



Northfield and Willowbrae Community Council

30 Piershill Terrace, Edinburgh, EH8 7BQ

Head of Planning and Transport,
PLACE,
The City of Edinburgh Council
Waverley Court,
4 East Market Street,
Edinburgh , EH8 8BG

10 December 2017

Dear Sir

PLANNING APPLICATION: 17/05217/FUL TREVERLEN PARK: NEW PARK AMENITY GREEN SPACE ON THE SITE OF THE FORMER PORTOBELLO HIGH SCHOOL.

1. I write to offer comments on this planning application as agreed by the Community Council as a consultee, following your letter of 21 November.
2. The timing of the consultation has not enabled a formal discussion at a meeting of the Community Council but we have agreed this response in correspondence and will minute that agreement at our next meeting on 11 January.
3. We conclude that the proposals are to be warmly supported as they put into practice the undertakings given by the City Council which have been endorsed in various sets of public consultations, and during the passage of the City of Edinburgh Council (Portobello Park) Bill.

Our community consultation

4. We have offered an opportunity to our community to comment direct to us via Facebook which reached 2077 people but no relevant comments were made either on Facebook or via our email address.
5. Many people believe that the consultations on the location of the new St John's Primary School and the process of securing views on various designs which occurred during 2014-16 have heard much of what needed to be said. The remaining step is to ensure that the final design meets the comments made.

6. Some small local discussions raised issues which are largely formally outside the application area, such as road markings and the School Street arrangements, and the Community Council will comment on these separately.

Drainage

7. The reports included in the application show that the site is covered in a considerable depth of clay. This had been presumed although much of the site has been covered with hard-standing for many decades. Hamilton Terrace has been subject to regular flooding of the basements of some houses and the retaining wall between the site and Hamilton Drive produces water flows.

8. It is therefore welcome that management of drainage is a substantial feature of the plan. The extent of the drainage swales, the SUDS tank and the protection zone along the wall have not been seen before and there has been local discussion about these. We recognise the removal of the current impervious surfaces should assist water to be absorbed locally and that, with the SUDS system, should be the right protection for the adjoining houses. There are concerns about the safety of the tank – how wet will it be, are there child safety issues? We note that SUDS systems elsewhere (for example, Queen Margaret University and one at Shawfair) carry clear warning signs. They are not places where children might play but Treverlen should be somewhere that children can play freely.

The retaining wall

9. Residents of Hamilton Drive have long been concerned about the wall. At the Mountcastle Drive end, the ground is almost 2 metres above the ground on which the houses stand, so they have been menaced for decades by the nuisance. That corner of the site was artificially raised when the High School was built to make a level car park (an aerial photograph exists of the work in hand). It might be thought that reverting to the original, natural, level would have been desirable – but only engineers can assess the optimum move here. Towards Hamilton Terrace, the wall is lower but has produced considerable amounts of water in the past, requiring residents to make dams and guides to protect their gardens.

10. The wall is braced in places after various bulges formed and so there are real worries about its condition. If it needs work, now is the time to do it. We understand that condition surveys were done as part of the early preparations for rebuilding on the site. Access to such reports would be assuring to residents.

Park Design

11. We recognise that the plan proposed is largely that agreed in the 2016 consultations and the changes are improvements. It has proved difficult to assess the various heights across the site; it had been hoped that section drawings would be produced in time for these comments.

Lighting

12. We recognise the Council's policy of not providing lighting in public parks, except on routes to a destination. It would be helpful to know if the lights on the rear path to St John's will be timed to go off when the school closes for the day, currently at about 9pm. It may be thought that leaving lights on all night would deter untoward activities – the evidence for that is not strong.

Boundary Railings

13. There is no mention that the concrete bases for the 1950s railing round the park will be repaired and the railings painted. In many places the concrete is in poor condition (the main school gate piers were repaired a year or so ago as they were found to be dangerous).

History

14. We understand that Holmes Miller are considering what artefacts from old St John's might be kept for the new school. If they cannot be accommodated in the new building there may be scope for some becoming features in Treverlen. For example, the "school teacher" weathervane should be preserved somewhere on the site, as might the "urns" on the roof and the gilded lettering.

15. The two almond trees either side of the original school gates date from 1926 (there is a photograph of one as a sapling). Tree surgeons working on the northern one reported a couple of years ago that it was split and rotting. They advised it be removed – in which case a new pair might be planted.

Fields in Trust

16. In Parliament, the Council said that it would put forward Treverlen to be protected under the National Playing Fields Association designation of Fields in Trust, as has been done with the Figgate Burn Park. Confirmation that this is still the plan would be helpful.

Duddingston Road

17. The consultation on 3 possible park layouts showed an entrance to the Park on Duddingston Road which would have gone a long way to tidying up a muddled layout around the former janitors' houses. This entrance has now moved back to the current line of severe security barriers behind the houses. We understand that the muddle is caused by the need for road access to the electricity substation which is placed oddly behind the house line. There are various small patches of land here, including the grassed area next to the road, possibly in Council or Scottish Power ownership. It would be useful if this area could be re-examined and ownerships and access for the janitors' houses rethought. Otherwise, it will become a blot on what is likely to be a well-regarded set of projects.

Conclusion

18. The Community Council believes that the local community supports the application made, while hoping that some further engagement on detail can be had. The opening of the new Park in the late summer of 2019 should enable peace to descend on a corner of Edinburgh that never expected to be the centre of the attention it has received over the last decade.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Geoff Pearson".

Geoff Pearson
Secretary