



## NEW TOWN AND BROUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

### Planning

Although the period between the October 2023 NTBCC AGM and the June 2024 AGM was short, there has been no let-up in the number of planning applications being brought forwards within NTBCCs area – in fact, for a variety of reasons as covered below – the total number of planning applications has showed a marked increase.

NTBCCs Planning committee processes have been revisited since the October 2023 AGM, adopting more of a shared responsibility amongst committee members for both assessing and also responding to applications, but without a nominated convener. However, despite this, the Planning Committee continued to be active during the period.

Given the sheer number of planning applications within NTBCCs area and the period available to provide comments, it hasn't been possible to submit representations on all of the 'significant' applications within NTBCC's area that we would have wished. Our focus has been on those applications that we assess as either being clearly contrary to the general views of residents or those that had generated a major response from local residents.

The role of the NTBCC Planning Committee also extends to monitoring and providing further response as necessary to those applications which have been appealed, either to the Council's internal Local Review Body or to the Scottish Government's Planning & Environment Appeals Division (DPEA). This area too has seen an increase in activity, either due to an application not being determined by the Council within the statutory period (defined as 'non-determination') or Planning consultants increasingly willing to test (and essentially get a 'second opinion' on) the Council's decisions by appealing applications that have been refused. Unfortunately, this isn't an option that's available to objectors or community councils following approval of a particular planning application.

One area that has seen a mushrooming in applications has been for **Short Term Lets (STLs)**.

The legislative landscape for STL applications has changed, both at Scottish Government level (e.g. the recently adopted National Planning Framework (NPF4) in February 2023) as well as Edinburgh Council's more robust assessment of these applications following a Short Term Let Control Area being adopted by them in September 2022 (which NTBCC supported). Although NTBCC had initially submitted individual representations (typically objections) to many of these – this had become unsustainable and given the changing legislative position, we took the view that we should have confidence in the policies

in place and agreed that we would not lodge further representations to any new /FULSTL applications. (i.e. those that require determination based on current LDP policies).

It's worth noting that applications for 'Certificate of Lawfulness' (CLE) applications for STLs do not allow comments to be lodged. These CLE applications now represent the majority of STL applications being lodged.

Key submissions during the period include:

- **Eyre Place**

**72 – 74 Eyre Place (formerly Jewsons)** - a revised application covering Purpose Built Student Accommodation [PBSA] and residential townhouses was lodged in August 2023.

NTBCC had supported the local residents' groups and also objected to the original application (August 2022) for which the council had agreed to hold a hearing, but had not done so within the statutory time scale resulting in the planning consultants (Scott Hobbs Planning) stating that their client wished to appeal to the DPEA against the "deemed refusal of the application" in February 2023. This appeal was subsequently dismissed by the Scottish Reporter.

However, new applications were lodged in August 2023 which were stated as addressing the concerns of the original scheme but from NTBCC's and others assessment, the amended seemed broadly similar to the original proposal. NTBCC continued to support local residents' groups and again objected to the amended proposal, along with local MPs, MSPs and local Councillors. Following a Hearing at the DMSC in December 2023 at which NTBCC and residents presented their objections, this was refused but again appealed to DPEA. NTBCC made further representations to DPEA and the Scottish Reporter (DPEA) again refused these applications.

Credit must be given to the energetic and effective response from local residents to these applications which resulted in repeated refusals of inappropriate proposals in a planning process which is skewed towards developers.

### **Former Smithies Pub & Adjacent Open Ground**

We raised concerns over the application to demolish the former Smithies public house and to build a 2-3 storey block of 11 flats – including using a parcel of former Council-owned green space to the east. We also supported the recently formed local residents group, the Canonmills Owners' & Residents' Association (CORA) in their attempts to obtain a review of both the land sale and planning process that resulted in the loss of the majority of this open space. Unfortunately, Smithies has now been demolished and the ground has been unsympathetically cleared. The formal complaint with Edinburgh Council is still open as far as we are aware. Although the planning application was amended during determination which did improve to some degree the frontage of the building to Eyre Place – the overall outcome is far from satisfactory and does not help to engender community trust in the Council's processes.

### **1 Canon Street (former Canon Mill)**

Just to complete the picture here – construction is well underway on the redevelopment and extension to the last remaining mill building at the corner of Canon Street and Eyre Place which will provide a further 11 flats at this location, approved in 2018. Whilst the facade of Canon Mill is being

retained, this is another high density development in this small triangular area. A further aggravation to local residents is the encroachment of the site's footprint to accommodate construction facilities resulting in the closure of Canon Street for at least 18 months.

Relevant to this, NTBCC were also active in a Council initiative to explore concerns expressed with the impact of construction activities on local residents' amenity. The Responsible Construction Working Group, involving local Ward councillors, community councils and Council officials reported back to the Council's Planning Committee in April 2024 and we look forward to the (limited) outcomes from that initiative. More background can be found [here](#)

- **Beaverhall Area (Residential and Student Housing)**

Another area which has seen much planning activity over the past 12 – 18 months has been Beaverhall. NTBCC engaged with HUB Residential regarding their proposal to demolish and redevelop Beaverhall House (27 – 29 Beaverhall Road), replacing numerous small business units and artist's studios to be replaced with Build To Rent residential and some commercial space. Whilst we were appreciative of the developer's intent to form an unofficial 'masterplan' of the wider area, we remain disappointed that development in the wider area continues on an ad hoc basis. Given the Council's clear aspirations to redevelop many sites here into residential, as an enabler to achieve their housing targets, a wider Place Brief for this area would have been beneficial to ensure that the transition from light industrial to mainly residential would have included developing a sense of place here.

