

Edinburgh Rugby's proposal to move to Myreside is not so welcome to neighbours



Edinburgh Rugby have announced that they plan a move to Myreside from January 2017. The Guinness PRO12 side will start the season at Murrayfield where they have played until now, but then they will make the switch.

Myreside is home to Watsonians and the ground where many Scottish greats of rugby such as the Hastings brothers, played club rugby before moving onto the national stage, and the club hope to 'build a better club feeling' at Myreside. In May of this year the club explained to fans in a letter from their Managing Director:

"I'm delighted to be able to confirm that we will be moving to Myreside – George Watson's College and Watsonians ground – on a trial basis, from January of 2017 through to the end of the season, where we'll be playing all of our Guinness PRO12 and EPCR Challenge Cup matches.

Myreside is a venue that Edinburgh Rugby know well. For over 100 years Edinburgh sides have played occasional matches at the ground, from a meeting v Paris in 1898 to fixtures against international touring teams and, more recently, against Ospreys in the league in February 2015. The ground has a significant rugby heritage in the city and we are really looking forward to going there.

From now until January, we'll be working hard to enhance the existing facilities there to make it a cracking place to come

and watch Edinburgh play.

If this trial period is successful, then we intend to enter into a longer term partnership with George Watson's College that would see us playing there full time from the beginning of season 2017/18."

Later today, 31 August 2016, Edinburgh Rugby will hold an exhibition at Myreside to show off their plans in more detail to local people and rugby fans.

On their website the Edinburgh Rugby Managing Director, Jonny Petrie, explained:

"This move to Myreside is about creating a strong future for the club and creating a better experience for fans and players, but we are very mindful that this move will be a change for the communities who live and work in the area.

"We would like to encourage the community to attend this event to find out more information about our proposals and pose any questions they may have.

"In addition to sharing our plans to erect temporary stands and adapt the ground for Edinburgh Rugby fans, we will be able to share our transport plan to alleviate traffic and parking pressures on match days. This will include the creation of a park and ride service and additional car parking provision."

Representatives from the club will be available to discuss the plans between 4 – 7pm at the Myreside Pavilion (79 Myreside Road) on

Wednesday 31 August.

It was announced in May 2016 that George Watson's College and Edinburgh Rugby have entered into a partnership to allow the professional rugby team to play on their grandstand pitch in the coming season. Their plans are for Edinburgh Rugby to play six home games at Myreside between January and May 2017 to 'test the feasibility'. If that works out then the plans are to move Edinburgh Rugby home matches there from the 2017-18 season on.

The school explained on their website:

This development sits well with plans the School has to develop the campus. Melvyn Roffe, Principal of George Watson's College said: "We are excited about the potential for this partnership to build on our rugby heritage and achievements and to enable the School to have a positive impact in the wider Edinburgh community. The School's plans for the campus will shortly be finalised and the partnership with Edinburgh Rugby will help us to achieve our aspirations."

Jonny Petrie, Managing Director of Edinburgh Rugby said: "This is a hugely

positive step for Edinburgh Rugby and we are delighted at the opportunity to play our home matches at Myreside. This is about building a strong future for the club at a home ground in the city that better suits our needs and improves the matchday experience for fans and players alike.

“I’d like to thank George Watson’s College for proposing the idea and for their support in working with us to develop the concept into a credible plan. We will now be liaising closely with all relevant parties to ensure a smooth transition over the coming months.”

Local politicians

Daniel Johnson the MSP who lives in the vicinity told The Edinburgh Reporter : “As a rugby fan I can understand why it is important that Edinburgh Rugby finds a new home. We need Edinburgh Rugby to be a success. But there are big concerns raised by local residents about traffic and the number of people who might potentially attend matches. The objectors have a real point. I will be interested to see the exhibition for myself.”

Councillor Mark McInnes said that he has also met with residents : “I will ensure that their concerns and position are represented to Edinburgh Rugby in any planning

application.”



Local Residents

We met with some local residents who will be most affected by these plans. They will be attending the meeting to try and find out more about what it means for them, but at the moment they do not feel that they have enough information, even though they live right next door.

The local residents met with the Council Leader Andrew Burns to talk to him about the proposals. Councillor Burns told us :”I met with the residents and Edinburgh Rugby and am very familiar with what is being proposed. I have encouraged both sides to stay engaged and communicate with each other.”

The neighbours have been told that there is a proposal to build a temporary stand at the beginning of the season and then take it down at the end. This stand will block their light while it is in place, and they fear that crowds of several thousand spectators for each match will affect them, their properties and the way they live there.

Mark Dixon explained that he is concerned about the proposed development. He and his family live on the ground floor of a block of flats which shares a boundary with the Watsonian ground. “We currently look at the north stand. We are approximately 10 metres from the try line and clearly the fact that Edinburgh Rugby would come here with 5000 or 6000 fans would massively change things. At the moment they have advised us that they will put a planning application in on 7 September.”

