

# **Balerno Inn to be 'heart of the community'**

**Ben Watson was a former pupil of Balerno High School and he has returned to the village to open an addition to the eating options at the gateway to The Pentlands.**

The Ratho resident saw the potential in a crumbling former pub and has taken eight months to refurbish the building in the middle of Balerno's main street into a bistro-style restaurant and bar offering all-day dining.

By December the prominent sandstone building, which has been vacant for several years, will offer five en-suite bedrooms, decorated with fabrics including Harris Tweed, and have three function rooms.

Ben already has Christmas bookings from people coming home to visit relatives for Christmas and he has also had inquiries from parents of students at nearby Heriot-Watt University who wish to visit their children.

Others wishing to enjoy the hills and the City of Edinburgh, but don't want a city centre hotel, have also made inquiries about The Balerno Inn which also has private dining facilities.

The Malleny Room is on the first floor and will accommodate groups of up to 12. It has a bay window which provides a view of the main street and the room also features fully-restored cornicing.

The Library Room, which will accommodate parties of up to ten, is adjacent to The Garden Dining Room which has a capacity for

40. They can be used together as an exclusive space for weddings or graduation, engagement and birthday parties.

The name of Balerno, incidentally, comes from Scottish Gaelic Baile Àirneach, meaning townland/town of the hawthorns and the 18th-century saw flax, snuff and paper mills springing up around the Water of Leith and its tributary, the Bavelaw Burn.

The largest mill, Balerno Bank Paper Mill, is located near the new gastro pub, and the village has expanded significantly since the end of the First World War.

Heritage is important for Ben and art work of local scenes taken by local photographers is very much part of the in-house decoration and he has also retained and restored the original beams in the property which used to be called The Malleny Arms. It had the local nickname of The Honky as American servicemen stationed at a nearby base used to drink there.

Everything is cooked fresh in-house by chef Andy Robson and his staff of three which includes a sous and pastry chef, and the close-knit team prepare food which ranges from classic pub fare to sophisticated bistro-style, daily specials.

From November 25 they will be open from 10am for morning baking – croissants and Danish pastries – followed by a relaxed lunch, bar snacks and evening dining until 9pm.

The owner and his five front-of-house staff are pleased to welcome guests who need to re-energise after a walk or taking part in fishing or cycling (he has installed bike racks in front of the building) in the nearby hills. The family dog is always welcome.

And, The Balerno Inn is only yards from a bus stop served by the No 44 (around 45 minutes) from Edinburgh's world-famous Princess Street. There is ample on-street parking.

He said: "I used to go to Balerno High School and lived in

Ratho where I trained as a chef under my late father Ian at The Bridge Inn so I know the area and what makes it tick.

“My aim is to make The Balerno Inn very much the heart of the local community.

“We plan special events in the bar like quiz nights, game nights and ladies nights and our menu is driven by quality, provenance and great value for the entire family.

“That is why we designed a space with the kids in mind, offering a play area that is safe and secure. Guests can relax and keep a watchful eye whilst the wee ones enjoy the enclosed play area.”

Food is key and, for example, starters include soup with fresh bread is £4.50 and pheasant (locally shot) and barley terrine plus Harlaw hawthorn jelly is £6 or fire cracker cauliflower with roast garlic mayonnaise £6.

Fish (full fillet, Scrabster landed) with chips and mushy peas is £13, the same price as pie of the day. Scottish mussels in cider, parsley, garlic, smoked bacon, crème freche, lemon and fries is £14.

Lamb rump, cooked low and slow, with roots, barley and mint is £17 and, from the grill, guests can pick a 180g fillet steak (£26) or rib eye (£20) with slow roast tomato, chips and proper beef jus.

There is also a beef burger (£11) or Honky Burger for £18, called after the former nickname for the previous pub, with mayo and sweet mustard, pickle, French fries, smoked bacon, Monterey jack cheese, spiced haggis, Cajun honey mayo and onion rings.

There is a choice of five desserts and a range of coffee and tea plus a selected wine list and a range of ales. The bar area is pictured above.

Ben said: "I've used social media to publicise the opening and in just seven weeks we have generated 1,500 inquiries. Our opening weekend was wonderful. We were crazy busy.

"Naturally, we appreciate everyone's support and, even after only a few days, we are being flooded by reservation requests on our Facebook page."

That is why they have installed an automated online reservation system on the website ([www.balernoinn.co.uk](http://www.balernoinn.co.uk)). You can call direct to 0131 202 3220 to make a reservation.

He added: "Our bedrooms, our private dining, our garden room and elegant library room are coming on fast and we expect to have them ready by early December.

"Whether you're looking to enjoy some Scottish sun at one of our outside tables in the summer or have a private get together in one of our cosy bothies, complete with heating and surround sound, in the winter, you'll feel comfortable and right at home at The Balerno Inn."

The Balerno Inn, 15 Main Street, Balerno EH14 7EQ  
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