and brought the planning system into discredit. We believe it has resulted in an over rapid and over concentrated expansion of our community, and that has led to serious stresses on the local infrastructure, which need to be addressed

CEC and government have fundamentally failed to ensure and maintain necessary infrastructure

The communities of the Upper Water of Leith Valley have warned for years of the need for infrastructure development to match increasing housing provision and the resulting strain on local facilities and resources. Housing development has been allowed by government with insufficient regard to the impact on host communities, while at the same time services to those communities have been cut .

Thus, for example;

- I. *Medical services* - There is no medical surgery in Balerno despite the population increase from some 400 new houses over the past five years. Associated with that there is no bus service for a significant proportion of residents who live some distance from the 44 bus route, in particular in the Ravelrig, Newmills/Curriehill Castle and Harlaw Road areas.
- II. *Pathways and connectivity with the village* - There is no path network for pedestrian connectivity between housing developments at Ravelrig Hill. Park and Gait, meaning that pedestrians are forced to walk on a narrow pavement along the length of the busy and dangerous Lanark Road West, to Bridge Road, at which point pavements are clearly inadequate. Nor does CEC appear to have made any effort to support local demands to secure upgrading of paths through the Ravelrig Estate, which could provide a safe route to school and village facilities. We cannot overemphasize that having a properly designed and properly maintained paths network is central to the successful functioning of any community.
- III. *Traffic and the A70* - The A70 is the sole transport corridor connecting the Water of Leith communities and it has become massively congested. Until 2016 the then local plan, the Rural South West Edinburgh Local Plan had included provision for construction of a relief road bypassing Balerno. The opportunity for that was however lost when the route at Ravelrig/Pilmuir was given up for housing development. It is inexplicable that what was seen as necessary when RWELP was formulated is now dismissed despite traffic volumes increasing.
- IV. *Public transport deficit* - The Balerno bus service to Livingston St John's Hospital was withdrawn in 2016 depriving residents of access to an essential service. There are no bus services within Balerno, apart from the 44 route on which the number of bus services has recently been reduced. Now CEC also wish to cut the number of bus stops allocated to the community, further reducing ease of access to the service
- V. *No community halls or facilities* - Balerno's population has increased over the past ten years by an estimated 2500 people or more , yet there is no community hall or community centre other than a former Scotmid store which houses an essential service – a nursery – but is wholly inadequate for the community's needs
- VI. *Little lateral thinking in assessing opportunities for use of public buildings* - Balerno's Police Station effectively closed as a public resource in 2016. There did not appear to be any thought to developing the building as a shared community resource, suggesting an absence of joined up or cross cutting imagination in policy thinking.
- VII. *General removal of community facilities* - The loss of Community High School status for Balerno High School led to the decimation of adult education provision and the loss of a community hub. Balerno is determined to be an active community but the lack of basic support by CEC for rudimentary resources is a serious challenge.



- VIII. *Deficit in open space* - Balerno is underprovided with greenspace/amenity or open space, having only a single community park at Marchbank Park part of which CEC has recently sold off, without any consultation with the community. There is a small amount of green space access at Malleny Park, which is mainly a sports facility, while the Malleny area around the park offers substantial opportunities for development as community greenspace.
- IX. *Lack of public toilet access* – While CEC is known to have effectively withdrawn from public toilet provision, it is still surprising that a community at the Gateway to the Pentlands Regional Park merits no public toilet provision apart from one single convenience at Harlaw Reservoir. Nor does CEC appear to have taken any steps to encourage take up of its Community Toilets Scheme.

There are other examples which can be given of the failure of government properly to ensure that infrastructure was maintained to match developing community demands including in particular those which have arisen from new housing.

Planning process must better assess impact of development on communities

The overall sense we have is of an endemic failure on the part of the City and of government in general to assess, far less make provision for, the community impact of the developments which have been approved in recent years. From transport to roads to health to education, services have been reduced or removed.

So far as locations such as Balerno are concerned, it is easy to conclude that government relies on the community stepping up to the plate and ensuring shortfalls in provision will be made up by voluntary effort. If so, community action ought to be supported by the allocation of public resources. More likely we believe, is that planners may not now have the time to plan properly and that assessment of community impact may be a dispensable luxury.

Developers must be required to make more realistic contributions to infrastructure *and* to mitigate impact on communities

There seems to be a clear preference on the part of the City and of government in general to avoid demanding anything of developers when granting permission for changes which will alter irremediably the character and viability of communities. Because the community has not seen benefits flowing from large scale housing development it is unlikely to believe that sS75 agreements work for the benefit of communities. The suspicion is that money levied because of local developments is allocated by CEC to other places. That is a corrosive situation which calls for a more transparent accounting by government to the community, and also for a far more robust approach to be taken with housing developers; they must integrate their developments into the community and also enhance the communities in which they are located.

Edinburgh Council and government at large must be much more transparent

There is a deep suspicion that resources accruing in this area to the City via the s 75 route are invested away from the Upper Water of Leith Valley communities. Whether that is the case or not is in a sense irrelevant. If there is an *apparent* disparity of infrastructure provision simply because communities do not see benefits accruing to them, the resulting sense of unfairness is corrosive of a good relationship between government and community.

Edinburgh Council must take seriously the position of outlying areas

While we appreciate the work that has gone into the CityPlan2030 draft, our experience is not such that we have great confidence that Balerno will be a significant focus so far as the development or implementation of the plan is concerned. Rather our experience is that we have to fight to get anything done for the benefit of the community – and that is not the way things should be.

While we understand that the plan does not suggest more housing development for Balerno we are concerned that the infrastructure which should have been put in place to cater for the



existing situation has simply not been addressed. For example, we have suggested in the past the need for a proper transport review to enable proper access to rail as well as bus and tram provision. Located at over 500' up on the slopes of the Pentlands it seems to come as a surprise to CEC that snow and ice are a greater problem for Balerno than for Princes Street. Local government reorganisation twenty-five years ago means that our High School still has a cross-boundary catchment area, but there are no bus connections between feeder Primary Schools and Balerno High School. Similarly, a stroke of the pen removed a bus connection between Balerno and its hospital in West Lothian. These are the sorts of things which can be avoided with proper planning and consultation with communities. Scottish Government told us in 2016 that there was no provision for cross boundary planning of services. Without that proper planning and consultation, it is small wonder that a deficit of trust in public provision is the result.

Despite all of this however, we believe in our community. We are committed to encouraging it to thrive, to be innovative and successful. Our *Community Plan*, published in March 2019 sets out what we want to see for Balerno; it may well form the basis for a Local Place Plan for Balerno.

We hope that CityPlan2030 will take account of that Plan and will engage with it as CityPlan2030 develops.

Balerno
25 April 2020