

Tollcross Community Council – Planning

One of our activities is to represent the local community on planning matters and to remain vigilant about new developments in our area. We are an official consultee to the planning department on major planning issues. We get involved in strategic planning; being consulted on the Strategic Development Plan and the Local Development Plan which guides development in Edinburgh. We are not always listened to but we try to influence these in a manner that supports residents.

We have been involved in many consultations with the Council and Scottish Government but have been unable to take part in all the consultations offered. Some examples include the Strategic Development Plan, the Government review of planning, Planning for Student Housing, New Council Planning Guidance, cycling routes, meadows activities and the overprovision of licensed premises and fast food outlets in our area. We also take part in consultations with developers where major developments take place. Consultations with organisations like Sustrans and Living Streets have also taken place.

Our remit includes the Fountainbridge development area which is an area in Edinburgh with some of the highest levels of development in the city. We have made representations to the Council Planning Department about most of the major developments in the area. We have made representations on planning applications – some large, like the master plan, Boroughmuir School, New Springside Development, King's Stable Road Development, The old ERI, Student Flats, Lothian House, Skyparks Development, and some small, like more hot food shops and canal berths. The most recent of these was an objection to the addition of another storey to the already agreed building on the corner of Semple Street and Fountainbridge. The Council finally rejected the extra floor as the building was high already.

It is fair to say that many of our objections over the last decade have not been accepted by the Council. It is not always appreciated that we can only object to certain things (material matters) which are largely determined by Council planning guidance. These include things like effects on traffic and parking, design features, effects on listed buildings and conservation areas and matters within the planning rules. However, issues such as loss of view, or negative effects on the value of properties are not material considerations.

We have worked with many resident's groups and organisations like Friends of the Meadows and The Fountainbridge Canal Initiative when they have particular issues about planning and developments in their areas. We have campaigned jointly with several residents groups, sometimes with success and sometimes not.

The Community Council has come to an agreed position on certain principles relating to planning matters. Some are summarised below.

We support more housing developments and particularly affordable housing as we feel that central Edinburgh is losing its longer term residential community. For example, we campaigned for more

housing and affordable housing on the King's Stable Road development but we lost out to a hotel and a student residence.

We try to protect and retain retail outlets in our high streets. This is not easy with changing shopping habits. We do feel that losing too much retail damages the quality of our high streets. We would also like to keep as many independent retailers as possible as the increase in chain stores causes any local individuality to diminish.

Edinburgh is a fairly low-rise city and we support Edinburgh's skyline policy and try to resist developer demand for taller and taller buildings.

Tollcross has seen the burgeoning of fast-food and alcohol outlets and is now classed as an area of overprovision within the planning system. We object to further increases of this type of provision. This also relates to the type of high streets we would like.

In more recent years we have objected to the building of more student residences. It is not that we don't like students but feel that nearly twenty student blocks in this wedge of Edinburgh is beginning to distort the demographics of a nicely mixed area.

We have been rather disappointed at the Government review of the planning system which is almost completed. We feel that the balance of power is still firmly with the developers and are sorry that equal rights of appeal was not introduced. Developers can appeal against a decision they don't like but objectors cannot.

We are always keen on public participation in the planning process and welcome all to our meetings. Comments and queries are welcome.

Paul Beswick May 2018.