



PORTOBELLO COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the 281st meeting held on 30 August 2010 in Portobello Baptist Church Hall

Present: Tom Ballantine, Sandra Blake, Archie Burns (PPAG), Diana Cairns (Joint Secretary), Dawson Currie, Maria Devoy, David Hamilton, Caroline Hosking, Nelson Johnstone, Joe Madden (Portobello Open Door), Lawrence Marshall (Portobello Older People's Project), Brenda Molony (Portobello Reporter), Margaret Munro (Vice Chair, Portobello History Society), Andrew Patterson (Portobello Council of Churches), David Scott (Portobello Community Centre), John Stewart (Chair, PAS), Ros Sutherland (Portobello Park Action Group), Leon Thomson, Sean Watters (Towerbank Parent Council), Anne Ward (PCATS), Frances Wraith (Brightons and Rosefield Residents' Association) William Wilson.

Apologies: Celia Butterworth, Lilian Graham, Nick Stroud, Sheila Gilmore MP.

In attendance: Cllr Mike Bridgman, Cllr Maureen Child, Cllr Stephen Hawkins, A Jeffrey, PC Matt Higson, M Williamson, L Kelly (CLD worker), R Firth, Avril Scott, Gillian Dunn, C Marriott, J Laidlaw (City of Edinburgh Council), P Blues, S Baccia, L Kindness, P Myerscough (BL Developments), B. McIntyre (City of Edinburgh Council), Scott Castle (Thomas and Adamson), Robin Anderson (JM Architecture).

281.1 Chair's welcome.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, explaining that, as we were having two presentations on major planning applications, normal business would be suspended. He noted that two new group representatives had joined the community council: Joe Madden (Portobello Open Door) and Lawrence Marshall (Portobello Older People's Project) and extended a warm welcome to them. He also introduced the community police officer, PC Matt Higson who is standing in for WPC Sarah Potter who is on sick leave.

281.2 Scottish Power site redevelopment (BL Developments)

BL Developments displayed boards with plans showing their latest proposals for the site. Phil Myerscough of BL Developments went through the elements of the revised plans for the former Scottish Power site on Portobello High Street, as part of the pre-application consultation process.

Mr Myerscough stated that his aim was to find a development option that works for him financially and for us as a community. There had been a consultation event from 2-8 pm in the Town Hall on Friday 18 July at which around 80 questionnaires had been completed. He also said that BL Developments had appeared in front of the Edinburgh Urban Design Review Panel who apparently liked Block E, the level of housing density, the green open space and use of lanes.

BL Developments had been talking to potential non-residential occupiers of the site which include Out of the Blue artists' studios, who are keen; health type uses including a pharmacy; Portobello Music School; Verden Recording studios; foodstore operators (Waitrose).

The feedback for the questionnaire had been mostly positive, however, temporary accommodation for young homeless people had only been supported by 33% of respondents. There was strong support for a coffee shop but not Starbucks or Costa. There was 31% support for a wine bar and no support for a large supermarket. The support for different foodstore operators was as follows: Lidl/Aldi (30%), Tesco (47%), Waitrose (56%) Marks and Spencers (58%).

With reference to building heights, 67% said the proposal was just about right but around 34% said they were too high; 56% thought the proportions of housing was just about right and 44% thought there was too much housing. With reference to retail provision, 70% thought the amount of shops was about right but 30% thought there were too many.

A whole storey has been taken off across the whole development; this would mean that there would be three storeys of housing above the street frontage. The final number of units they are asking for is around 550 in total. In order to achieve this the building would be lower than in the previous scheme, with more ground coverage and use of lanes, whilst still retaining a good amount of open space. However, in order to achieve the lower density he said it would be necessary to have a significant retail element (18,000 sq ft) and that a retail impact assessment would be needed. BL Developments wanted to know if the package outlined was going to get the support of the community council.

There were a number of questions relating to the proposal for food retail on the site, for example car parking (60 space planned on the ground floor adjacent to the shop); the impact that the supermarket might have on existing retailers (a retail impact assessment would be required); whether Portobello was the correct demographic for a Waitrose. It was stated that the existing locations of Waitrose stores elsewhere in the city have a very different demographic from Portobello and much denser housing. There was a concern that the supermarket if it went ahead might end up with a different operator but BL Developments said that the application would have Waitrose's name on it.

