

Council to decide future for Boroughmuir High School



A Victorian school building on Viewforth will become vacant next year when Boroughmuir High School moves to its new campus on the bank of the Union Canal. The council have decided to put the building up for sale and it is now recommending sale to property company CALA.

The preferred bid is from CALA who have developed many sites across the city and have a track record of high quality housing at the luxury end of the market. They are already developing sites at Ocean Drive with prices from £435,000 and Dalmeny near South Queensferry with prices in excess of £510,000 and Fairmilehead where the prices range from £715,000 upwards.

The other bid is that from the Out of the Blue Trust (OOTB) who want to develop the school as an arts and business venue in the same way that they have developed the Drill Hall in Dalmeny Street Leith. They also want the building to continue to have educational use by offering it as capacity to nearby schools. The community bid is not the council's preferred bid at this stage although there is still time for the Finance and Resources Committee to change their minds or indeed refer the matter to the full council.

The difference is plainly more than money. The price offered by CALA is said to be over £14m and that offered by OOTB is just under half that. We are told that only CALA's offer is subject to planning permission for the changes to the building, but the final say on who gets to buy the school lies

with the council who currently own it.

Local councillor Melanie Main said: "Out of the Blue's bid for Boroughmuir would see the old school, which has been for so long the heart of the community, kept in the public domain for the use of the many rather than the few. What could be better for the local economy and community in Bruntsfield and South Edinburgh than OOTB bringing 20 years' success and experience to develop an Arts and business hub at the old Boroughmuir?"

"What's more this project would allow the extensive use by community groups and organisations to continue, securing their future and giving them a home for years to come. There is no shortage of arts and businesses in need of space across the city, with over 200 on OOTB's waiting list currently.

"It has become abundantly clear that the community feels strongly that it's voice should be heard and that selling off this wonderful historic building, the largest building the Council is likely to dispose off, is not to be rushed through committee at the earliest opportunity, without due consideration and evaluation of the community bid."

Merchiston Community Council also support the bid by OOTB and helped them to hold a public meeting on Tuesday at the school when they say over 150 residents attended.

Thanks to everyone who attended our open meeting last night about the Out of the Blue bid for the Boroughmuir High...

Posted by [Merchiston Community Council](#) on [Wednesday, 6 May 2015](#)

The community council is now calling on residents to sign a petition to support the bid by OOTB and you will find that by clicking [here](#) and the Community Council have a Facebook page [here](#).

The Community Council is set firmly against a housing development as they say the housing density is already amongst the highest in the city, and that there will be long delays before the actual development of the listed building begins due to the planning process.

It backs the arts bid as they feel it will help the council to fulfil six of their stated pledges:

- 1. **Providing for Edinburgh's prosperity** – the new SME and Social Enterprise businesses run from this space will contribute to the economic impact of the area and the City*
- 2. **Ensuring every child in Edinburgh has the best start in life** – Out of the Blue's bid includes working with the local schools for formal and informal education for children*
- 3. **Reducing poverty, inequality and deprivation** – Out of the Blue intend to provide social housing within the space as well as developing work placements, training, supported employment, education and development projects to help those in poverty, inequality and deprivation.*
- 4. **Strengthening and supporting our communities and keeping them safe** – Out of the Blue will make the space for the community and by the community with events/ classes and development for all.*
- 5. **Maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in Edinburgh** – an arts and creative hub will improve the quality of life to benefit all in the area and the City of Edinburgh.*
- 6. **Ensuring Edinburgh and its residents are well cared for** – the community aspect of the Out of the Blue bid ensures that outreach work (which also covers point 3 above) will benefit residents in the area and Edinburgh as a whole.*

00TB has a track record of success in providing arts spaces in Dalmeny Street but they also set up the Bongo Club in New Street until the building was demolished in 2006 and the club had to move to new premises. They also set up Powerhouse in Portobello where they offer studio and creative spaces to businesses and in 2011 they took up a lease on additional rehearsal space there. Run as a social enterprise they generate income which is then reinvested for social benefit.

✘ CALA also owns the former Donaldson's School where development has not yet begun and the school has lain empty for a number of years.

Planning permission for development of that important building was granted in 2007, but CALA has been involved with heritage restoration specialist City & Country who will soon be lodging updated proposals for the transformation of the Playfair building into homes.

CALA propose a crescent of new build homes alongside the listed building where parking will be provided in underground car parks.

David McGrath, managing director of CALA Homes (East) said: "This is a special site and our designs have been carefully shaped to fit the context of the setting.

"Our proposal celebrates this historic building, which is the site's most impressive feature. Anyone living in our new apartments will enjoy the unique view of Donaldson's every day.

"The changes we are proposing not only reflect the best advances in design of the past seven years, it also means we are meeting changes in the market to deliver the style and quality of homes that people actually want today."

The council has begun building the new school which will provide new facilities for 1165 pupils, including a roof top

games area to make the most of the space.

