



### Chairman's Notes

How we plan and care for Edinburgh is a central concern for the Cockburn and its members. These are difficult times for “all those who love Edinburgh”, as the Cockburn’s strapline puts it. The fate of the Old Royal High School remains in the balance, with the public inquiry into the luxury hotel’s “Inca Temples” proposals put on hold while new designs are promised. Important as this site is, it is only one of a number of controversial developments that have come forward in recent months, and most of them have been granted planning permission as the city council scrambles to grab economic development opportunities.

In May, there will be local elections. These present us with an opportunity to raise our concerns with those who would represent us on Edinburgh’s Council. The Cockburn is working on a paper that we will be launching ahead of these elections, and that will highlight concerns that we have about the trajectory that is being pursued. I have trailed some of these issues already in my presentations to the Cities Summit last July, then in my Cockburn Annual Lecture, and in a recent seasonal talk on *The Ghosts of Edinburgh Past, Present and Future* to the Grange Association. They range from potholes and bins to how we manage growth without destroying the qualities that make Edinburgh special and successful.

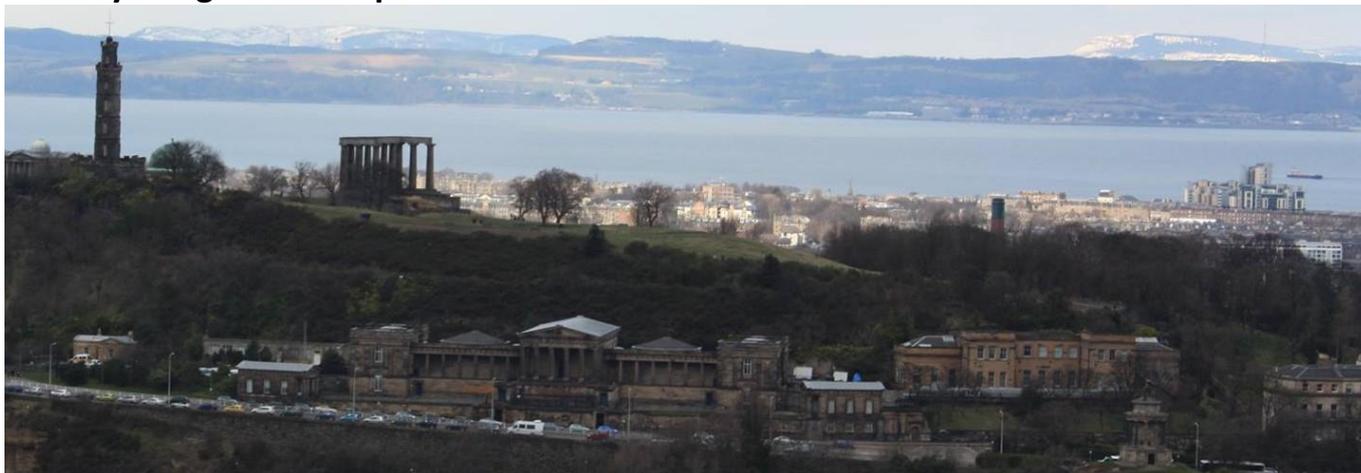
Meanwhile the city council has launched its consultation on a “Vision” for Edinburgh 2050. I have some reservations and concerns about this exercise. A very long term horizon such as this can easily obscure urgent short-term concerns. Also, the wide open focus does not help respondents to think about what the really strategic choices are, or what are the “points of no return”, where future possibilities are blocked off for ever. This is important because, as Lord Cockburn reminded us all those years ago, there are so many “ways to spoil the beauty of Edinburgh”. We are still living with the consequences of the decision in the 1840s to allow the railway into Princes Street Gardens!

It is heartening to see that many of the responses to the Vision 2050 exercise stress the importance of the built environment and greenspaces. However, in the council’s Progress Report, “A city of great natural and architectural beauty” is highlighted as a strength, but it then gets lost. The four themes around which the vision is to be built are A Connected City, A Fair City, A Thriving City, and An Inspired City. This bland 21<sup>st</sup> century management –speak elides the fundamental importance of the very qualities that make Edinburgh such a special place.

Finally, I have just been reading the consultation on the future of the Scottish Planning System. Like the Review that preceded it, it is something of a mixed bag, with many questions unresolved. It says the government wants people to have more opportunities to influence where development should take place. To this end, it proposes to create a new right for communities to prepare their own plans and have them adopted as part of the statutory development plan. Overall, the thrust of the whole document is to make the planning system a stronger tool for delivering development. The only time the word “conservation” appears is in the proposal to remove the blanket restriction on Simplified Planning Zones in Conservation Areas.

Cliff Hague, Chairman

## Old Royal High School update



The Public Inquiry remains SISTED (paused) whilst a further planning application is prepared for the hotel development. We asked the Scottish Government Reporters to de-SIST and continue with the Inquiry but our request was refused and we remain in limbo awaiting the developers' next move. We have paid a bill of £3,000 for the work of our advocate to date and anticipate a bill of £20,000 as and when the Public Inquiry takes place.

We would, of course, be grateful for any contributions to our [fighting fund](#) as this will be a significant spend for the Association this year. We believe it is vital that we challenge this development given the consequences to the Old Royal High School and its setting on Calton Hill.

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## Scottish Government consults on reform of the Planning System

**Cliff Hague, Chairman**

Communities should be given new rights to come together and prepare local place plans. This is the most eye-catching proposal in the consultation paper from the Scottish Government on the future of our planning system. It echoes a practice called Neighbourhood Planning, which was developed in England under the Coalition Government after 2010 when localism was briefly in vogue.

So the intention is that communities would “actively design, rather than comment on plans for the future” (para.2.4). The “local place plans” could be adopted as part of the statutory development plan. However, the road leading to this new planning adventure is carefully nuanced. The overall aim of the proposed reform is to make the planning system a more effective tool for delivering new development, a theme that runs through the consultation like the lettering in a stick of rock.

Alongside the rhetoric about “empowering people to bring forward their own plans” are a series of caveats. It will take time and an investment of resources, though exactly what resources and who is to provide them are not clearly specified. The new opportunities must not be used to promote “unreasonable protectionism”, and the new plans should be about how a community wants to deliver “change in a sustainable way”. In the real world, what looks like “unreasonable protectionism” to some may be seen as greenspace conservation to others, and “sustainable” is a notoriously malleable term.

Nevertheless, the idea of local place plans should not be dismissed cynically. The Government’s proposal is that local authorities would have a duty to adopt the local place plan as part of the local development plan, unless they think the plan opposes the wider aims of the local development plan. Furthermore, the community would have a right of appeal to the Scottish Ministers if a council refused to adopt their local place plan.

## Equal rights of appeal

The Cockburn has supported the idea of Equal Rights of Appeal (ERA) and continues to do so. A group called Planning Democracy ([www.planningdemocracy.org.uk](http://www.planningdemocracy.org.uk)) has probably been the leading voice on the issue. ERA is also sometimes called Third Party Rights of Appeal, and would mean that “third parties” such as a community group could object to the granting of a planning permission. However, the consultation firmly rules out ERA. It “would work against early, worthwhile and continuous engagement that empowers communities by encouraging people to intervene only at the end of the process rather than the beginning where most value can be added. This would also ignore the important role of elected members in representing communities in planning decisions and community involvement in the development plan process, whilst delaying and undermining much needed development” (para.2.40). In short, ERA is not going to happen.

My own personal view is that it would be better to probe a lacuna within the local place plans idea. If such plans are indeed an exercise in co-design, and written into the local development plan, then surely the community producing them is no longer a third party. It has as at least as much ownership of the local place plan part of the development plan as does the local authority. In those circumstances, it should have the same rights as the council on development matters pertaining to that local place plan.

## Time to respond

The *Places, People and Planning* document is more wide ranging than the selective summary I have provided here. It includes proposals for a stronger role for community councils, but also is strongly focused on means of delivering on housing targets. It proposes scrapping the regional scale of plans (SESPlan in the case of the Edinburgh area), and instead strengthening the regional dimension of the National Planning Framework. It announces the intention of raising planning fees and discouraging repeat applications from developers (c.f. the old Royal High School).

The full document can be downloaded from <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/planning-architecture/a-consultation-on-the-future-of-planning/>. The consultation closes on 4 April 2017.

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### **Voluntary Trustees**

The **Cockburn** Association

Are you passionate about Edinburgh? Do you have skills to offer non-executive governance to a dynamic charity?

We need to strengthen our current board of trustees to include a wide range of knowledge, skills and expertise to support the implementation of our strategic plan.

We are particularly keen to recruit people with the following areas of expertise:

**Finance - in the role of Treasurer;** Income Generation; Human Resource Management; Events Management; Urban Design

If you are interested in offering your time & expertise and can commit to four trustee meetings a year plus a few hours each month to support the charity's work then please get in touch

[director@cockburnassociation.org.uk](mailto:director@cockburnassociation.org.uk)

We are also looking for members of our **Transport Committee** who can offer their expertise. Meetings take place around 6 times a year.

Two **new trustees** have recently been co-opted to the Cockburn Council

**Iain MacPhail** is a consultant with Justin Lamb Associates, having previously worked for City of Edinburgh Council as an Affordable Housing Advisor and City Centre Development Manager for 10 years.

**Keir Bloomer** is an independent education consultant. He is also Chair of the Education Committee of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Chair of the Scottish Book Trust, Chair of the Tapestry Partnership (a professional development organisation for teachers) and Chair of the Commission on School Reform.

In addition, he is a member of the Committee of the Duddingston Conservation Society, the Board of Reform Scotland and the Scotland/China Education Network. He was Director of Education and later Chief Executive of Clackmannanshire Council, a post from which he retired in May 2007. He is immediate ex-Chair of the Court (Governing body) of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. He now undertakes curriculum and professional development work with the Scottish Government, local authorities, national agencies and schools.

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### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

This year's **AGM** will be held in September, details to follow.

**Edinburgh Doors Open Day** will be held, subject to funding, on the last weekend of **September, 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup>** with a week of talks from Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September. The brochure is available to our members by mid-August and released 1<sup>st</sup> September

An **events schedule** for 2017 is being worked on by Joseph and Molly (an intern currently helping us) and will be sent out to our members as soon as possible.



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The Cockburn Association staff team is smaller than most people think. We have just four members of staff (three working part time), helping all the citizens of Edinburgh, who like you, ask us to work on the issues we all care about. We want to keep the work of the Cockburn Association going so that people can keep using us, regardless of their financial situation, when they need support for the things they care about.

[That's why I am asking if you will join us, if you are not already a member, or consider a monthly contribution, as some already do, of £5?](#) With a monthly contribution you will be helping to support our work and campaigns.

Donations can be made online <http://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/donate/> or by cheque payable to 'The Cockburn Association' or by standing order, contact Joseph for details [admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk](mailto:admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk)

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I hope you have enjoyed catching up with us. I'd welcome your feedback and any contributions or suggestions for the next newsletter.

The Cockburn Association is proud to be a member-led organisation and by being a member you are helping to safeguard Edinburgh's unique built and natural environment for future generations. You are a member of the oldest civic amenity body in the UK, established in 1875.

If you are a facebook user come and find us there for daily updates and a gallery of images, you can also follow us on twitter [@thecockburn](#) and our website [www.cockburnassociation.org.uk](http://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk)

*Marion Williams, Director*