



THE COCKBURN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

July 2017

Chance to have your say on designs for Ross Bandstand

Princes Street Gardens is probably the most cherished public open space in Edinburgh, but there is certainly potential for its enhancement. The Ross Fountain is indeed a magnificent piece of 19th century cast-iron work – but it has not worked for years. Much of the space around it in the western end of the Gardens is cluttered and tatty.

The Ross Bandstand, at the heart of the Gardens shows its age. About a year ago the city council accepted an offer from a benefactor, Norman Springford, to help fund the redevelopment of the bandstand area, as well as providing new landscaping and visitor facilities, and to refurbish the Ross Fountain. Mr. Springford is the founder and former chairman of Apex Hotels, and is reported to have pledged £5M towards the estimated £25M cost of the project.

The project is being carried through by a charitable trust. The Ross Development Trust website says that the Trust is “constituted to deliver significant regeneration in West Princes Street Gardens. The Trust is responsible for managing the development phase of the proposed improvements, as well as raising the capital required to fund them.”

The Trust has overseen an international design competition. There were 125 entries, more than half of them from overseas. Seven finalists have been chosen and their schemes can be viewed in the City Art Gallery until the end of July (Wednesdays to Saturdays) or online at <https://www.rdtrust.org/designcompetition/Gardens>, where you can comment on each of the seven designs.

The centrepiece is to be a new “Pavilion”. The Ross Development Trust, in setting the brief for the competition said, “To achieve international acclaim, the new Pavilion needs to present an internationally recognisable image, with the ability to function as a space for daily performances.” As well as being a venue for the end of the Festival and for the Hogmanay crowd-puller, it will “be used to complement the events on offer at the EICC, Assembly Rooms, and other venues within the City. It provides a focal point for a unified City-wide entertainment and exhibition offer.” By drawing more residents and visitors into the city centre, the development is intended “to increase footfall to encourage the enhancement of the city centre retail offer.”

Part of the brief is to create a Visitor Centre, which will include a café with views to the Castle. This is seen as a means of improving disabled access to the Gardens from Princes St. The red blaes area near the fountain is to be landscaped, and the bridge into the Gardens from Kings Stables Road is to be strengthened to enable the materials needed for the new Pavilion and for events in the Gardens to be delivered more easily.

The Cockburn's Urban Design Group is looking carefully at the project. When the design competition was launched in February, our then Director, Marion Williams, was quoted in the press saying that the Cockburn was involved and "happy with the direction things are going in."

(<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/music/work-set-to-get-underway-on-new-outdoor-concert-arena-in-edinburgh1-4361824>).

Council planners review parking standards and give green light to "Built for Rent"

Parking standards in new developments was a key focus in the recent consultation by the City Council on Design Guidance. The declared aim is to support active travel and public transport. Thus there is emphasis on permanent and long stay parking provision for cycles. Maximum standards will be specified in planning permissions but the idea of a minimum level of car parking provision is dropped. The intention is that required levels will take account of the accessibility of the location to public transport, density and carriageway width.

In addition, "one fully wired, connected, and ready to use electric vehicle charging point must be provided for every five spaces on proposals where ten or more car parking spaces are proposed".

At the June meeting of Edinburgh's Civic Forum, which is chaired by the Cockburn,

the planned changes in parking requirements was much less controversial than proposals to facilitate development of Build to Rent Housing.

The industry body Homes for Scotland successfully lobbied the Scottish Government on the potential of Built to Rent (BTR) as a means of tackling endemic housing shortages. In 2013 Nicola Sturgeon agreed to contribute £70,000 from the government to an expert group to "pave the way for the industry to capitalise on the opportunities to attract new sources of finance, boost the supply of housing in Scotland and support jobs."

Edinburgh's proposed Design Guidance explains the concept. BTR offers "high quality professionally managed homes under single ownership with shared facilities that can be delivered rapidly." It can also include the conversion of existing buildings. The guidance further mentions the units being let separately and the provision of high quality amenities.

