



## RBS site developer's public viewing was 'patronising'

>> Residents Association wants another public viewing before planning application is lodged

Almost three years since 2,000 RBS staff left the 1970s former data centre on the corner of Dundas Street and Fettes Row, the buildings are increasingly decrepit. But work is stirring, notably on the former car park, and the bulldozers may finally move in this year.

Previous plans to demolish the site and erect eight overbearing residential blocks with 400 flats, underground car parks, retail shops, hotel, offices and other add-ons were opposed by the Fettes Row and Royal Crescent Residents Association, alongside other conservation and community groups, and withdrawn in July 2018.

State-owned RBS then sold the 5.9-acre site in May last year for £36 million to London-based Orion Capital who rebranded it "New Town North", a nod to its location on the edge of Edinburgh's World Heritage area. Ediston, an Edinburgh-based property investment company, is developing the site on behalf of Orion Capital.

Over two public consultations at St Mary's Church, Bellevue Crescent, in September and December, Ediston showed off its plans for around 100 executive apartments, 200 'affordable' flats, 9,000m<sup>3</sup> of offices, a boutique hotel, food and drink outlets and healthcare facilities.



>> This developer's sketch shows what the developed RBS site may look like from the western section of Fettes Row. The new developed blocks clearly dominate the trees and the streets.

But other than artists' sketches of garden walkways above apartment blocks and aspirational yoga sessions, the developers offered little detail.

There appeared to be no consideration of parking issues created by hundreds of extra cars, no clear artists' impressions of what the buildings would actually look like, nor what material would be used to construct the buildings.

Judith Symes, chair of the Residents Association, said that transparent and accountable public viewings were an important part of the planning process and a third effort was needed.

"It has been a busy, if frustrating year, on the redevelopment of the site

formerly owned by RBS," she said. "Whilst Ediston is very happy to meet with us, there has been a frustrating lack of clarity on how the site will be redeveloped."

The developers hope for speedy approval for their plans before the Summer with demolition work to start in the Autumn. It could take up to five years to complete the project.

The Residents Association recognises that the RBS site needs to be redeveloped but wants developers to approach the project with respect for the site's surroundings rather than just trying to squeeze in as many flats as possible. The Association wants "new plans that more comprehensively meet the area's World Heritage status".



Keep up-to-date on the news by following the Association on Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/FettesRowAndRoyalCrescentAssociation/>



# Royal Crescent's illustrious football past

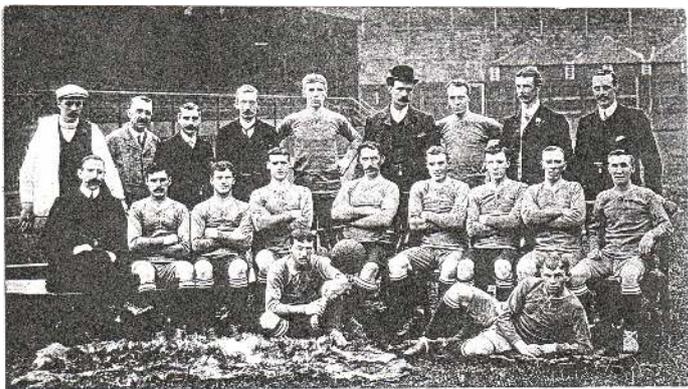
>> Royal Crescent was once home to St Bernard's Football Club, then one of the best in Scotland, writes George Park

St Bernard's Football Club was formed in 1878 and disbanded in 1943. It is now regarded as one of the most famous of Edinburgh's original football clubs to "fade away". At one time the football club, named after the well on Water of Leith near Stockbridge which is covered with a neo-classical colonnade, played in the top Scottish League against Rangers and Celtic but after 1900, its remaining years were in the Second Division.

Its chief claim to wider fame was winning the Scottish Cup in 1895, beating Renton 2-1 at Ibrox but for us, living on Fettes Row and Royal Crescent, it is fondly remembered for playing its home games from 1880 to 1883, again from 1902 until the outbreak of World War I, and then from 1924 until 1942, on what is now King George V Park, just off Royal Crescent.

At the beginning, the pitch, which was part of a site built by the Victorians and called the Gymnasium, ran South to North and had a running track around it with a wooden grandstand on the Scotland Yard side. Whilst there the club won the Scottish Second Division and the Scottish Qualifying Cup.