Further proposals have been brought forwards close by for **Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA)** with a consented scheme at 27 – 36 Dunedin Street (the site of the former Kidd catering Supplies depot directly to the north of the Brought Road Play Park and adjacent to the existing student housing (Homes for Students) in Beaverbank Place. Site clearance and construction is well underway. Given the proposed architectural treatment, appropriate height and massing, NTBCC supported this application.

A further application for redevelopment of the former Sixt Car Hire depot on Dunedin Street has been brought forward by HUB Residential. Although the original proposal was for further residential units here, the proposed use changed to a further PBSA block. The initial proposal was refused on the grounds of inadequate residential amenity for the future occupiers but an amended application has been brought forwards. Whilst we support redevelopment here, we would question whether yet another student housing block here is either necessary or appropriate. The amended application is awaiting assessment.

- **Old Royal High School and Calton Hill Environs**

An amended application for the **old Royal High School** (New Parliament House) was lodged in late 2024 reflecting concerns with the spiralling cost and economic viability of proceeding with the previously consented proposal to include relocation of St Mary's Music School there. Although strongly supportive of the intent to provide a long term sustainable use for the old Royal High School, we did raise some concerns with the prominence of the proposed new school entrance pavilion at the rear of the Thomas Hamilton building. The application was approved and demolition of various later building on the site (as consented) has been completed.

In late 2024, a new application was brought forwards, removing the St Mary's Music School relocation from the plans and now proposing a **National Centre for Music** in eastern section of the main Thomas Hamilton building with publicly accessible performance spaces and a cafe in the western section of the building. We have again expressed our strong support for this proposal.

NTBCC welcomed the extent, functionality and aesthetics of the proposed landscaping (rumoured to be a design developed by Tom Stuart Smith) which creates harmony between the wider natural environment and the built environment as well as providing the potential for animating the space at certain times of the year – for the enjoyment of both Edinburgh residents and visitors.

It's clearly recognised by many residents that as the site has been vacant for many years and the former Royal High School building is in need of sensitive repurposing and an appropriate sustainable use to secure its long-term conservation and provide enjoyment to the wider public. We believe that this proposal achieves that but in a manner which reinforces the essential heritage value of the site, rather than detracting from it.

On the subject of retaining wider views of Calton Hill, NTBCC also responded to a recent application to build a 5 bedroom, contemporary house on the former wooded area to the north west of Greenside Church. Whilst we acknowledged that the Richard Murphy Associates proposed development was innovative and elegant in design if considered in isolation, this particular site was inappropriate for such a development.

Although the design had been modified from the initial proposal to overcome concerns raised by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) with regards to impact on the setting of Greenside Church and the vista along Blenheim Place to Calton Hill, the modifications do not go nearly far enough. We therefore objected to the proposal.

- **St Andrew Square / Princes Street – Hotel Developments**

Given various applications for conversion of existing office buildings in St Andrew Square being brought forwards, NTBCC discussed several of these at our monthly meetings. As well as the existing Ibis hotel and recently converted Malmaison hotel at 20 -21 St Andrew Square, proposals were lodged for conversion of the 1897 Scottish Equitable offices (most recently the former Virgin Money building) at the north-east corner (28 St Andrew Square) to a 167 bed hotel with restaurant. This application has been approved.

A further proposal for conversion of 10 St Andrew square (including the current Sainsbury's supermarket) to 206 bed hotel has also been lodged. This application is currently awaiting a decision.

Whilst we welcome repurposing buildings here to a longer term alternate use, we question whether the increasing concentration of hotels at this location adds to a sense of place for those city centre residents who remain – as well as the loss of a well used facilities e.g. a supermarket.

NTBCC were also offered a pre-application site visit for another hotel proposal on the corner of Hanover St / Princes St (including some demolition / redevelopment of buildings on Rose Street). Again, the specific proposal has merits in terms of consolidating various discrete buildings at that location as well as reinstating the former Crawfords Tea Room there – there appears to be an inexorable march to converting buildings to hotels.

A few other applications where we were involved include :

- Commenting on long delayed proposals for mitigating the SGN works on the amenity ground / car park fronting Broughton St Mary's Church on Bellevue Crescent (NTBCC position – given that there was an inappropriate, unapproved installation there, the proposal went some way to mitigate the impact but it would have been better to carry out the original works properly in the first place). The application as submitted was approved without change.
- Liaising with local residents to object to an entirely inappropriate proposal for a 3 storey block on the car park at the **Canon Court apartments**. NTBCC objected along with over 60 residents and the application was refused.

NTBCC were also invited to (& attended) several site visits at the request of the applicant for proposals to undertake a significant refurbishment of the **Calton Square office block** – currently occupied by Baillie Gifford. Whilst welcoming the retention of the use of the building as Grade A office space along with the sensitive considerations of the impact of any change to the wider heritage views of Calton Hill, we did express concern as to the potential impact of the major construction activity there both on local residents and the wider operation of a busy transport hub at Picardy Place. We expect a formal application to be brought forwards in the coming months.

With regard to less significant applications, normally categorised as 'Householder' developments, we continue to support local residents where appropriate in submitting comments to these developments.

We continue to scrutinise the weekly Planning Lists that are sent to us as well as increasingly, those applications that are appealed to the Scottish Government's Environment & Planning Appeals Division (DPEA) – (aka the Scottish Reporter) and are willing to support concerns raised by local residents on either the many planning applications that are brought forwards or subsequent appeals.

*Richard Price - On behalf of the NTBCC Planning Committee*