It was acknowledged by BL Developments that the questionnaire had not included the option of a purely local corner shop as stipulated in the North West Portobello Development Brief and it was suggested that the questionnaire had been designed

to produced the results the developers wanted. Concern was expressed about the impact on the local butcher and fishmonger. BL Developments said that it would be up to the planners to make a recommendation if the retail impact assessment showed a potentially negative impact on the existing shops.

Concern was also expressed about the impartiality of the retail impact assessment as it would be commissioned by the developers. It was felt that a low number of people had turned out to the consultation event but it was pointed out that the event had taken place on a Friday afternoon into evening during the Trades fortnight.

There was no information given about building materials but BL Developments said that there would be no buildings over five storeys. There was no information given about where on the site the additional lanes would be sited.

Mr Myerscough said that he had a put a package together that works from him and if he can't get support he will hand the keys of the site back to the bank. One member of the public said she had been told at the Town Hall event that there would be five small retail units of around 5,000 sq ft each and that a possible Waitrose would only take up one or two of the units and that she had supported the Waitrose proposal on this basis but BL Developments admitted that the supermarket proposal would take up 18.000 sq feet. Concerns were also expressed about the effect of a new supermarket on this site on the local independent traders.

It was suggested that by giving the British Legion space on the site it would cut down on the need for a supermarket. BL Developments stated that the British Legion was no longer a major element of the scheme but said that the door was still open for discussions.

It was suggested that an additional 550 homes would create new footfall on Portobello High Street but that there were concerns about the effect on local schools if the housing mix were to change. BL Developments confirmed that there would be fewer small units and more large units.

It was suggested that BL Developments were trying to force the community into accepting its plan so that they could make money. Mr Myerscough said that he had to get his money back and that if the community said the plan was not acceptable then he would hand the keys back to the bank and sell the site.

There were a number of concerns expressed about the current state of the site, the dumping of flammable materials and the fires that had taken place as a result of this. Mr Myerscough said that he couldn't give any guarantee about the condition of the site as he had little control over it and said that the longer the site lay empty, the more trouble there would be with fly-tipping.

Mr Myerscough left the meeting and there was discussion among community council members and the members of the public present. The Chair said that we needed to give a response to the developers in order to help them fine-tune the planning application, by establishing the main concerns and suggested that a group should

work on it. He reminded the meeting about our response to the previous application, i.e. that we welcomed a mixed development but had concerns about heights, density, traffic and air pollution.

The following additional comments were made:

- there is not enough information on the visual impact of the site, for example there is a fear that it will be cheap architecture and a box;
- there are still concerns about heights of the buildings;
- concerns about the lanes within the development;
- the development could potentially bring in 1,000 additional people to the high street;
- the site is not currently benefitting Portobello and the plan is realistic;
- concern about empty flats as in Leith if they can't afford to build affordable housing;
- concerns about the retail element;
- concerns that if other non-residential uses such as GP's surgery do not take up space on the site, the vacant space could be used to add to the floorspace of the proposed supermarket;
- concerns that if sold on the site could be landbanked by a supermarket;
- the site could lie vacant for a number of years;
- the increased family housing element is a positive aspect;
- some people would prefer to have more housing and no supermarket;
- Phil Myerscough suggested a Waitrose at the very first master planning workshop and there had been reports from Stockbridge about the negative impact that the Waitrose there had had on local independent traders.

A vote was taken to agree to continue dialogue with BL Developments.

It was agreed that a group would draft a letter.

281.3 Presentation on plans for a new Portobello High School

A presentation on the latest plans for the new Portobello High School was made by Billy McIntyre (Children and Families, City of Edinburgh Council), Scott Castle of Thomas and Adamson and Robin Anderson of JM Architecture.

Billy McIntyre said that the team would produce a consultation report which would be submitted with the planning application at the end of September. This will include both positive and negative comments. He acknowledged that the issue of building the school on Portobello Park was a contentious one.

He said the aim was to try to keep the school as sympathetic to the environment as possible and that they would work in partnership with the neighbours of the site.

Robin Anderson outlined the designs in more detail, covering the following points:

- there would be an entrance to the west;
- the main entrance will be at the plaza on the south side of the site;

- the entrances to the park would be enhanced to get people off the roads;
- to compensate for the narrow pavements, it is proposed to have a new illuminated path of part of which will be inside the line of trees on the Hope Lane side of the park, also a 3m wide cycle/footpath on the south side of the site, plus a new pedestrian crossing.

