

Cockburn Association AGM 2014

Cases Committee Report

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Cases Committee continued to deal with a considerable workload over the period 2012/2013, reviewing over 250 applications. Concerns remain much the same as those reported to the AGM last year, namely pressures on the Green Belt, lower density development on brownfield sites within the city, the level of student accommodation and budget hotels and 'planning by appeal' replacing the democratic process.

Craighouse, the former campus of Napier University on Easter Craiglockart Hill, remains unresolved. We supported the conversion of the existing buildings to residential use. We remain unconvinced that there is any need for additional new housing on the site to support the conversion of those buildings. The site is designated Open Space and an Area of Great Landscape so there would need to be an extraordinary public benefit to justify any new development on the land. Submission of a planning application has been further delayed but we expect to see something soon.

The revised plans for the Caltongate site provided little improvement on the original designs and despite our lengthy engagement and protestations the applications were recently passed by the Development Management Sub-Committee of the City Council with one member remarking that the plans were "not horrendous enough to refuse".

Proposals for Student Accommodation have continued to come forward as planning applications. For example, in May 2013 we looked at plans for Bernard Terrace/Lutton Place. This went on to be a planning application that was considered at a public hearing where the Association spoke against the proposal in March 2014. We were concerned that the social balance of the area was being compromised. There is already a considerable concentration of student accommodation in this community with more being built at Deaconess House and St. Leonards. Nicholson Street tries hard to be a community but the accumulative effect of increased student accommodation affects school rolls and other family amenities as social and residential development falls behind and the mix of shops and facilities adapts to a single user-type.

Edinburgh Council's policy guidance on student housing (HOU10 b) is to have no more than 30% full-time students per data zone, as defined by the 2001 census. It states that cognisance will be taken of adjoining data zones with regard to cumulative effect. The policy supports purpose-built student housing near colleges and transport routes unless it breaches this proportion because of the destabilising effect on communities due to transient population, vacancy over summer and lack of patronage for services such as schools, etc.. Student numbers have risen dramatically since then with another 20,000 places created at the city's further education establishments between 2002 and 2009, so this data is well out of date and things could be much "worse" than the guidance acknowledges. The Bernard Terrace/Lutton Place data zone already has 51%+ full time students as a percentage of the population; there is no higher concentration in the city. Two adjoining data zones have 41-50% and the remaining two adjoining data zones have 31-40%. Just beyond these there are two data zones with 51%+. This is the densest concentration of students in Edinburgh and there is no record of whether the actual figure exceeding 51% was 52% or 92%. If the objective is to retain at least 70% of a "normal" stable population for there to be a community this data must be taken seriously and on this basis alone we objected to the application. The committee went on to unanimously reject the proposal in line with the officer's recommendation on these grounds. We wait to see if the decision is appealed by the developer.

We have also commented on numerous recent applications for student housing across the city that we have a concern for this housing-type's relevance in the long-term structure of the city. Student numbers can fluctuate, however a building of this type should have a life-span in excess of sixty years. We are therefore opposed to the type of room cluster or surrogate dwelling proposed here where the rooms are all single-aspect off a spine corridor. This arrangement is quite incapable of adapting to alternative housing need,

whether for the elderly or young families, as the central corridor prevents dual aspect which is a stated objective of the city's housing policy. Student housing also typically lacks any car parking provision, again hindering future conversion potential.

In general it would appear that the planning department is following the lead of a pro-development council, as the planning guidelines and policies are often set aside and planning permissions granted regardless. It would also seem to be the case that even when permission is refused, the permissions are often granted on appeal. We are considering how we might deal with this increasing problem.

The Association is represented on the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel, now in its fifth year, which meets twice a month to consider design proposals for major developments at an early stage of conception. It is desirable to have a positive influence on projects at this stage rather than meeting problems later in the process.

We also have regular meetings with developers, attend exhibitions and consultations and meet with Community Councils and Amenity Groups to consider planning issues and applications within their area.

We thank the members of the Cases Committee for their contribution; Jens Bergmark (Convener) Lorraine Briggs, John Byrom, Jon Grounsell, , Yvonne Holton, Lorn McNeal, Ian Temple, Richard Thomson, Richard Rogers, Jane Roy, John Fleming and Lawrence Marshall.

Euan Leitch moved on to a position with BEFS (Built Environment Forum Scotland) in June 2013. Rebecca McCaig helped with Cases as a volunteer before taking a training position with Historic Scotland followed by Joe Taylor who has since been appointed as our Cases Officer on a part time contract.