

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL (PORTOBELLO PARK) BILL

OBJECTION 8 – SCOTT MACPHERSON AND DR SUSANNAH FRASER

This objection was signed by the objectors and reproduced in typed (electronic) form by the clerking team

We would like to register our objection to the whole bill.

As a large open space, the Portobello Park is an extremely valuable open space for the Duddingston, Portobello and East Edinburgh community. Like what has happened in other developed cities, these large open space areas become increasingly rare as urban areas enlarge, gobbling up land for roads, houses and developments. Large open spaces need to be preserved for recreational activities that require more space, for personal solitude, water catchment, and allow trees to grow and filter the air of carbon dioxide etc. Using a significant section of the Park for a school equates to a decrease in the area of the park thus compromising the environmental and recreational value of this community amenity. It is clear that once a large open area is broken up, even if the same acreage is found at various other little places, there is still a loss, as much of the value of Portobello Park is the fact that it is a large open space. Once fragmented, it is an area that will never again be recoverable.

It is clear that the courts have declared building on the park would be illegal. We understand that situations change and that over time some laws do need to be adjusted as situations change, but this is not one of those situations. Portobello needs a new or renovated High School, but there are other places for a replacement school to be built, or the school could be rebuilt on its current site. The park does not need to be developed for a school and 100+ car parks, and so overriding the law to build school in what is arguably the most dangerous, noisiest and busiest corner of the park is short-sighted, illogical and grossly detrimental to the integrity of the park.

We have been left bemused at some of the arguments put forward by the council to build the school on the park. Our broad understanding is that A) Portobello High School is falling down and it needs to be replaced. We accept this. B) The Park is the best location because it provides outdoor facilities. Students should have outdoor facilities, but if the justification is about physical education, why is the gymnasium in the new school smaller than that in the existing school? Presumably this is a primary space for the physical education of children in Scotland where the weather can be poor? In regards to this, we heard in May 2013 during the local consultations that if the school is built on the park children will still be transported by bus to the Jack Kane Centre for indoor sports. If that is the case, why move from the current site? It would be easier to build an all-weather outdoor football pitch on Figgate Park adjacent to the current school.

We live adjacent to the Park and have done so for over 5 years. With two young children [REDACTED] the Park is an area we enjoy to use year round. This enjoyment has decreased to a small degree since the Council stopped mowing the grass to a height that a ball can be kicked on, but still we can take the kite over to the park and

enjoying running around. With no real turfed area of our own, we consider the park an important area because it is openly accessible for people like us. With the majority of the park in use as a golf course, building a school on the only open section will remove or substantially reduce these opportunities.

We are concerned about the increased noise, light and litter pollution, but our greatest concern is safety and traffic. Milton road is the A1 and a main thoroughfare for Edinburgh commuters. It is a busy road. Bringing the school, complete with 1400 children, teachers and support staff to the A1 will be a recipe for disaster. Reports show that the proposed school is further from the area from where the majority of the students are drawn. We think that this will mean a greater number of students will be delivered to the school by vehicle than currently occurs. Also, the continued reliance on buses means that residents of Park Avenue (many of whom do not have off-street parking) will become not only subjected to a new flow of 1400 children being picked up and dropped off, but a continual flow of buses. Park Avenue will be a primary thoroughfare for morning drop-offs and afternoon pick-ups, buses, rubbish and servicing vehicles, and parent and teacher journeys that will increase the daily congestion on the A1 and forever more negatively impacting the established lifestyles of the residents of Park Avenue.

Almost the entire community would like a new school. A significant number of the community would like the legal status of the park upheld. We believe there is an opportunity here for both outcomes to be met. For this to be achieved, either the new school is built on a brownfield site like Baileyfield, or the school is renovated on its current location. We urge that the Private Bill be voted against and all steps are taken to build the new school on any location that is not the Portobello Park.

The broad ramifications of this Bill being passed should also be considered. This may set a precedent for other Councils to build on Common Good land and this could be damaging to communities across the country.

12 June 2013