

Fight is on to save Western Harbour ponds

A group of Leith residents are fighting to secure the future of three natural ponds home to a “diverse” range of wildlife, after the land they are on was put up for sale by private developers.

Located at end of Western Harbour, the three ponds have been around for just under 20 years – and were formed entirely by accident.

The site was once earmarked for flats, but construction projects were abandoned after the 2008 financial crash. Residents say the ponds which have appeared in the half-dug building foundations are now teeming with life and enjoyed by many who live locally, particularly following the lockdown period when they were unable to visit other green spaces in the city.

However, there is growing concern in the community after the plots containing the ponds were put up for sale recently.

Ida Maspero, who is behind the Save Western Harbour Ponds campaign, said: “Right now our aim is just to raise awareness of the value of this lovely re-wilded space for bird life, for waterfowl but mainly for people. Locals have been using it a lot, it’s become really special.

“We’re just concerned for its future and would like to raise awareness of its value”

[A petition](#) calling on The City of Edinburgh Council and The Scottish Government to “recognise the value of the self-willed wetland habitat for nature and for people, and to help save it from development” has so far gathered more than 1,300 signatures.

The group has also urged the landowner to engage with them, with hopes of working towards a community buy-out of the ponds, and to “consider and recognise the value of this re-wilded land beyond simply being ‘plots for development’”.

Jennifer Howard, who lives at Western Harbour, added: “For mental health it is a big thing. I’m round here a couple of times a day. Mostly in the afternoons, this is our sort of circuit.

“We’ve seen swans, cygnets, various ducks, butterflies, kingfishers, woodpeckers, we’ve got goldfinches – there’s all sorts.

“At the toughest part of lockdown when you were technically confined to your own garden, and when you didn’t have that, you weren’t allowed to go anywhere. So we came around here each day to see what else we could find, keep our minds going and just get some fresh air. I think especially for people that live on their own something like that is absolutely invaluable, there’s some older people who can’t walk too far so this is just right.”

Meanwhile local birdwatcher Stephen Metcalfe said the area is now “better for birds than it ever was”.

He said: “In lockdown I started coming here a lot and that was in the spring and started to find lots and lots of songbirds here, it’s a very diverse area. I’ve recorded I think about 60 species now around the ponds.

“In terms of freshwater pools near the sea where you will get migrant birds coming through and dropping off to feed for a

bit, there's the scrapes at Musselburgh and you might get things in Cramond but there's really nothing in between."

by Donald Turvill

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