He continued: “Essentially what Edinburgh Rugby could do is not come here. They could go somewhere with all the facilities

and infrastructure already in place. Somewhere with the sheer space that would allow a major rugby team, one of only two teams in Scotland of its size, to play rugby in a decent facility. This is not it."

John and Noel Allan are pensioners who have lived on the ground floor which faces onto the sports ground for 23 years. John explained that there was a trial of Edinburgh Rugby matches here a few years ago which resulted in people trying to exit down the stairs next to their block of flats, leaping over their fence and through their garden in the rush to get out. Their main fear is that the development will be very close to their house and there will be a lot of pedestrians going to and from matches. Noel said : "A temporary stand is planned for this end of the ground which will affect our light and our lives."

Noel continued: "We are not against Edinburgh Rugby at all, and they say that they will protect this corner here next to us and they are going to put fencing up. They have not given us any details of that however."

John explained his concerns over the lack of information : "We have been told there will be toilets in this area but we don't know exactly where and we don't know how many. They could continue to play at Murrayfield where all the facilities are on hand."

Noel continued: "The city has a tram which has cost a fantastic amount of money. You have a city where people can get on a plane and then get onto the tram to Murrayfield. Instead they are going to be trying to get 4,000 people up this street. Many of the bus services here stop at certain times of the evening. The 38 goes from the Western to the Royal and it stops at 9:00pm."

John explained that they will be going to the public meeting later today to find out more. He said: "Despite the fact that

ours is the building closest to the site we learned about it from reading about it in the Edinburgh Evening News, and only after that did we get a letter from Edinburgh Rugby saying it was planned. Since then we have had two meetings with them which were public relations exercises and which did not give us any more information."

Noel concluded: "We think that the height of the stand at this end will be the height of the soffits on the roof of our three storey building, but we just don't know."

John Elliott lives in Merchiston Gardens, and although he lives around the corner from Myreside, he is worried about noise levels and overflow parking from the rugby ground. He explained to us: "I imagine there will be many people walking to the ground along this and neighbouring streets. I live in a street where noise is already a problem, and we may suddenly have more people, perhaps 5,000 each match. I don't think that capacity is suitable for this area.

"It is quite a quiet area. One of the big advantages of living where I do is that there are houses only on one side of the street with the school on the other, so a lot of the time it is very quiet, apart from on school sports days! However that is moderate in comparison with what we expect from these matches."

Philippa and Mark live on the first floor, and again their main fear is that the road and the area are not set up to take the levels of footfall that the matches will attract. Philippa, who is a former pupil of the school, explained : "As you can see even from today there is a high level of traffic coming along this road after rush hour. It is constantly busy and jammed along here."

But the parking issues also concern them. She continued: "We already deal with parking overflow from Tynecastle and that happens regularly enough. This would be the straw that breaks

the camel's back. To be fair Edinburgh Rugby have shared some plans with us, but those plans don't contain any specific details. They allude to transport plans but there are no specific details given.

"What we would really like to see more of is the detailed structured event planning that you would expect to see in the case of matches of this size. Also we would like to see some more awareness of the likely impact. It is also fine to say that you will educate people to come to the ground in something other than cars but that leaves the decision firmly with your supporters!"

Mark explained that his main concern is the sheer volume of people. He said: "Traffic is one thing, but the idea of the sheer volume of people who are going to be coming into the stadium through this one access point on the west is I think quite dangerous."

They already have double glazing and blackout linings on their curtains as a result of the current use of the ground for Watsonian matches, but they are concerned about the scale which is proposed.

Philippa explained: "We know from the annual fireworks display held here that there is only so much that blackout blinds can do. We feel we should be able to open our windows if it is a warm day or evening. I understand that these matches will not take place each and every day, but we also have two dogs and we are concerned about the effect of the noise on them."

Stephen Scott also lives in the same block of flats on the top floor where he has lived since 2000. He explained that his view is not anti-rugby, and he very much supports the use of the ground by the school but he objects to the commercial plans for Myreside. He said: "I feel to bring something that size onto Myreside is just wrong. Personally this will be catastrophic for me. I have lived here for so long with lovely

views and peace and quiet, and this ground is not right for the number of people who might descend on Myreside. The main thing is the stand which is almost on our doorstep. We will be most interested to see where the stand is going to be at the exhibition. We were initially told that the roof would be as high as the embankment but now we are told that it will be as high as our roof. They could be clearer on certain aspects, and I understand that they need somewhere smaller than Murrayfield but I don't feel Myreside is the right place. It will take too many changes."

The exhibition by Edinburgh Rugby takes place on 31 August 2016 at Myreside Pavilion on Myreside Road between 4pm and 7pm.