

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL (PORTOBELLO PARK) BILL

OBJECTION 13 – BILL AND JOYCE FLOCKHART

We are writing to show our disapproval to the Portobello Park Private Bill in total.

The Portobello Park development engineered by City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) has split community spirit in EH15 and has rapidly become the Education Department equivalent of the Tram project and now has all the ingredients for a good TV drama:-

1. Local residents trying to protect their environment.
2. Over zealous parents whipped into a frenzy to produce the best education for their children to the extent of ignoring possible health and safety problems
3. An incompetent town council who have dug themselves a £40m hole by agreeing to building contracts without carrying out basic due diligence regarding ownership of Portobello Park.
4. In the background shadowy figures at the Scottish Parliament awaiting the outcome of the Private Members Bill to see where they can plunder future common ground land.

We have resided in Bailie Terrace for over thirty years so feel qualified below to comment on the proposed development and list our objections to it as follows:-

1. Legal consequences.

The common good land was granted to the citizens of Portobello as part of an agreement reached between Lord Provost Millar and CEC and has been used for leisure activities ever since. I have lived in EH15 for the majority of my life and spent much of my youth on the 'Golfie', as it was referred to, playing football, rounders and of course golf.

The decision that CEC has taken to challenge the ruling of the Court of Session is a very worrying development that has far reaching consequences for the whole of Scotland as granting a ruling in favour of CEC creates a precedent and opens up the fear that other common land will be acquired by politicians who will use this ruling to promote their cause.

We are fourteen months away from voting on independence and if the politicians decide to bend the rule of law for their own purposes then I fear for the future of Scotland.

2. The Proposed site on Portobello Park.

There are a number of reasons why Portobello Park is not fit for purpose:-

1. As someone who walks over Portobello Park regularly I object to the possible removal of another Greenfield site as having been a pupil at Portobello High School in the 60s I witnessed our sports recreation park being acquired to build the present school.
2. Portobello Park is fraught with danger for the 1400 pupils destined to attend it as it is surrounded on all sides with problems that I have witnessed daily:-
 - (a) Traffic in the area will be increased generally and that will lead to a further haemorrhaging of an already congested traffic flow mostly in a East - West direction on Milton Road encouraging 'rat running' down Hope Lane and Park Avenue. I would also envisage that many commuting drivers will investigate ways of beating the congestion by cutting into Magdalene Drive/Magdalene Avenue/ Bailie Place and then into my street Bailie Terrace that leads on to Duddingston Park South. This could lead to problems for children attending Brunstane Primary as their school is situated on Magdalene Drive and for all the residents of Magdalene as the roads are not suitable for commuter traffic.
 - (b) Traffic flowing North to South (Duddingston Park) will also be affected as they operate on a single lane with less time allowed between traffic light sequences compared to those travelling East- West. Drivers in this direction are supposed to stay out of the bus lane, but due to the short time they have to traverse the junction in practice tend to ignore the bus lane. During the rush hours it is common for some drivers to line up in the lane marked for traffic going East or West then jump the lights and pull out in front of traffic who have patiently queued in the correct lane.
 - (c) At all the meetings I have attended nobody has referred to the problem of how hundreds of pupils are going to commute at break times to the shops on Milton Road East or Magdalene Drive. Currently pedestrians have a very short time span to cross the junction at Milton Crossroads and with the increased volume of commuters the traffic light sequence will have to be lengthened thus causing a back-draft to the traffic flow. As the proposed school entrance is on Duddingston Crescent where 120+ cars will be exiting and entering daily one would expect an additional pedestrian crossing to be installed at Bailie Place to allow access to shops in Magdalene Drive. Again this will affect traffic on the A1 entering or leaving Edinburgh.
 - (d) Bailie Terrace, like all the roads in the area was not built for volume traffic but fortunately everyone parks their cars on the North side of the road to allow a decent traffic flow but my fear is building contractors will not adhere to this and that could lead to us being unable to access our driveway – not

to mention the increased volumes of traffic resulting from the above and the 'lazy parent brigade' dropping off pupils.

- (e) At present Hope Lane is so narrow that it is hardly suitable for two-way travel and it does not have continuous pavements for pedestrians who have to cross the road at a certain point to continue their journey. Pedestrian traffic on this route will increase with the new school and pupils going south towards the school are faced with a blind corner that is used by cars travelling west to east so some form of pedestrian crossing will be required - again affecting traffic flows.

CEC has proposed walk- ways bordering the golf course that I will comment on later. Consideration will have to be given to improving fencing on the pedestrian bridge that connects Hope Lane to St. Marks Place as the bridge spans both the Edinburgh to London rail track and the road traffic over Sir Harry Lauder Road so as to avoid any acts of vandalism.

- (f) CEC are advocating in their plans for the school that pupils will be able to use paths on either side of Portobello Golf Course leading to the school. At one meeting I challenged the stupidity of exposing children daily to flying golf balls and was told that CEC would be erecting two metre fences to prevent anyone being hit. Clearly they do not understand the problem as golf balls now travel at speeds up to 150 miles and very seldom at heights of under two metres! Experience at other schools near golf courses have demonstrated that pupils do not adhere to the paths but merely take the shortest route thus unwittingly endangering themselves - and I would not see it being any different at the proposed site. One only has to look at the fencing bordering the 17th hole at Duddingston Golf Course opposite Holyrood School to see how the fencing has been vandalised to make way for shortcuts.

3. The Role of Edinburgh City Council

CEC has shown incompetence of a level that sadly reflects local government in Edinburgh that included:-

- (a) Signing contracts to the value of £40m with builders without carrying out the necessary due diligence despite being told by local residents that they did not own the land.
- (b) Not seizing the opportunity to build the new Portobello High School on the present site by decanting the pupils to the old Holyrood School before it was knocked down, with further accommodation being made available at Castlebrae. Decanting has been utilised in other parts of the city so why should Portobello High School be any different.
- (c) CEC carried out an archaeological dig on Portobello Park then cynically did not restore it to its former condition thus denying local football teams the

use of it for matches. This served their media campaign admirably from their point of view as what was a viable leisure area was portrayed as a piece of wasteland when shown on television.

- (d) Not considering building the new school alongside Holyrood High School, as was done at St. David's in Dalkeith, thereby giving pupils ready access to playing fields. Such action could have gone some way to temporarily solving the Castlebrae High School issue.

Summary:

Losing the current vista one experiences looking from Milton Road out over the Firth of Forth abhors me. The thought that politicians can dispense with an area at the stroke of a pen where generations of children have honed their sports skills that led to them representing Scotland at international level is very sad - especially when other alternatives for the new Portobello School are readily available.

21 June 2013