

Discussion continues over Craighouse development



Local Green councillors warn over “high risk” Craighouse development plans

Green councillors Melanie Main and Gavin Corbett have warned that plans to develop the Craighouse site in south west Edinburgh run a high risk of utterly changing the character of one of Edinburgh’s most cherished locations.

Writing in a blog at the weekend the two local councillors list a series of concerns about the controversial plans for the former Napier University site on Easter Craiglockhart Hill. These include reduction in access, loss of green space, loss of habitat and profound disruption to the character of the site.

Developers, the Craighouse Partnership, have submitted plans to renovate the seven grade-A listed buildings into 64 homes and also to build 89 new homes on the site. The site is not earmarked for development in the local plan but the developers argue that planning policy be set aside to allow new homes to offset the cost of renovating existing buildings.

In the blog piece, Green councillor for Meadows / Morningside, Melanie Main, said:

“Craighouse has a unique place in the hearts of thousands of people in the area: from those who walk in the grounds to those who simply admire the open spaces and wonderful architecture from a distance. Craighouse is one of Edinburgh’s Seven Hills, views towards and from the site are protected and its future is important as part of the heritage and landscape of the city.

“In my view, the developer’s plans put the essential character of the place at real risk.”

✘ Fellow Green councillor, Gavin Corbett, in the neighbouring Fountainbridge / Craiglockhart ward added:

“This has been a big issue in the area for over a year now. Local people feel very strongly about it. At the heart of the argument is whether it is right to set aside planning policy on such an iconic site – to allow ultra-modern buildings, loss of green space and habitat and reductions in freedom of access – to secure a possible future for the old buildings. In the current plans, the pain hugely exceeds the gain.

Their concerns were echoed by Lothian Green MSP, Alison Johnstone, who said:

“I cut my campaigning teeth on the destruction of green space at nearby Meggetland. A decade on I am saddened to see the same arguments come full circle once again. As a city, we need to hang on to the shrinking pockets of green space and Craighouse is no ordinary site. If we let expensive new homes be built on a site like this then I fear for what that might mean across the city and for very qualities which make Edinburgh so attractive in the first place.

The blog is at <http://www.edinburghgreens.org.uk/site/blog/craighouse-planning/>

A spokesman for the Craighouse Partnership said:

“No-one will be surprised at the reaction of the Greens to this proposal. Their views do not match those of the silent majority of residents in Morningside and Craiglockhart who support the development. They know this area of Edinburgh needs more housing and they also understand that without this scheme there is a real danger the historic Craighouse campus buildings will fall into disrepair. This project offers a

solution that maintains the life of these Grade A listed buildings, that provides new housing sensitively designed around the grounds and a new community owned park that guarantees access to the grounds and woods for the people of Edinburgh. Most people would consider that a good solution."



In The [Scotsman](#) earlier this year, Dame Joan Stringer, Principal of Edinburgh Napier University hit back at the people who are motivated to try and save the green space at Craighouse by explaining the financial benefit to the university. She said that the price being paid is £10m up front and a further £1.5m when the planning permission is granted. (The application is now at the planning stage and is open for comments until 21 December 2012.)

Rosy Barnes is the spokesperson for Friends of Craighouse. She said earlier this year:-“We are very disappointed that Dame Joan Stringer chose not to take this opportunity to provide answers to questions in the public interest, and instead attacked a local community campaign trying to find out how and why this important and protected landscape has been sold to an offshore complex of companies looking to build newbuild development across some of the finest parts of the site, contrary to planning regulations and the wishes of local residents.

“We call on Napier to release the paperwork on the bids and criteria for choosing Mountgrange over the other 5 bids. Is the extra £1.5 million she quotes dependent on reaching a particular target in terms of new-build? Are Napier lobbying politicians over this development? Are they happy with the public consultation process being undertaken partly in their name? How can they claim to be acting as a “custodian” of the site when they seek to make money out of building across this protected landscape and what exactly does their newly stated monitoring role consist of? If they indeed have some influence on the plans, why are they not using that influence to reduce

the excessive amounts of new-build in keeping with planning regulations and the wishes of the local community?

“We would be delighted if Napier were to release the “true facts” as Dame Joan Stringer calls them . But where have they done this? Not on their website. Not in the community liaison forum (which they did not attend). Not in the exhibitions (where they were not represented). Not in answers to our letters and not by their extremely heavy redaction of documents released under Freedom of Information requests .”

The Friends of Craighouse have a website [which you can see here.](#) They have information on how to post an objection to the planning application.

The developers have provided materials for a planning exhibition at Morningside Library which will run at least until the library closes for repair on 8 December 2012 so you can see the proposals for yourselves. The University are to vacate the whole campus by the end of the current educational year.