

New Portobello High School still on the agenda



Still room for a new school?

A report due to be discussed at the meeting of the full council next Thursday confirms that The City of Edinburgh Council remains totally committed to replacing the existing Portobello High School as soon as possible and that the preferred option remains to build it on part of Portobello Park.

The recent appeal outcome has shown that there is a significant gap in existing legislation which is preventing the Council from building on the park. The Council has already written to Scottish Government Ministers in order to seek their support for a change in the legislation.

In order to gain as much support from the community as possible, changes are also being recommended to address what are believed to be the main concerns of some of the local community relating to the loss of open space in the area.



Convener of
Education – Paul
Godzik

Councillor Paul Godzik, Education, Children and Families Convener said:- “We are committed to delivering these schools and we still believe that the park is the right place to build the new High School. We have weighed up the different options for achieving this, and consider that a Private Act has the best prospect of success. We will now pursue this, and consult widely with the local community on our proposals.

"Further to this, I am pleased to announce that we plan to build a new park to help address concerns by some of the local community around the loss of green space. I'm sure this news will be welcomed by all Portobello residents."

Alison Johnstone, MSP for Lothian and education spokesperson for the Scottish Greens, said:-

"A private act of parliament would require the agreement of the Scottish Government to pass such a bill and also sufficient parliamentary time to be set aside. I believe the council should be pursuing this option with the Scottish ministers in order to determine how quickly an Act could be passed. I believe it should apply only to the circumstances of Portobello and not to common good assets more generally.

"There may be alternative sites that will ensure a school can be built as quickly as possible if other approaches are unsuccessful. Any alternative site must be able to provide a high quality learning environment for our young people in the long term. If part of the park is to be built on then the council must abide by its original promise to provide compensatory open space in the area."

The local community would have a say on what the new park would look like and be given free access to the all weather pitches which are planned to be built beside the new high school on part of Portobello Park when they weren't in school use.

Further to this, officers are recommending a twin-track approach which would also include a back-up plan should the preferred option of building the new high school on part of Portobello Park ultimately prove to be unsuccessful.



A full review of potential sites in, and around, the area has confirmed yet again that there are very few alternative sites available. Only three potential options have been

identified and all are seen as a significant compromise in comparison to what the Portobello Park site would offer.

Sites under consideration include the former Scottish Power site at Baileyfield, which is currently for sale, and a site on the Brunstane Estate. The other option would involve using the current high school site but extending it into the site currently occupied by St John's RC Primary School.

As there is a limited time within which to decide on whether the Baileyfield site should be purchased, a feasibility study is underway to see if it is possible to build either of the schools there. In addition, views will be sought from the school communities to establish the level of support for this alternative option. This will inform a further report to Councillors on 22 November regarding whether, or not, consideration should be given to purchasing the Baileyfield site as a fall-back option.

