

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL (PORTOBELLO PARK) BILL

OBJECTION 59 – GRAHAM KITCHENER

In regards to this proposed Bill I object to the whole of the bill, the promoter being the City of Edinburgh Council.

From the beginning of the plan to replace the existing Portobello High School with a new purpose built school there has been a unified view within the whole of the Portobello community that a new school should be provided. It should be understood to those interested parties that this letter of objection applies only to the loss of green space that is proposed to be built upon, whether that be for a school or housing.

I will be personally affected by the loss of this large area of green space as it is part of a regular area taken in for exercise and fitness training. Due to an arthritic joint in my right foot I am unable to train on hard surfaces such as pavements or treadmills. Portobello Park is the nearest, suitably sized natural area for me to train, the ground having enough natural give in it to help me. Health and well being are of equal importance as education provision I would hope. Thankfully this large area of green space exists to enable myself and others to use it for this purpose well away from the dangers of pounding the streets. Though next to a busy road it is large enough to feel the benefits, and I must add that it is the largest such space in the area. Loss of this is irreplaceable as other parks and green space in the same close proximity to Portobello do not exist. It is unacceptable to suggest that anyone should travel further afield, for example to the Queens Park, to gain the same benefit. This concerns a large green space adjacent to my community.

Mental health is a growing problem throughout the UK, affecting increasing numbers year on year. Green space allows us the amenity to reflect and escape the daily pressures. Green space of any kind, of course, can help us, but Portobello Park is unique. Not only is it the largest such area but the mature trees to the south, and the more recent planting of the millennium trees to the north, all work together to provide a beneficial environment for the public's health. I for one will personally feel the effect of this space being built over. Despite assurances that the public will have access to the sporting facilities of the proposed school, this does not compare in the slightest to the benefits of a purely natural environment.

Local issues and personal loss aside, I also object on the more obvious dangers of creating a precedent. I understand that every case is dealt with individually, but if a bill such as this is successful then it could be used in the future by other areas to follow a similar route. Green space is the lungs of a city and its people and it should be protected and fought for, not be made easier to have its use changed. Once that decision is made it can never be out right.

I must now address the legality of this issue. Portobello Park was bought for the people of Portobello by Provost Miller following the amalgamation of Portobello with Edinburgh, in perpetuity, as a green space. The Council from 2006 onwards pursued the course to build on the park blatantly ignoring the fact that they did

not have the legal right to do so. They were brought to task in court on this issue and the right of the people was upheld and the Council were proved to be in the wrong. It is this disregard by the Council that also worries me. There is little consideration here for the loss of the green space. They cannot practically replace such a large area (which would be nonsensical anyway as existing green space anywhere else is already green space!) and this issue has become more about the fight than about the school. There are alternatives but the Council have not pursued any thorough investigation into any alternative site. They have, in essence, decided they have the right to build on Portobello Park and will do everything they can to make it happen. Period. The fact that for a number of years now they have neglected the park, and stopped the use of it for football, all points to their determination to repurpose the area. In the past few weeks they have decided to cut the grass and re-seed areas, which is a last minute knee-jerk reaction so that they can say they haven't been neglecting it! But the evidence speaks for itself over the past five years. This is not caring for the environment, this is doing what they think it takes to silence those who would object.

It is not enough to say that as the bill concerns education it should be approved regardless. It is not an argument in favour to suggest that there is no alternative site (clearly there is, be that phase build, brown field site etc, and to date adequate evidence has not been provided by the Council that they have thoroughly exhausted all investigations into the alternatives, not just decided at a meeting round a table). It is however clearly evident by its very nature that a large green space will be lost. This cannot be argued against.

I would draw the parliaments attention back to 2006 when part of the proposal was to build housing on the park in addition to the school to make the new school build financially viable. This part of the proposal was withdrawn, but when challenged on it at a later date the Council's response was that "there were no plans *at this time* to build housing on the park". The very wording of this is a concern as once permission has been given to build on this half of Portobello Park for a school it is not too far a stretch to see housing being built on the remainder at some time in the future.

From a practical point of view this is not a good site for a new school. It is adjacent to one of the busiest arterial traffic routes in and out of the city, especially in the morning. Add into this parents taking their kids to school, and delivery and maintenance lorries accessing the school via Park Avenue (an already congested and narrow street) and you have the potential for disaster. The existing road network, which cannot be adequately improved, would be compromised, delays would be inevitable for the traffic, frustrations would build, and before you know we are dealing with a fatal injury of a pedestrian, God forbid that would be someone's child.

It is also proposed for a large steel fencing along the northern perimeter following the edge of the busy road, and floodlighting to be installed. The unsightly view of this from anyone's perspective, be that residential neighbours, passers by, local residents or even attendees, is hardly conducive to a thing of beauty. The light pollution for local residents as well would become intolerable I would surmise. Included in this part of my objection would be the obvious loss of the majority of the mature trees along this northern boundary. Earlier in my letter I highlighted the Park as being of close proximity to the road. It is this band of mature trees

that creates a natural barrier and filter for the Park, which is what makes this large green area perfect for its current purpose personally.

On the overall subject of education, what message are we sending to the young people of today when we ride rough shod over green space to lazily satisfy a building requirement? They will no doubt look back in shame at us.

I urge you to consider rejecting the whole of this bill on the grounds of protecting green space and all my points outlined above. I hope you will have the foresight to protect this natural environment for the greater good.

The great Scottish naturalist John Muir, who once said, "in every walk with nature one receives more than one seeks". He had the foresight and vision to protect natural environments and how glad we are today for his foresight and vision. This bill has lost sight of what is important long term.

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