



Winter 2016/17

Crisis on the Canal

Important decisions are being made about the development of the area along the canal. If we want housing accessible to local people, development that reflects the extraordinary history of the area, cultural centres to enjoy and draw new life to the neighbourhood and safe zones for pedestrians and pupils attending the new high school, then **now** is the time to be heard.

The Edinburgh and Union canal is about to celebrate its 200th anniversary. Built between 1818 and 1822, it was the distillation of ideas from the foremost civil engineers of its time including Thomas Telford. The design and management of the project was taken up by Hugh Baird and company, with the radical plan to push the canal to Falkirk and to link with the Forth and Clyde canal for onward passage to Glasgow. The route accessed all the necessary coal mines and stone quarries that supplied Edinburgh's growth, and the city's industrialisation. From the canal's start in port Hopetoun (now Lothian house) to its end at Port Downie, there are no locks, making passage quick and cheap. Fed with water from the Pentlands reservoir, the canal was used extensively as coolant for the many industries emerging in the Lothians.

Fountainbridge Canalside Initiative (FCI) is here to help co-ordinate local voices, but inertia and inactivity will lead to one sad outcome. A series of developments, driven solely by financial gain for private interests, no long-term attachment to the area, and a cash-strapped council drawn along behind.

The development of the site East of Viewforth

After the vote to leave the EU in the June referendum, the funding partner that was lined up to enable the housing to be built on the site to the East of Viewforth (opposite the new high school) withdrew, so EDI is now speaking to others to try to get the money to build the housing on the site. The plan remains that 112 affordable homes to rent will be provided by 21 Century Homes, the City of Edinburgh council housing programme. EDI currently intends that the rest of the housing (a further 320 units) will be privately managed housing for rent.

FCI supports the inclusion of significant amounts of housing on the site, but continues to have concerns that the plan to provide this through blocks of flats owned by private property management companies may lead to gated communities for those that can afford very high rents. The danger is that this will exclude most

local people and may mitigate against the creation of an engaged community that we always hoped to see on the site.

Goodbye to another historic building

A while ago, the Council granted permission for the old Mecca Bingo hall (opened in 1911 as a circus and skating rink, then becoming the Palais de Dance in 1920, with a special revolving stage to feature two live bands) to be demolished. This has now happened, and the site is to be developed to supply yet more student housing. The developers say that this will be designed, and priced, to suit postgraduate, rather than undergraduate, students.

Canalside site up for sale

The original plan was that ownership of the site would be retained in the public sector, but the Council has decided to raise finance by selling the section to the east of Gilmore Park (beside the lift-bridge). We had all hoped that, fronting onto the canal, this part of the site would be used for a substantial building with a cultural use. Sadly, this space (in mauve and red, below) has now been put up for sale to a developer for a hotel. EDI are currently in negotiation with one of five bidders.



The proposed development plan for the site to the east of Viewforth

FCI is very disappointed by this, and remains very keen to ensure that the site has a vibrancy and usefulness for local people. The unique character of the site – the frontage onto the canal – needs to be celebrated and reflected in the ways the public can enjoy the area. The creation of cultural uses for areas of the site is central to this vision and we hope to join the cultural and creative sector in finding the opportunities that the site presents, much as the Edinburgh Printmakers have with their exciting plans for the old brick built 'Rubber House' on Fountainbridge.

Meanwhile moves

It is so long since the old brewery along the towpath was demolished that many of us have almost forgotten what it looked like! But FCI has been committed to making constructive use of the site, and the little community of activities that developed on the corner of Viewforth and Dundee Street became a space to play and grow and meet others in social, hands-on collective activities.

Most of the Grove (temporary allotments) has moved to Harrison Park and the Pianodrome has moved to Bridge 8 in Wester Hailles. We are trying to ensure that the Wikihouse can now move to Tollcross Primary school, a satisfying end to this long and at times, hard project to bring to completion.



Although the Meanwhile project had to end in September, it has provided a fabulous demonstration of the need people have for public open space in which they can express themselves creatively and actively and mix socially. Join us in our campaign to bring the essence of this into the last phase of the development, through establishing a creative focus on the site that is 'Our Space'.

Scottish Canals and the towpath

Work along the towpath between Gibson Terrace and the Viewforth Bridge includes re-surfacing in front of the new school and stabilizing work along the banks of the canal. Scottish Canal's contractor has undertaken phase 1 archaeological investigation and is agreeing final details for the pile foundations following ground investigations, which will ultimately strengthen the canal banks. They will be back on site with the next phase of works soon and the weblink (<https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/news/works-on-the-union-canal-at-fountainbridge-edinburgh/>) and notices will be duly updated to alert users to any diversions.

As part of the works on the new Boroughmuir High School, there will be further closures of the local towpath. We understand that, with helpful funding from Sustrans, the surface will be granite paving to replace the existing tarmac, and to match the rest of the paving up to the new school.

Further work will be carried out nearer to Lochrin Basin end of the canal to improve the towpath surface.



Boroughmuir High School

Because of further delays in construction, the move to the new school building has been put back to after the summer break in 2017, making the opening a full year behind schedule. While the contractor indicated that it might be feasible to hand over the building in the spring, it would not be sensible to have the upheaval of moving the school during the examination period.

The existing school building is well used as a public facility, and that will continue to be the case in the new building. The Council has told us that "the Sports Facilities, i.e. the outdoor Multi-Use Games Area, Sports hall, dance studio, fitness suite and a gym will be available to the public out of school hours and these will be managed by Edinburgh Leisure. All other facilities within the school, e.g. atrium space, classrooms etc. will be available to be booked, in line with the Council's letting regulations."

The old school building is subject to a contentious planning application to convert it into flats with a large block of flats in the grounds, creating a total of 115, varying in size from one, two and three bedrooms.



Looking North East from the canal towpath towards the new Boroughmuir High School



An architect's view looking across the Viewforth bridge to the North East (with a pedestrianised bridge?)

Viewforth Bridge

A number of local groups and individuals are in discussion with the Council to try to ensure that the Viewforth Bridge over the canal is closed to traffic, hopefully on a permanent basis. Other than the clear danger to pedestrians (not least the 1,200 pupils of Boroughmuir High School), the brief period during construction when the bridge was re-opened, with traffic light controls, revealed major issues with traffic management. Residents of St Peter's Place who overlook this section of road told a recent meeting of the Boroughmuir Parent Council that the widened section of footpath is commonly parked on, and that the roadway approaching the bridge is not wide enough to carry two streams of traffic.

The impetus behind the campaign to close the bridge is growing. But it is also clear that traffic management on nearby Yeaman Place is poor, and that pedestrians crossing it at Dundee Street are at considerable risk. We hope that the installation of traffic lights at the Yeaman Place/Dundee Street junction, effective management of illegal parking at the junction, and the removal of communal bins that obstruct driver and pedestrian lines of view, will form part of the solution for this junction.

Boroughmuir Parent Council has set up a petition, calling on the Council to review the safety of the Viewforth bridge crossing, and you can add your name to the petition by using [this link](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/864495/safety_first_-_close_the_bridge)

Our AGM

The FCI Annual Meeting, at which local residents can come and talk about all the issues related to the development of the canalside – will be on **Monday 20 March 2017**, in the church hall at King's Church, on the corner of Viewforth and Gilmore Place. Doors open at 6.30pm. We will have a speaker and aim to stimulate a friendly discussion among all who come along. This year, our theme will be **“How to make sure that the canal remains OUR space”**.

Please visit our website at <http://www.fountainbridgeci.org.uk/welcome>.

Or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/fountainbridge.canalsideinitiative>