

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL (PORTOBELLO PARK) BILL

OBJECTION 56 - DR GORDON J MCCULLOCH

I am a recently retired GP who has lived and worked within one kilometre of Portobello Park for 25 years. My interest lies in my own health and that of all the people who also live within one kilometre of the Park. Many of them were my patients. I object to the whole bill because it would adversely affect our health and well-being.

My submission rests on the premise that Portobello Park is commonly understood as Green Space, and that replacing with a school would be commonly understood as destruction of Green Space.

The Park is indeed green and spacious. My own professional experience has taught me that the exercise, sport, play, recreation, relaxation and meditation it offers to those in the vicinity are vital to their health and well-being. I can reflect on individual patients where that has been the case. During the course of a busy 12 hour working day involving 60 consultations my own relaxation and sanity were best served by a daily 30 minute walk around the Park.

This belief is naturally intuitive and sensible. However in the past 10 years it has been increasingly backed up by peer-reviewed medical research. In 2006, a study of the relationship between green space and health was based on self-reporting of all residents of England at the 2001 Census. It concluded that a high proportion of green space in an area was generally associated with better population health¹.

The most comprehensive research so far was a groundbreaking study in 2009 of 345,000 people in the Netherlands². It is well worth reading in its entirety. In summary, it showed that

..“the annual prevalence rate of 15 out of the 24 disease clusters was lower in living environments with more green space in a 1 km radius. The relation was strongest for anxiety disorder and depression. The relation was stronger for children and people with a lower socio-economic status. Furthermore the relation was strongest in lightly urban areas and not apparent in very strongly urban areas.”

The study went on to conclude that

..“the previously established relation between green space and a number of self-reported general indicators of physical and mental health can also be found for clusters of specific physician-assessed morbidity. The study stresses the importance of green space close to home for children and lower socio-economic groups.”

In the study the disease clusters positively impacted on by living close to green space were neck, back, shoulder and upper arm complaints; depression and anxiety; respiratory and urinary infections; asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; and intestinal

¹ reference 1:

Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 2007; 61:681 -683 doi:10.1136/jech.2006.053553

² reference 2:

Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 2009; 63:967-973 doi:10.1136/jech.2008.079038

infections. Furthermore, particularly strong positive association was found in childhood depression within a radius of up to 3km and in lower socio-economic groups. I think that the study's findings resonate strongly with the large number of children and lower socio-economic families in the Christians, Bingham and Magdalene, all lying within 1km of the Park.

In 2013, a study of 204,000 middle-aged and older Australians³ showed that those living within 1km of green space were significantly more likely to walk and participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity.

In summary, I object to the Private Bill because as a GP with a continuing interest in Portobello's health I believe it would have a detrimental impact on the well-being of adults within 1km and children within one kilometre of the Park.

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³ reference 3:

British Journal of Sports Medicine doi: 10. 1136/bjsports-2012-092006