Members of Edinburgh's Civic Forum raised a number of concerns. The proposed Guidance says "A flexible approach to current space and amenity standards is accepted depending on the quality of the accommodation and amenities provided." The fear is that this will result in a further reduction of space standards in the flats, creating long-term problems. In addition, questions were raised about how developers could be held to their promises once the developments are completed. For example, what happens if concierge services or on-site facilities such as gyms prove too expensive to sustain?

Similarly, the Design Guidance says somewhat ambiguously, “the retention of the homes for rent for a specified time period should be explored and secured via an appropriate method to be agreed between the Council and the developer.” Already the boom in holiday lets and AirBnB in Edinburgh is squeezing traditional sources of homes in the city. This makes unacceptable this hint that retention of the BTR as rented accommodation is negotiable.

Meanwhile, *Scotland on Sunday* reported in its 2 July edition that “a flood of international money is expected to be invested” in BTR, with Scottish cities offering better returns than similar places elsewhere in the UK. The New Town, the city centre and the west end are described as Edinburgh’s “rental hotspots” with rent-to-income ratios of 40-50%.

John Boyle of Rettie and Co. said that more than 2500 BTR units are in the pipeline in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, with developers such as Moda Living and Apache Capital acquiring sites. They have bought the Springside site in Fountainbridge, along with 50 existing private rented houses, and plan a £215M 500 unit “BTR village”.

You can see the draft Guidance at <https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/review-of-edinburgh-designguidance/>

Annual General Meeting

The 142nd AGM of the Association will be held **on Monday 11 September 2017 at 5.30pm to commence at 6pm**. The venue will be St.Cecilia’s Hall, Niddry St, Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1NQ. Please email admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk if you wish to attend.

Nominations are invited from Members wishing to serve on the Council.

Nominations must be made and seconded by Members and must include the consent of the nominee. Nominations should be sent to the Director at the Association’s office at Trunk’s Close, 55 High St, Edinburgh EH1 1SR, or by email to

admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk. They should be accompanied by a personal statement by the nominee, not exceeding 250 words in length. The cut-off for receiving nominations will be **Monday 28 August at 5pm**. Persons elected will serve a term of 3 years and may stand for one more 3-year term after that before being required to stand down for a period of at least one year. It is expected that there will be 6 Council meetings during 2017-18, though Council members may also be asked to serve on Committees or working groups.

The election of the new Council members will take place by voting at the AGM itself.

The AGM will be followed by an address by the new Director. We hope to arrange some additional entertainment, details of which will follow.

Chair's Notes



Recently I represented the Cockburn at an “away day” of the Edinburgh Sustainable Development Partnership (ESDP). It is one of a number of partnerships that the City Council has established as part of the Community Planning process. Community Planning actually has relatively little community input and lacks a spatial dimension. It is basically about aligning the priorities of Council service providers with other public sector agencies such as Police Scotland, the NHS or the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Representatives of these bodies mainly comprise the Partnership.

Previously 12 “Neighbourhood Partnerships” have replicated the process more locally and fed into the Community Plan. Now the City has invented four “Localities” – South-West, South-East, North-East and North and West. These attempt to align with boundaries used by public agencies, though make no attempt to relate to community perceptions of their own localities. Led by Locality Leadership Teams, these will produce Locality Improvement Plans that will feed into the Edinburgh Vision 2050 process.

I apologise if this all sounds boring, or bemusing, or both, but I just wonder how many Cockburn members are aware of these structures? From the presentations made at the ESDP meeting, the whole process is rooted in the type of bland “management-speak” that totally misses the specificities of Edinburgh as a unique and special place. This is not just a matter of pedantry. By failing to understand how the special strengths and assets of Edinburgh could be used to advantage.

