

**OTCC DEPUTATION
Development Quality Sub-Committee
6th Feb 2008**

Caltongate Development Planning Applications.

The Old Town Community Council would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak at this important hearing.

We have grave concerns regarding the applications before you today and our detailed objections to each of the 12 planning applications have been referred to in the 5 reports presented today.

There are 3 issues we would like you to give particular thought to when making your decision are

1. The sustainability of this project.
2. Planning and the consultation process.
3. The implications for the future.

1. The Sustainability of the project

Sustainable development is not just a tack-on thing that can be addressed in the detailed design – it's fundamental, and should promote a holistic approach which benefits the economy, the environment and society.

The applicant has made great effort to highlight the energy efficiency of the proposals through the incorporation of a ground source heating/cooling system. Whilst this element of the proposals is welcomed, the application of it here is disappointing.

If the opportunity to utilise such technology exists due to the particular ground conditions and available public funding subsidies then it should be employed for any development at this location.

The proposed development restricts the application of this technology to the office block and private residential developments on the bus depot site (to mitigate the effects of passive solar gain), with a possible link to the hotel and conference complex if the demolition and deep excavation of the 2 listed building sites are approved.

There is no intention to link this technology to the affordable housing which has been offset to the adjacent council owned site on Calton Road.

It seems thoroughly wasteful to design a building which then requires advanced technological solutions to minimise the impact of passive solar gain. Passive solar gain is an opportunity to reduce heating demands and a good designer would incorporate elements of this to reduce energy demand for heating, not to create buildings which require energy dependant solutions to modify an overheated environment created through poor design.

Little consideration has been given to the CO2 generated through the demolition works, excavations, and production of vast quantities of concrete which will be required in construction.

No explanation is forthcoming as to why private parking should be included for all the private residential units at such a central site where good public transport links exist and where it has been accepted (in the recommendations for approval of the housing on Calton Road) that standard parking provision of 1 space per dwelling is not required.

At the start of the council's formal consultation on the draft masterplan it was agreed that the development should aim to achieve a zero carbon rating. However this commitment appears to have got lost during the final approval of the plan. It is imperative that for the development to be truly sustainable equal consideration must be given to the environmental, economic and social impacts of these proposals.

A good development will address all three aspects of sustainable development. An approach is needed which aims to use resources efficiently, maximise community benefit, protect what is valued and repair what is damaged. Commitment to these principles needs to be embedded in any proposal and the constraints should help shape appropriate development. As we are forever being told by the council - Reduce Reuse Recycle. The continued use of structurally sound buildings which are still in demand should be the starting point for any development in this area.

What is the long term view of the proposed development? Will it achieve sustainable economic growth for future generations? Will the development provide a range of employment opportunities and services for future generations growing up in the area?

Most importantly will future generations be able to grow up in this area?

The plans give little or no consideration to the environmental and social impacts of the development on the local community. It is very disappointing that the reports prepared by the Head of Planning and Strategy pay no more than lip service to the representations regarding the incongruous and undesirable elements of the scheme. It puts speculative economic factors at the top of the agenda, and community and environmental interests at the bottom.

2. Planning and the Consultation Process

It is clear that the masterplan is fundamentally flawed. This is because the masterplan was not urban-form driven and there was no real commitment to responding to the existing community needs and aspirations which were articulated early on at both the Stakeholder Meeting and the Community Planning Day.

These 2 events facilitated by independent consultants, in response to requests from the Old Town Community Council, highlighted serious concerns regarding key elements of the planned development. Both independent facilitators raised concerns with participants that the community consultation had been undertaken far too late in the process to allow real analysis or make effective changes.

No consideration was given to alternative approaches and proposals put forward by other stakeholders and certainly no consultation was permitted on alternatives.

The Caltongate development has from the offset been an all or nothing development with the Masterplan process clearly focussed on meeting the terms and conditions of the sale of common good land and publicly owned buildings and maximising the economic gain to the developer. Both the masterplan and the detailed applications are clearly out of step with current policy and guidance regarding sustainable development and architectural conservation. However the process has been driven by a city development department who have colluded in promoting a developers masterplan to facilitate the sale of land at less than market value and to justify ignoring national planning policies and statutory guidance.

The development appraisal (which details how the sale will achieve best value for the council) was key to convincing the previous administration that the land

sale was a good deal, yet it has never been disclosed to the public despite repeated requests.

To be fair the developer has made no secret of the fact the development is an all or nothing scheme. However if the economic benefits of this scheme are wholly dependant on this particular hotel in this particular location it is patently obvious that it is the wrong scheme. Even the masterplan did not agree the principle of demolition of listed buildings but deferred the assessment of that to the detailed planning stage.

In June 2005 it was reported to City of Edinburgh Council Committee that Mountgrange had made an off market offer which included a detailed masterplan for the area, yet, at the same time the application submitted for demolition of the bus depot included no redevelopment proposals.

Despite many requests for more details of redevelopment proposals the masterplan was never disclosed to the public. It did not appear until the end of September when it was displayed in the St James Centre. As soon as the masterplan was disclosed numerous conservation, heritage and community organisations raised concerns regarding the further demolitions proposed. If the Development Appraisal is as devoid of intelligent economic evidence as the masterplan is of understanding the heritage and sustainability issues I'm not surprised it has not been disclosed to the public.

The Caltongate Masterplan is a clear example of how not to plan and the consultation exercise a good example of why community consultation should

not be developer led. By not responding to the outcomes of community consultation, detailed proposals will still get bogged down in a long and drawn out adversarial planning process.

Wise and good decisions are made when there is involvement from all stakeholders.

The Community Council have made every effort to engage with the developers and City Development and encourage greater community participation in the planning process.

1. We held a public meeting and have contributed to the debate at events hosted by other organisations.
2. We have participated in the developers Liason Group which did nothing to aid the consultation process or enable discussion or amendments to be considered.
3. We have consistently highlighted the urgent need for the development to include significant levels of affordable housing and family housing dispersed throughout the masterplan area. The community have indicated a real need to redress the significant loss of family homes resulting from increased demand for 'investment properties' which if occupied are predominantly occupied by transient residents and this prices working families out of the area.
4. We have consistently asked for a commitment to providing safe, green public spaces throughout the area, to create opportunities for play and social interaction for permanent residents.

5. We have consistently asked for the council to consider ways to ensure an ongoing supply of affordable workspace is maintained to ensure artists, creative industries, start up and local businesses can continue to develop a range of employment opportunities and give inspiration to all members of the community.

Our requests and recommendations throughout the process have been ignored.

3. Implications for the future

The Canongate has always been home to the workers of the city, migrant populations, charities, social enterprise and industry as well as home to royalty and the gentry. People have always worked, lived and played here - a truly mixed sustainable community. Future generations of the Canongate and Old Town deserve better than Caltongate.

It is ironic that the proposed hotel will be destroying the very thing that makes Edinburgh unique: conservation of its historic buildings and the fact that real people are still living here and raising families. That is what makes it so unique and what makes visitors return again and again.

The development of community planning, neighbourhood partnerships etc provide an opportunity to strengthen this community, give clear guidance to developers.

I have circulated to you a recent presentation from the RTPI and IHBC which demonstrates how heritage-led regeneration can reconcile economic, community and environmental issues. By focusing on what is valued and allowing partnership between conservation and community the future could be very bright for the Canongate.

I therefore urge you to refuse these applications as they are simply not good enough for such a unique and important site. Far from being a lost opportunity, refusing these applications will enable work to begin on creating a truly sustainable development based on evidence, aspiration and real partnership.

A wise and good decision will stand the test of time but if it is foolish and unsound hindsight will catch up with it.