By 1924, when St Bernard's returned for a third time to the Gymnasium, the pitch this time ran East to West. A feature of the new grandstand



backing onto Royal Crescent was a metal bridge leading from the Crescent to the upper level of the new structure. Nowadays only the entrance gate remains in the railings facing up Dundonald Street. Wooden hoardings along the walls beside the stand

prevented people from getting a free view of games.

The introduction by the club of greyhound racing in 1930 created unrest due to an undesirable element attending and led to a petition with 300 signatures to close the site. Otherwise relations with local residents appear to have been cordial.

With Hibs in the Second Division in 1932, the New Year's Day Edinburgh Derby was not the traditional Hibs vs Hearts match. Instead, it was Hibs vs St Bernard's at the Gymnasium. This attracted 27,000 people to the "Gymmie" the highest ever ground attendance. No crowd trouble was reported but two Hibs players and one St Bernard's player took an early bath for field offences in a 1-0 win for the Saints that went down well in Stockbridge.

In 1938 East Fife won the Scottish Cup but not before winning a twice replayed semi-final against the Saints. All three games were played at Tynecastle before a combined total attendance of nearly 100,000.

>> George Park lives on Royal Crescent and is the author of 'St Bernard's Football Club: Or when the well ran dry'

## Chairwoman's Note

Welcome to this issue of The Chronicle, the annual newsletter of the Fettes Row and Royal Crescent Residents' Association.

The Association was formed 50 years ago and is one of the oldest and most active residents' associations in the New Town. It is the envy of many other streets.

And the association is as vital now as it was when it was set up in 1971. Then the New Town, and especially our small patch of it, looked and felt very different. Great construction projects have changed the vista and feel of our two streets over the past 50 years, and another building project looms over us now.

The way that the old RBS site is developed will have a profound impact on our streets. The Association is our chance to have a voice and to try and influence developers and planning officials so that the right outcome can be achieved. We have already helped knock back poor plans and are prepared to take on the developers again.

But the Association is not a single-issue group. We are also monitoring the growth of short-term lets, watching out for unwelcome planning proposals and the state of drains, railings and lighting.

We need your support, as members of the Association and at our AGM on Wednesday Feb. 26 at 7pm at the Cumberland Bar. The AGM is a place for sounding out different opinions, appointing and reappointing committee members, devising strategy and plans and, also, for a social.

And this brings me to one final note. Over the last three years, we have organised a successful and well-supported street clean up. It much improves the look of the two streets and is also a fun, social affair. Please come along and volunteer for 15 minutes, half an hour or an hour next November/December.

See you there!

Judith.

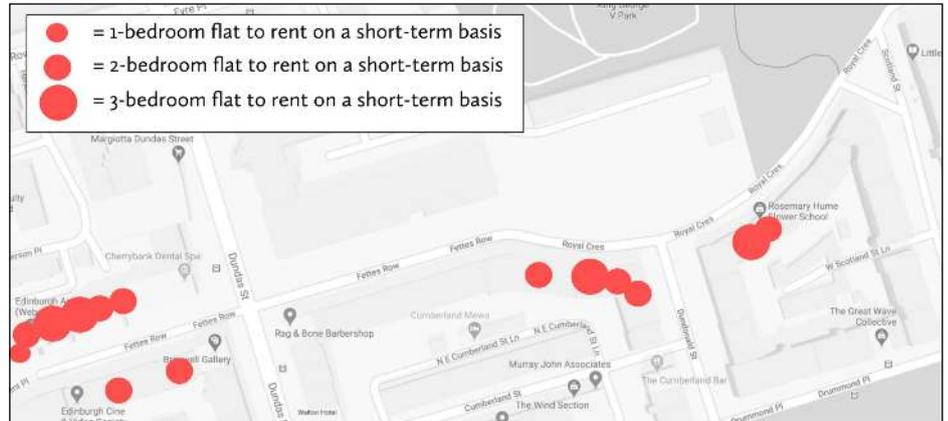
# 6% of streets' flats rented out as short-term lets

Roughly 6% of the housing stock on Fettes Row and Royal Crescent is now sold as short-term lets for tourists and party-goers through websites such as Airbnb and Booking.com, analysis showed.

Of the 250 or so flats on the two streets, 14 or 15 are listed as for sale by the night. Most are 2-bedroom flats costing £90 - £120/night, a price that can double during the high-demand Festival and Hogmanay periods. Two 2-bedroom flats in 30/31 Fettes Row, owned by the same person, have a bunk bed in their identical box rooms, to maximise their capacities. There are also four 3-bedroom flats available to rent.

