

Plans lodged for rewilded land amid local campaign to stop development

Plans have been lodged to build homes in north Edinburgh on a plot of land which locals are fighting to stop from being redeveloped as it has become rewilded in the meantime.

The Western Harbour site was abandoned by developers around 15 years ago and has since become woodland and natural ponds which are now home to a diverse range of wildlife.

After being put up for sale by its British Virgin Islands-based owner last year, it has been the focus of a community campaign to keep it as a nature spot – arguing it is a “wonderful example of urban rewilding” and a “haven for insects, bats and waterfowl” including breeding swans and moorhens, goldeneye, herons and kingfisher.

Early proposals for a ‘residential development’ on one of the four parcels of land submitted this month have intensified concern over the future of the area which the government and city council are being urged to “recognise the value of”.

But obstacles could stand in the way of FM Developments, which is behind the new plans, including the protection of trees which the council say “contribute to the attractiveness and character of the locality”.

Officials have drawn up temporary tree preservation orders (TTPOs) which if made permanent could make building on the plot more difficult.

Save Western Harbour Ponds campaign founder Ida Maspero said she hoped the TTPOs would “raise awareness of the biodiversity of the site, and help us in our fight to secure the future of the ponds as a precious greenspace for nature and people”.

And although the site remains allocated for housing by the authority, its planning blueprint for Edinburgh over the next decade, City Plan 2030, noted that “further assessment of these ponds is required given the nature of the ponds has progressed over time”.

Scottish Government planning officers who are currently reviewing the Plan have visited the woodland and ponds as they consider whether the space should be officially designated as greenspace.

Local Labour councillor Katrina Faccenda said there was a “mad rush” from some developers to get plans approved in advance of the draft City Plan 2030 being finalised.

She said: “Since the land was designated for housing, our approach to the importance of greenspace in the city has changed a lot and if you look across that part of Leith and North Edinburgh there is a real lack of greenspaces, especially wilded greenspaces, and it would just be an absolute crime to not take the advantage of the fact that nature has re-wilded that and that we actually look after it and allow it to flourish.”

Meanwhile, David Adamson from Edinburgh Natural History Society visited the plots in July. [He wrote a guest blog for the Cockburn Association which you will find here.](#)

He said that he found “a thriving population of Cream-streaked ladybirds which are scarce in Scotland, a colony of Leafcutter

bees, and some dragonflies,” he wrote for the Cockburn Association website this month.

“A pair of swans had raised six cygnets. The orchids were over but Sickle Medick, a plant I had never seen before, was still in flower,” he said.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

Save Western Harbour Ponds are running a petition to save the ponds from development which has been signed by 2,808 people. On the petition webpage the group said: “We are an emerging community campaign working to try and secure the future of the Western Harbour Ponds by some means or other. We call on Edinburgh City Council and the Scottish Government to recognise the value of this self-willed wetland habitat for nature and for people, and to help save it from development.

“We call on the landowner, too, to consider and recognise the value of this rewilded land beyond simply being ‘plots for development’, and to enter into dialogue with the community about its future. FACEBOOK

GROUP: www.facebook.com/groups/westernharbourponds”



