

Tollcross Community Council – Canalside Issues

In the heart of the city the mathematical river flows. The Union Canal was designed to link Edinburgh and Glasgow, by meeting the existing Forth and Clyde Canal at Falkirk, 31 totally flat miles away. It started at Port Hopetoun at the top of Lothian Road (site now occupied by Lothian House.)

Completed in 1822, it brought industry and commerce to TX, then, when the transport function was taken over by the railways, it provided a great source of water for cooling and cleaning purposes for the industries around TX and Fountainbridge.

For many years the canal was closed and became an unsightly rubbish dump. Many enthusiasts continued to use the canal in limited ways, not least the school and university rowing clubs, the Forth Canoe Club and the Edinburgh Canal Society. The canal was included in the Millennium project to rejuvenate canals as linear parks throughout the UK. Much work was done to restore the throughway of the canal, new passages re-cut and the new Falkirk Wheel linked the Union Canal to the Forth and Clyde Canal in 2002. It is now administered by Scottish Canals as a national asset. The canal provides a unique opportunity to experience wildlife in Edinburgh because, unlike the Water of Leith, it is a slow-flowing shallow river and therefore attracts a different list of inhabitants. Also it has a number of people living in houseboats on the water, and it is hoped that this number will grow.

The canal today is enjoyed by walkers, runners and cyclists along the towpath as well as canoeists, rowers, and barges on the water.

However the role of TXCC is here drawn to the concerns of the canal users;

- cyclists versus walkers
- litter in, on and around the canal.
- But, especially at present, the development of land adjacent to the canal.

In the early 1990s S&N brewers vacated the site previously occupied by the North British Rubber Company (which was in its day the biggest employer in Edinburgh). Originally acquired by Lloyds Bank, it was bought by the Council after the 2008 banking crisis as a suitable site for a new Boroughmuir school building. The new school was opened in 2018.

However the rest of the site was available for development and the Council, after lobbying and forceful delegations by the Fountainbridge Canalside Initiative (a local action group tasked with engendering community revival in the area) has agreed and has plans for housing and office space - to include workshop and industrial incubator space - on the site as well as offices and hotels. It is hoped that the emphasis will be on residents for the long term and not transients.

At the Eastern end of the site a further section has been acquired by Vastint and here again the hope is for more community-minded development, although commercial considerations - especially for such a site in the heart of the capital - make the need for the community council vital.

On the other side of the canal, in Lower Gilmore Place, further development of old and unsightly properties has led to outcries from local residents, fearing over-extended non-inclusive development.

On other parts of the canal around TX there has been a high concentration of purpose-built student accommodation, and, while it is accepted that Edinburgh is a University city, such concentrations cannot

help the amenity of the city and will, in the long run, lead to further problems for the resident population.

TXCC is committed to the revival of, and maintenance of, a vibrant city centre community encompassing all comers, visitors and residents and making this, as it has been for two hundred years, a cornerstone of Edinburgh.

Richard Allen May 2018.