

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL (PORTOBELLO PARK) BILL

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM SEAN WATTERS ON BEHALF OF 1346 SIGNATORIES

We, the undersigned, write in support of the Private Bill promoted by City of Edinburgh Council. We have no desire to add to the workload of the Committee with multiple submissions making the same argument, so we have chosen to make this single submission signed by 1346 people, together with some short, personal statements from people across the community.

Portobello High School is an excellent school that has served this community for over 100 years. But 50 years ago a problem was created when the largest secondary school in Edinburgh was built on a site fundamentally too small. The building is not fit for purpose, at the end of its useful life, and on a site that is grossly undersized. We have an opportunity to rectify that.

There has been a comprehensive process going back over 10 years looking at how to replace the school. That has included an extensive investigation of possible sites, a statutory educational and public consultation, a prioritisation exercise identifying it as the Edinburgh school in most urgent need of replacement, a lengthy pre-planning consultation, a planning application, and the Private Bill consultation itself. The Council have conducted all stages of this process rigorously and fairly.

From the outset it was clear that there was no easy option and that compromise would be required. The core dilemma has stemmed from two sincere aims; obtaining the best new school on one hand and preserving open green space on the other. We can all support those goals, but balancing priorities is the challenge.

However, when options were exhaustively examined by the Council and consulted on with the community, one thing became clear: by far the best site for Portobello High School is Portobello Park. In terms of size, location, and the environment it can provide, no other site comes close. It would finally establish the school somewhere large enough to accommodate all the necessary facilities, and turn an underused space into a valued community asset.

The Council proposals, with the school on the park, public all-weather pitches, a brand new park on the existing school site and other open space improvements, offer the best possible outcome.

That is why there is such strong support for the proposals. The Council's consultation on the Private Bill was unprecedented (10,000 respondents across the city) with local responses indicating 76% support.

The Private Bill is now the only way to deliver the school that our young people need, on a site where the majority want to see it, as quickly as possible and at the lowest cost.

The Common Good exists for the benefit of a community, and this Private Bill is in the best interests of our community. There would be no change to the status of

Common Good land or open space anywhere else in Scotland. Portobello Park would continue to be Common Good, but now dedicated to the important purpose of education as well as recreation.

In Scotland we have a proud tradition of placing great value on education. When looking to build a new school, serving 1,400 pupils for generations to come, we should aspire to the best; the best for our young people, the best for our community.

We hope you can help deliver that by supporting the Private Bill. We would be delighted to address the Committee if you would find this useful.

June 2013

**Personal Statements in support of the written submission to the City of
Edinburgh Council (Portobello Park) Bill Committee**

[REDACTED]

"When I was a pupil at PHS 25 years' ago, the building was already said to be on its last legs. Areas were regularly closed due to structural issues, top floors became no go areas on windy days, regular crushes in the stairwells and broken lifts all added to what looked like a rundown building then, i dread to think what state its in now. So to think that my children, a whole generation later, could now go to school in the same building is not only a really depressing state of affairs but its hugely frustrating for hundreds of families in the area who want and need resolution and soon.

It's a great shame that legal wrangling appears to be blocking the delivery of a new high school which will be a benefit to the whole community. Not only the children that will be educated there but the staff who work there and the businesses who will be involved in the development and build."

[REDACTED]

A new modern high school on Portobello Park which can meet the needs of the younger generation will be a great asset to the local community. [REDACTED], the Portobello Park site is of an appropriate size to be able to accommodate the scale of school required. It therefore addresses our concerns about having a school which is fully accessible without being restricted by a site of insufficient size.

[REDACTED], **resident of Christian Crescent**

Portobello Park is just a field and has never been used as a play area since I moved here in 1959. Most times there is not a soul in the park. The park is the best area for the new school, pupils would benefit from park setting and outdoor sports facilities. Local youths would use the pitches instead of hanging around the streets. Improvements to pathways/roads/lighting would be a major improvement for local people. The park should be for the whole community and not just dog walkers. The new School does not personally benefit me in any way – I just want to see the children have a school in the best place. I would like to see the school built before I leave this world.

[REDACTED], **resident of Magdalene Drive**

I live 2 minutes from Portobello Park. I see on a daily basis that it is mainly a desolate wasteland used only by the occasional dog walker. The local area has an abundance of green space hence the reason the park is un-used. The school on the park would be a tremendous asset for and, used by the local community in many ways. Children/Youths would use the sports pitches, adults: the evening classes/swimming pool. The park is the best cost and location and would allow on-site sports pitches and full PE lessons for the pupils. I do not have school age children so no personal gain involved. The use of the park needs changed to benefit the whole community.

[REDACTED]

"Neither of my boys will benefit from going to the new school – [REDACTED]. When they started at the school we all had high hopes that they would both flourish in fantastic state of the art classrooms, sports halls, swimming pool and grounds. We tolerated the major inadequacies of the old, exhausted building and were impressed at the commitment, tenacity and professionalism of the teachers despite the sub-standard conditions they had to work in. I can say with absolute confidence that the overwhelming majority of the High School's Parent Council and Parents Forum do not want any more children and their families to suffer the disappointment of delay - support the building of new school in the park as quickly as possible and watch a community thrive!

[REDACTED] I know the issues around schools and schooling.

Portobello has a genuine community, a strong identity and character. You get a real range of people here. Emerging from mansions to maisonettes, there's a rich artistic vein of talent, sporting excellence and some of Scotland's most senior public servants rub shoulders with musicians, photographers, film makers, historians... Where the community has a focus or reason for coming together it prospers - bonfires on the beach, village show, church events, protests, rowing, eating, drinking and music making in the excellent high street and shoreside venues....we all prosper when we come together.

But nothing brings us together like our children - on a day to day, life to life basis. In this area we have some of the best primary schools in the country. We need a new high school to continue what has been happening for years at places like Tower Bank. Children are won or lost to education between the ages of 10 and 14 - so are their parents. Parents currently are faced with a stark choice of Soviet style amenity at the high school or digging deep and going private or going elsewhere. This diminishes us all, fragments our common good.

Portobello High does a very good job - but in the face of continual obstacles. At a time when a new curriculum is being introduced, on no additional resources, to maintain learning in a building that soaks up resources, resourcefulness and human resilience is asking too much. Yes, even of a fine Headteacher and a diligent dedicated staff.

We need a new school to stop the wasting of effort and money - in blocked sinks, blown off roofs, broken lifts, in bussing pupils to games fields. We need a new school to allow all of our people to flourish. When we do that we will all be surprised at what we will unlock - together. What a powerhouse for us all this building in that location will be. We'll wonder why it took us so long, but never whether it was worth doing.

Every new school creates a surge of hope- a sense of pride and aspiration. We have a lot of that already - along with a steely resolve not to miss an opportunity to build our children's futures. We're all going to depend on them very soon so let's put them first now!