In respect of the City Vision 2050 process, the ESDP was told that “Heritage” will be one of the themes. I challenged this and suggested that “Conservation” should replace it. “Heritage” too easily pigeonholes concerns, and leaves “Heritage” to be balanced against all the other legitimate issues that command attention, such as jobs or poverty. In contrast, “Conservation” needs to run through the Vision like the lettering through a piece of rock. So, for example, conservation means looking after the whole stock of traditional buildings, not just those classed as “heritage”. It means caring for landscapes and public spaces, not just seeing such items as assets for disposal. It also points to the need to respect and build on community ties and identity, as a way of engaging with the city and its people.

I was able to make members of the ESDP aware of the Cockburn’s Civic Agenda (<http://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/cgblog/55/41/A-Civic-Agenda-for-Edinburgh/>), and urged them to use it as the basis for building the sustainable development argument to the Edinburgh Partnership.

Are you on email? Do we have your email address?

If you have an email address, please share it with us. It makes it easier and cheaper for us to communicate with you. We promise not to pass your email details on to any third party. If you prefer to receive the Newsletter by post that is fine, but email makes it easier for us to stay in touch. Please contact

admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk

Thanks!

New Director

The Cockburn has made an offer to our preferred candidate for the post of Director. That offer has been accepted in principle, and we are currently in the process of drawing up contract that will be fully compliant with all aspects of current legislation. A formal announcement will follow and we hope to have our new Director in post before the end of August.

Royal High Hotel application to go to hearing in August

There will be a public hearing by the City Council's Development Management SubCommittee into the proposals to develop the controversial "luxury hotel" at the Royal High School site on Calton Hill. The hearing will be held in the Council Chamber in the City Chambers on the High Street, on 31 August starting at 10.00am. The Cockburn has asked to make a statement to the meeting. The new

Convenor of the Sub-Committee is Councillor Lewis Ritchie (SNP). The Committee has 5 SNP members, 4 Conservative, 3 Labour, 2 Green and 1 Liberal Democrat.

Some Cockburn members attended the public meeting in Canongate Kirk on 22 June to promote the case for relocating St Mary's Music School to the old Royal High School building. One of the speakers was Cockburn Trustee Keir Bloomer. About 150 people attended and offered unanimous support for the proposal.

The purpose of the meeting was to support the music school rather than to oppose the hotel. However, the feelings of the audience about the hotel proposal were very evident.

Mr. Gray Muir, chairman of the Royal High School Preservation Trust, focused on the importance of the building and its suitability for educational purposes. He referred also to the provision of a new concert venue for public use. Mr. Taylor indicated that the move would allow the school to take about 50% more pupils, thus extending the opportunities for top-level musical education in Scotland.

The most important information provided on the night was the extent of the funding on offer from the Dunard Trust. No figure was given (so as not to discourage other potential donors) but it was made clear that the project is now financially viable. This destroys one of the arguments that the hotel developers might otherwise deploy.

Events News

Joe Taylor *Doors Open Day Coordinator*

We've been increasingly busy organising Doors Open Day these past few months and with deadlines approaching this week it feels like I've been thinking about very little else! We are close to a final list of venues and I'm pleased to say we now have 133 confirmed venues in Edinburgh. This is a 17% increase on our last biggest Doors Open day in 2015. We also have 18 New Town venues this year which is a large increase on the 5 venues last year. This push for New Town venues is due to our efforts to meet our *250th Anniversary of the New Town* Theme. I am particularly excited by the Georgian House Museum and Rock House (home of C19th photographer Octavius Hill and reputedly the oldest house in the New Town). So these venues are my top tips for now! Fashion and homeware designers ANTA will also be opening their Old Town home (Crocket's Land) on Victoria Street and their George St shop for a fascinating talk about the history of Scottish design and contemporary tartan - another one to look out for!

East Lothian

The Cockburn has been asked this year by the Scottish Civic Trust if we can bring in East Lothian to our Doors Open Day weekend. This is due to public funding restrictions in the region. Therefore I'm excited to announce that this year will be the first year of an Edinburgh & East Lothian Doors Open Day weekend. We intend to have a separate map for E. Lothian in the brochure and I am currently targeting around a dozen venues in the area.