

18<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Dear Sir or Madam,

Planning application – **8/01088/FUL**. Starter Hut, Golf Tavern, 30 - 31 Wright's Houses, Edinburgh EH10 4HR.

Tollcross Community Council was invited to a 'public' exhibition at the Golf Tavern/G1 group on Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to discuss changes to a planning application granted last year under 18/01088/FUL.

This 'public' meeting took place, we were told, at the request of Parks and Greenspace Manager David Jamieson to allow for a 'public' consultation on the above application from the owners of the Golf Tavern/G1 Group which was granted last year. The people running the event, Sir Frank Mears Associates (FMA), told us that after the 'public' event evidence would be forwarded to David Jamieson for him to make a decision on these revised plans<sup>1</sup>.

The 'public' event invited only those who had commented via the CEC planning portal before the original application came to Council - and anyone happening to pass on the day who saw the boards. Hardly a large or representative sample of the public, which we feel is not good enough.

Tollcross Community Council felt at the time of the original application that the grounds for granting the application were weak.

1. The main reason for the objection is the reported use for these changes; i.e. the expansion of the Golf Tavern's business onto Bruntsfield Links with the use of tables and chairs. We object to this type of privatisation of public space and particularly so on the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links which historically and by edict have remained a publicly useable amenity.
2. The formation of a crossing from Bruntsfield Links to the door of the Golf Tavern seems to be another commercialisation of this public space.
3. There is no explanation as to why there should be the construction of a second starter's hut. There do seem to be past edicts (e.g. 1991 Confirmation Act) to prevent the building of permanent structures on the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links.

According to what we were told at the time, the planning permission granted was not acted upon as the Golf Tavern/G1 Group do not own the land and David Jamieson had refused permission for its use.

Effectively the Planning sub-committee granted permission to use land that the Council<sup>2</sup> hold in care on behalf of the people of Edinburgh.

Our original objections to the use of public land for private gain still stand and notwithstanding the summer letting of the Meadows to allow festival events to take place, we believe that encouraging a commercial use on the Links side of the park remains unacceptable. We felt at the time that the Council's decision would come back to haunt us at some future point, and now this time has come.

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<sup>1</sup> See exhibition boards at end of the document.

<sup>2</sup> This common good land practice has been established over many centuries and is widely used across Scotland – land managed in trust by the local authority.

The Links has a fine and historic Short Hole Golf Club (SHGC) just across from the Golf Tavern which has occupied this space for many years. This area of the Links enjoys regular active use by SHGC, tourists, amateur golfers and by many others. We feel that no further use of this area should be encouraged whether either commercial or otherwise – it has enough going on already.

Our basic concern is that the Golf Tavern/G1 Group is going to hire out golf clubs, picnic baskets, and deckchairs from the new starter golf hut. This is nothing more than a bare-faced commercial enterprise on the part of the Golf Tavern with the aim of selling more alcohol on the back of this 'amenity'. Under the revised plans, this un-demarcated area, will in effect become the Golf Tavern's beer garden and a taking-over of public space. These revised plans show the area with steps up a bank and seating for customers, and we also note that Wright's Houses, the student housing cooperative next to the Golf Tavern, will suffer noise from the beer garden during the day and late into the night.

With regard to the Golf Starter Hut, we are under no illusion that the proposal to erect one that will not be permanent is to get around the laws governing the Links and the Meadows that do not allow for permanent building, as stated in the 1991 Confirmation Act<sup>3</sup>. We can foresee a situation where once the new starter hut is up, very conveniently it will never be taken down.

The location of the hut under the canopy of a mature tree is concerning. Has a tree survey been carried out? If so, the results need to be put in the public domain. Likewise, is this tree protected with any tree order? We are also concerned about permanent damage to the root system of the tree, given the proximity of the proposed hut and its weight.

Although we were told at the exhibition that the Golf Tavern/G1 Group intend to hire out 'various goods' from the new golf starter hut on the Links, we were also told that income-generation for this proposed enterprise is not the main reason. . We find this hard to believe. It is clearly for commercial gain.

Across Edinburgh we see parallel examples of commercial pressure on public spaces. In Princes Street Gardens, for example, public space has been turned into event space for profit. Despite claims to the contrary, this is not part of a master-plan to make spaces fit for the 21st century, it is merely profit-driven. And with this will come the loss of the peace, quiet and overall ambience of parks that many communities use as their only green space.

We were told by FMA that following the 'public' exhibition the decision of what happens next will be left to David Jamieson who would be presented with the evidence from the 'public' exhibition via the comment forms and written submissions.

Thus the Golf Tavern/G1 Group would not be required to resubmit the changed plans via planning. And we only have the word of the Golf Tavern/G1 Group that there will be no tables and chairs on the Links. Their current approved planning application says they have the right to this, and could possibly act on it in the future. We believe this is too weak a safeguard for the future of the Links and could be seen as a gateway for other commercial operations to gain control of parts of other public parks and spaces in the future if this is allowed to go forward.

Many tenement-dwellers in the City Centre, especially surrounding the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links consider the parks as valuable green space which constitute their back yard. We cannot give that up for commercial operations at the expense of the communities that want parks kept as green space.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1991/19/contents/enacted>

We have consulted with the local community and in response have been asked to object to the use of this public space for commercial purposes. One objector in particular replied, saying:

‘Let's not be too naive: this isn't an altruistic proposal; it's to make money for the pub, by emphasising the land as a glorified beer garden. Your own photo shows chairs being hired for customers. See the numerous objections (including @TollcrossCC's) at

[https://citydev-portal.edinburgh.gov.uk/idxpa-web/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=P5L4ZAEWN3I00&fbclid=IwAR1AFYY-qoVy\\_CMNZNs2qY2GYaamo-7jbvc3L4p8sHhnrRKP7ukWJDEmpaE](https://citydev-portal.edinburgh.gov.uk/idxpa-web/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=P5L4ZAEWN3I00&fbclid=IwAR1AFYY-qoVy_CMNZNs2qY2GYaamo-7jbvc3L4p8sHhnrRKP7ukWJDEmpaE)

**Jonathan Mitchell QC**

We believe that if we want to move forward and protect this valuable green space then the modified plans should be rescinded with immediate effect. The Golf Tavern/G1 Group have not applied for new planning; they want us, the local community to take their word for it that they will keep to these revised drawings and plans.

We should be a generation that is preserving our dwindling city centre green spaces, and not supporting the extension of commercial use on public land. And in light of the Council declaring a ‘Climate Emergency’ at May's full Council meeting, the Links should be one of the first places to benefit from this change of attitude.

We warmly welcome a modal shift in Council priorities on the use and protection of our green spaces. As citizens of Edinburgh who have inherited these amazing spaces, we want to pass these on in the best possible shape for future generations. These historic green areas are becoming increasingly important in the ever more-congested city that we call home.

Andrew Brough

**Chair, Tollcross Community Council**

visual of proposed Golf Hut and proposed public area



Aerial sketch