Analysis had been carried out on school travel patterns using national data showing that 1,000 pupils are likely to walk to school and the staff travel patterns would remain the same. It is proposed to have a part time 20 mph limit along the Milton Road where it borders Portobello Park. It is also proposed to introduce double yellow lines down the park side of Park Avenue and the HGV entrance would be off Park Avenue. The main car park would be accessed via the Milton Road entrance.

A complete path network is proposed around the golf course and park, including an amenity path inside the woodland and at the edge of the roadway on Stanley Street. The playing pitches were shown end-to-end and it is proposed that they would sit below the level of the roadway. As the cycle/footpath across the south end of the site is estimated to cost around £350,000 there would only around £150,00 remaining for “compensatory measures” for the loss of open space. There had been no real steer from the consultation on how the money should be spent so it is intended to seek advice from the Neighbourhood Partnership.

The design of the building is staggered, with the intention of not presenting an intimidating frontage to Milton Road. The school would be 1-3 storeys at different points across the site. The Milton Road frontage would be two storeys high and is proposed to be the same height as the villas on Milton Road. There would be “glimpses” of the building through the trees but it was acknowledged that the building would be clearly visible when there are no leaves on the trees.

It was noted that the part of the building containing the swimming pool and games hall would have planting against it. The school would be on a “village street” layout and a typical classroom would have a “teaching pod”, with two classrooms that could be combined or separated, plus breakout spaces. The PE area and Home Economics area have been modified since the original designs.

A number of concerns were raised, for example, regarding basketball provision, which is not considered to be adequate by the Basketball Club. Billy McIntyre said that the “gap” in provision was relatively minor but that it comes down to money. There is a £260,000 shortfall and Sportscotland would consider an application for up to 50% of that sum but the project would have to find the remaining £130,000 and the project team has had to make compromises. It was suggested that money from the open space compensation budget could be used for the basketball facility and the project team said they would consider this and discuss with the Neighbourhood Partnership.

There were also questions about the “catflap” system of entry to the sports pitches. It was made clear that if there were any abuses the catflap system would be

stopped. In terms of health and safety users will be deemed to assume responsibility for their own actions.

A concern was raised about the amount of playground space and also about the path round the edge of the golf course presenting a possible health and safety hazard. The project team said they were aiming for a "good score" in the BREAM sustainability assessment. The building would be protected from golf balls on the north elevation of the building as there would be fewer windows on that elevation and appropriate glass would be used.

A number of concerns were raised about possible safety issues regarding the Hope Lane access bridge across the railway line and the bypass but the project team said that this was outwith their remit and was the concern of the railway authority but they would flag up the concerns to the authority.

A question was asked about why the pre-planning application process was not considering site location and the project team replied that they were charged with delivering the school on that site and they therefore could not discuss other sites. It was pointed out that during the educational consultation residents had been told that they could comment on the site at the planning stage but now this seemed not to be the case.

Concerns were also raised about the temporary 20 mph speed limit in that it could be confusing and might not actually slow down traffic adequately. The project team agreed to look into this. The project team said that they would be on a "learning curve" with the traffic issues. A number of concerns were raised about the traffic issues. It was feared that they would be a big problem and frustration was also expressed that the project team seemed not to be listening to concerns about traffic.

Other questions were raised about the number of car parking spaces (there would be 117), the narrowness of Hope Lane and the fact that it would cause traffic problems for the residents of the Christians, bus access, materials (acrylic render), informal open space within the site (this has been taken up by the sports pitches).

It was agreed that the community council should submit a response to the project team on the issues raised, i.e. concerns about traffic, access and safety, open space provision, paths, roads and pavements, basketball provision and also that the community council should have a say in how the remaining £150,000 open space compensation should be spent. It was agreed that community council members would pass comments on these issues to Brenda Molony who would co-ordinate the points and write the letter.

281.4 Any Other Competent Business

Dawson Currie mentioned that motions about Straiton Place and parking were being put forward to the Neighbourhood Partnership (NP) meeting on 8 September and he had no recollection of these being discussed. Peter McColl said that proposals had been agreed at the community council to be put forward. Councillor Hawkins invited

people to attend the NP meeting on 8 September at which the open space compensatory provision would be discussed

281.5 Date of next meeting: Monday 27th September 2010. Subsequent meetings will be held on Monday 25 October, Monday 29th November and Monday 31 January 2011.