

# Memorial bench near former home and new play park to be named after Joe Baxter

A campaigner who fought for almost 20 years for a fair deal for home-owners on ghost estate condemned over crumbling concrete is set to be honoured on the site.

Joe Baxter died a month before he could move into his new home, after being among the campaigning for fairer treatment after their homes in Deans South, Livingston, were found to have dangerous RAAC concrete.

Housing developer Springfield is currently working with West Lothian Council and the campaigners on a site for a new play park in the rebuilt Deans South to be named after Joe.

Before that, however, fellow campaigner Kerry Macintosh said a bench would be installed at the foot of Jura Avenue – not far from the site of Joe's former home – and near to where his widow Isabel now lives.

"It will be for the community – to sit on and to remember Joe Baxter for his kindness, and for the gentleman that he was", Kerry told the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Kerry added: "We're going to work with Springfield on where we can have the park named for Joe they have said they would like to put it as near to this part of the site as possible, but they're still working on the plans."

The plans are being drawn up just as the last of the old Deans South disappeared over the summer. Demolition crews took down the last of homes built with the now discredited Siporex- a brand name for the RAAC – commonly known as crumbling concrete.

The site of the former bungalows alongside the railway line has now been readied for the start of building work and Beattie's demolition teams are clearing the last remnants the homes to the east of the new Jura Avenue.

The estate of 140 homes was built by Livingston Development Corporation in the early 1970's with the then pioneering Siporex system building which allowed for lightweight aerated concrete roofs.

Like many system build designs from the 1960s the design had been made for warmer climates such as North Africa- and the materials failed miserably in the harsh and wet UK winters.

Deans South was evacuated by West Lothian Council after Siporex was judged to be unsafe. The home-owners left behind soon found themselves living in a nightmare on a ghost estate surrounded by empty crumbling buildings overrun by vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

At the end there were only two neighbours – Kerry and her two children and Joe and Isabel Baxter – left on one of the streets to support each other, more so than ever in the tough two years of the Covid lockdown.

Kerry told the LDRS this week: "All the home-owners have now got homes some have moved in, and some have moved on. Isabel is around the corner and Phil [ fellow campaigner Phil Cavan] is next door.

"It's great to see neighbours old and new settling in. It is so nice to have neighbours and feel part of a community again. I'm looking forward to Christmas and being part of the proper community again. It's so rewarding."

Kerry is continuing to lend her support to the national campaign fo justice for RAAC home-owners including taking part in a protest at Holyrood on Monday.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter