



**THE COCKBURN  
ASSOCIATION  
NEWSLETTER  
April /May 2019**

## **Cockburn to launch 'Our Unique City' consultation at AGM**



At the AGM on 6 May, the Cockburn will launch a major new initiative called 'Our Unique City'. A series of policy papers are being prepared that will be released at the meeting, with copies being sent to members as quickly as possible afterwards. The aim is to reach out to civic society across the city, providing an informed platform for ideas and discussion about how Edinburgh should develop.

Cockburn Director Terry Levinthal says "Edinburgh is a unique city, but its future is now in the balance. We have had a period of considerable growth, but it has come with costs such as air pollution and loss of affordable housing. Before it is too late, it is time to take stock of where the city is heading and what future the citizens want."

Later in the year the City Council will be consulting on the new Local Development Plan, which it is calling CityPlan 2030. The exact timing depends on when the Scottish Government gives its decision on the city region plan – SESPlan2 – which sets the strategic context for CityPlan 2030. The 'Our

Unique City' programme will provide inputs to the Cockburn's position on the new plan.

## **Can Astley Ainslie break new ground?**

Sara Stevenson reports.

The National Health Service is transferring the facilities from the Astley Ainslie hospital in South Edinburgh to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital in Morningside and vacating the site within five years. They propose to sell the land and its buildings next year. This raises important issues, which the community represented by the local Community Association and Councils and, now, by the Astley Ainslie Community Trust, are addressing.

The Trust members came together a year ago, to discuss acquiring the land for the community by Community Buy-Out or Asset Transfer. The Government's *Making Places Initiative* awarded AACT a grant to set up consultation with the public. We have had two open meetings, enabling us to start constructing a vision for the site. AACT has consulted with schools, with older people in care, and, more broadly, through pop-up sessions in the street.

By combining public wishes and expressions of pleasure in the site, we have an initial mandate to explore the issues: health and wellbeing; nature; outdoor learning and education; community gardening and farming; homes; community hub; creative arts; enterprise; paths and routes.

The site is a beautiful, southern slope facing the hills, known as the 'Lands of Canaan' – the land of milk and honey. It is the centre of our green corridor into the hills, between Bruntsfield Links and the Meadows, and the Hermitage below Blackford Hill, leading through the Braidburn Valley Park. It connects

to the real, natural world in a way that is essential to the City's health.



The second public meeting held for the community by the Astley Ainslie Community Trust, 31 March 2019. Iain Stewart (copyright, the photographer),

There are around 2,000 trees on the land, both native and fine specimen trees mostly protected by Tree Preservation Orders. This natural source of health is of continuing interest to the NHS in their fight against such ills as obesity and diabetes, depression and asthma.

Its earliest history relates to the plague chapel and hospital established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These have never been investigated by archaeologists. Harvard University is currently examining skulls from the plague cemetery, so physical investigation has begun.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the land, admired by Robert Burns, Dugald Stewart and Walter Scott, and painted by J M W Turner, became a retreat from the pollution of the city, with a

number of houses – now listed - and extraordinary gardens. The connection with health continued, especially in the residence of Professor James Syme, whose notable garden grew medicinal plants, exotic flowers and fruit (pineapples, grapes, figs, oranges and lemons and bananas).

In the 1920s, the bequest of David Ainslie purchased and generously funded a convalescent hospital, in memory of his nephew who died young. The design of the Astley Ainslie buildings reflected the need for light and air in the restoration of health. When the NHS took over in 1949, they accepted the gift of an expanded operation, including remedial treatment and occupational therapy, and the site has worked well as a convalescent hospital for seventy years.

Please visit the Astley Ainslie (avoiding the active medical buildings). There are rights of way across the site, established by the Grange Association and Scotways.

This extraordinary venture is not just a local Grassroots movement but a sophisticated, exploratory Treeroot movement, which could break new ground for the future – in relation to nature, our health, social encouragement and improvement. We hope you will join us actively or simply as a supporting member. We need to add your inspiration and enthusiasm to ours to make this an Edinburgh action, appropriate to our beautiful, dynamic city, generating happiness rather than a cash receipt.

*Sara Stevenson is a member of the AACT Steering Group. For more information visit <https://aact.scot/>*

## **Meanwhile, over in Meadowbank...**

*Save Meadowbank* is another grassroots campaign, this time in the east of the city, contesting a City Council plan to sell off public

land to a developer. The origins of the controversy here go back well over a decade and are summarised by *Save Meadowbank* on their website (<https://savemeadowbank.wordpress.com/>).

The velodrome and the sports stadium which hosted the Commonwealth Games in 1970 and in 1986, and provided a venue for big events, are being demolished, and will be replaced by a new, much smaller sports centre. The City Council has also agreed in principle to redevelopment of land surrounding the sports centre for mixed uses including new housing, student accommodation, hotel and commercial uses, together with car parking, landscaping, drainage and ancillary works.

The campaign group points out that East Edinburgh has already lost an extensive list of sport facilities and open space, including:

- Hawkhill playing fields
- Royal High School playing fields
- Various bowling greens
- Leith Links & Pilrig putting greens
- Meadowbank tennis courts & velodrome
- Powderhall speedway track
- Pitz Portobello (pending)

## Chair's Notes

Has there ever been a time when the green open spaces of Edinburgh have been under so much pressure? As report elsewhere in this Newsletter show, a combination of development pressure and pressures on public sector budgets make speculation rife.

Back in 1849 Lord Cockburn, in his famous letter to the Lord Provost, spoke out against development on the open space on the south side of Princes Street. Today we have a much better scientific understanding of the benefits that greenspace confers to a city, but sadly we also know much better what benefits

development on that greenspace can bring to investors



Professor Cliff Hague OBE

Cities need public open spaces; they should not be seen as luxuries that are no longer affordable, or as liabilities to the municipal authorities. We know that good local parks can add value to houses nearby: it follows that loss of such greenspace is eventually registered as a negative impact on adjacent property. More importantly, good open spaces help keep us healthy in body and in mind, they are a form of preventative medicine. Their trees help absorb CO2 and improve the quality of the air we breathe. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children the right to play, recreation and culture. Take away the public spaces and you erode that right. The Scottish Government supports the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Target 11.7 of those states "By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities". Yet what we are seeing in Edinburgh and elsewhere is a chronic loss of such assets, and when they are lost to development they become literally irreplaceable.

The future of our open spaces is just one of the concerns that the Cockburn will be airing in the 'Our Unique City' initiative in the coming weeks. I hope you are able to come along to the launch at our Annual General Meeting on 6 May, and / or can have your say as the programme unfolds.

### **Annual General Meeting and elections to the Council of Trustees**

This year's AGM will take place at the French Institute, W Parliament Square, Edinburgh EH1 1RF. It will commence at 6pm on Monday 6 May and will be followed by a Members' Reception.

There will be places to fill on the Council of Trustees due to retirements. If you are willing to serve please contact [admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk](mailto:admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk) or phone 0131 557 8686 for details. **Nominations must be received by 5pm on Monday 22 April.** Candidates must be Cockburn Members and be proposed & seconded by members.

### **Sustainable Construction**

Many members enjoyed the talk given by Sandy Halliday at the Annual Lecture last October. The second edition of her book *Sustainable Construction* was published recently by Routledge. The paperback copy costs £39.99 but members can get a 20% discount if they buy at [www.routledge.com/9781138200289](http://www.routledge.com/9781138200289) and enter the code FLR40 at the checkout.

### **Development News**

We are still awaiting the decision on the Old Royal High School. We have been in discussions with kindred organisations to coordinate lobbying activities. Network Rail have launched a consultation on a proposed

masterplan for Waverley Station, which would include the wide-scale demolition of the Category A-listed structure. The Cockburn and other heritage organisations have questioned the strategy as no significant analysis of the heritage assets has been made. A proposed mountain-biking and outdoor activities centre at Hillend Ski Centre as come to our attention. The tracks would intrude into the Swanston Conservation Area. A significant housing scheme of 3,600 houses in a new "village" setting at Riccarton has come forward. City Centre Transformation Project proposals are emerging, with ideas such as a traffic free Sunday once a month and possible "pedestrianisation" proposals coming forward.

### **thecockburnassociation**

Trunk's Close, 55 High Street  
Edinburgh EH1 1SR  
0131-557-8686

#### CONTACTS

Director – Terry Levinthal  
[director@cockburnassociation.org.uk](mailto:director@cockburnassociation.org.uk)

Doors Open Days Coordinator &  
Administrative Officer – Joe Taylor  
[admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk](mailto:admin@cockburnassociation.org.uk)

Assistant Director – James Garry  
[James@cockburnassociation.org.uk](mailto:James@cockburnassociation.org.uk)

Scottish Charity SC011544