

LOCAL PLAN - HSG15 – the ZOO’s Housing Proposals – The REPORTERS’ REPORT.

Submission to the Planning Committee by 5 local Corstorphine area organisations –

Corstorphine Community Council, Murrayfield Community Council, Corstorphine Trust, Friends of Corstorphine Hill and residents in Kaimes Road and nearby.

We put up a joint case along with the Council at the Hearing into this part of the Local Plan, opposing the Zoo’s application to be allowed to build between 100 and 150 houses on the western part of the Zoo. The Reporters accepted some of our principal points, but not all.

They recommended:-

- \*that the Zoo should not be allowed to build houses on the upper part of the site, where they would involve loss of trees and harming the more distant views of Corstorphine Hill;
- \* nor to build flats on the frontage on Corstorphine Road – the A8 – where they would replace the present attractive stretch of the Zoo’s frontage around their main gate with flats on a scale with the adjacent hotel;
- \* against the Zoo’s proposal for one junction on the A8, serving the Zoo, the hotel and the new houses;
- \*and that the western boundary of the Corstorphine Hill Green Belt and Local Nature Reserve should remain in its present position.

However, they accepted that the Zoo’s need for money made a case for some housing to be allowed on the site as an intrusion into the Green Belt and recommended an unspecified number of 2-storey houses on an unspecified site in the middle part of the proposed 100 – 150 house development near the small road from Kaimes Road into the Zoo, from which access to the new site would be provided.

We totally oppose this proposal on the following grounds:-

- \*we oppose housing developments inside the Green Belt. There may sometimes be a valid argument for adding some houses to a village in the Green Belt, if most of the residents think it will improve their community; in the case of the Zoo’s houses, as the Reporters made clear, there is no demand for them on planning grounds, the local community is mostly strongly against them, and they are merely a device to allow the Zoo to acquire some capital.
- \*Since the Reporters’ proposal is completely vague, the Zoo will no doubt try to smuggle in as many house as they can get away with; this will destroy more of the trees , bushes and ground cover, which form a major part of the Hill’s appeal and importance in the Edinburgh landscape;
- \*it will also increase the traffic problems created by the very narrow entrance from Kaimes Road and the additional cars from this entrance adding to the many cars already using Kaimes Road as a rat run to avoid the Clermiston Road – St.John’s Road lights and the increase in traffic generated by the Queen Margaret University site housing development.
- \*The whole reason the Zoo seeks to gain support for its housing development no longer

applies to this modified proposal. The money it would gain would be a very small part of the whole sum required for their development plan and would no longer be a critical part of that plan. Why enrage the local community for the sake of no significant gain to the Zoo?

Our main argument against allowing a considerable number of houses to be built in the Green Belt is that you would be creating a precedent. You would have abandoned a principled position of opposing housing in the Green Belt and opened the door to future applications, which would then be far harder to resist. If the Zoo came back in a year or two, saying "That development didn't raise enough money to pay for our plans, so we must build another 100 houses on our land" how do you resist them when you have conceded the principle? Or how do you stop other people putting forward applications for profitable housing on the Green Belt?

Our organisations and the communities we represent are not anti-Zoo. We are just against this housing proposal which would harm our communities. We would like to engage with the Zoo and the Council to help to develop the Zoo in a community- friendly and environmentally acceptable way. The Zoo is underfunded and deserves substantial support from national and local government and national institutions to recognise its contribution to education, tourism, and sustaining species at risk. Edinburgh could lead the neighbouring Councils and local organisations to co-operate in supporting the Zoo and pressing the Scottish Government to recognise and support it as a regional Centre of Excellence in conservation and education. We would be happy to work with the Zoo to form a locally-based organisation – perhaps "Friends of the Zoo" - to encourage trusts, businesses and individuals to contribute to meeting the Zoo's running costs, for example by adopting an animal. The Zoo needs continuing annual support much more than the one-off capital payment derived from its housing project.

Another major issue is the traffic generated by the Zoo and its likely increase, if its development proposals or the pandas succeed in increasing the Zoo's public attendance figures. On busy days its car park is soon full and Corstorphine Road and the surrounding streets become one large parking lot of visitors cruising about looking for a place to park their cars. The blockage, for example, causes buses to take more than 30 minutes to get through Corstorphine. The Council and the Zoo should get together to provide park and ride systems with buses from near Maybury or Ingliston or Murrayfield rugby ground taking visitors right to the top of the hill with the tickets included in the entry fee.

Finally, the Green Belt and Local Nature Reserve are also under threat from the Zoo on its Eastern side. We know that some parts of the Council's departments agreed to the Zoo extending its ground Eastwards into the area of the park on Corstorphine Road opposite Balgreen Road. It is highly valued as rough open ground, with lots of gorse and few trees, of a sort rare in the city and ideal for family recreation. Some other departments opposed the proposal. The local organisations and people are vehemently against losing this recreational green space. Please resist this proposed extension of the Zoo into a valuable public park.