This is the first full analysis of the short-term let data for Fettes Row and Royal Crescent and, while the 14 or 15 flats to rent probably represents a significant increase in the number of flats rented out on a short-term basis in the area, it is probably not above average for the New Town.

In the Old Town, residents have estimated that 20% or more of the housing stock is now rented out as short-term lets.



>> The spread of short-term lets across Fettes Row and Royal Crescent

Activists against the rise in the number of short-term lets, fuelled by Scotland's surge as a global tourist destination and the Council's enthusiasm to promote Edinburgh as a party town, have said that they hollow out communities and can generate noise and anti-social behaviour.

They have also said that the short-term let market is largely unregulated and has been abused. It was conceived as a way to rent out a spare bedroom to make extra cash rather than whole flats as a business.

From next year, though, new legislation will give local authorities in

Scotland more power to regulate the short-term let market, powers that Edinburgh Council has promised to use.

Supporters of short-term lets say that the flats are often well-maintained, attract people who want to spend money in local shops, bars and restaurants and create jobs.

The data for Fettes Row and Royal Crescent showed that short-term flat rentals are concentrated on the western section of Fettes Row. There are also a handful of short-term lets on Royal Crescent but some sections are entirely unaffected, such as the eastern section of Fettes Row.



How well do you know your street?

Q1: What is Fettes Row's royal connection?

Q2: When was Royal Crescent built?

Q3: The photo on the right, what is it and why is it on our railings?

Answers at the Fettes Row & Royal Crescent Residents Association on Wednesday Feb. 26 at 7pm at the Cumberland Bar.



### Planning permission blocked at 5 Royal Crescent

Last year, under pressure from the Residents' Association Committee, Edinburgh Council refused planning permission to split a rental flat at 5 Royal Crescent into two. The plan had been to build into the roof of the existing flat to, it was thought, create two small flats for short-term rent. There were a number of issues with the plans, not least creating an extra apartment and windows in the roof of a Grade-A listed building. The applicant appealed the original decision but his appeal was rejected as not being in keeping with the original design of the block.

### 19C Fettes Row wins permission to build extension

Despite objections from 25 property owners in the area, planning permission was granted in May for an extension in the garden of 19C Fettes Row. Most objectors said that the proposed 40sqm extension, which was angular and modern in design, was out-of-keeping with the rest of the architecture along the street. There was also no precedent for granting planning permission into gardens along this section of Fettes Row. The owner of the property has since sold-up without building the extension.

### Council's parking ticket revenue drops

Edinburgh Council earned nearly £5.3 million from parking tickets in the 2018/19 financial year, 10% less than the previous year, its own data showed. In 2009/10, the Council had earned £6.3 million from parking fines. The parking data is not split up into zones and is for the whole of Edinburgh. The data surprised one Fettes Row resident. "Really?" he said. "At one point last year I was collecting more parking tickets for minor infringements than plastic bags from Margiotta."

### Successful street clean up now into its fourth year

The Residents' Association held its third, and most successful-to-date, 'street clean-up' on Saturday Nov. 30 and Sunday Dec. 8. The 'street clean-up' was started in 2017 to pick up the slack from the council. Council street sweepers and litter-pickers have become an increasingly rare sight on our two streets so the annual clean-up was set up as a response. This year around a dozen people volunteered to help out. One volunteer said: "It was good fun and a nice social, plus it really wasn't that much work when we got down to it and it made the streets look so much better." Well done and thanks to those who volunteered.

### Flooding on street corner

Street flooding on the corner of Fettes Row and Royal Crescent remains a particular problem. The drains do not appear to be working properly and the area collects rainwater and floods. This makes the road impassable and is also a potential threat to some of the basement flats. The council has been told.

### Break-in at 12 Royal Crescent

At the start of January, there was a break-in at 12 Royal Crescent. A report on the Association's Facebook page said that this is a main door flat and that the thieves broke in through a window. The owners of the flat were believed to be away at the time of the break-in. A Facebook user added a comment to say that there had been a similar break-in on Scotland Street in December.

### Fixing street lighting

Fettes Row and Royal Crescent residents are rightly proud of their street lights. They do, though, have a tendency to go out. If you do notice street lights that have gone out please report them to the council. They are obligated to fix them. The easiest way is through the Council's website.



Join the Fettes Row & Royal Crescent Residents Association. Subscription costs £10/year per residence or £5/year for a single occupancy. Bring this membership form to the AGM on Wednesday Feb. 26 at 7pm at the Cumberland Bar or post through the letterbox at 8A Fettes Row.

NAME: .....

ADDRESS: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

TELEPHONE: .....