



Edinburgh Old Town Association

Convener's Report 2015

In 2015 the Old Town Association was involved in objecting to two major controversial development proposals in the Old Town area at India Buildings and Kings Stables Road. The India Buildings plan proposes a mixed use development comprising a hotel, bar, restaurant, cafe, retail and commercial uses. In Kings Stables Road there would be a hotel, student bedrooms, bar/restaurant, an 'arts facility' and 28 flats. It is obvious that these schemes are extensive and would have significant consequences for the Old Town in terms of the balance of the local population. Two more hotels, more student accommodation and very little provision for affordable housing would lead to an even more transient population with no real commitment to the Old Town. For the benefit of local residents we need a more settled demography in the area. The Association also objected to the plan to turn the former Royal High School building into yet another hotel. We felt justified in expressing a view because although the Royal High School building is not in our area it overlooks the Old Town and is visible from the Old Town. We conveyed our misgivings about the Virgin Street of Light in the High Street during the Christmas period to our local councillors and to the Planning Department of the Council. While we are not kill-joys we felt that the Street of Light was an inappropriate event for an Old Town residential area. We were also concerned that Underbelly (responsible for the Street of Light) appears to want to expand events in 2016.

There are still traffic management issues to be addressed in the Old Town. The volume of traffic using Victoria Street is excessive and many cars and buses continue to be driven there too quickly. Inconsiderate parking is still a problem. We feel that in the Canongate one side of the street should have double yellow lines to allow for flow of traffic. Proposed developments eg in India Buildings would have further implications for the control of traffic. The uneven condition of many pavements is a further cause for concern as a hazard to pedestrians.

Fortunately there are some positives for the future. Artisan – currently developing the New Street site – are proposing to open a Community facility at the foot of Cranston Street as part of their agreement with the Council. This is to be welcomed. It is hoped that the Community room will be run by a management committee consisting of local community representatives. Edinburgh World Heritage intends to improve 12 closes in the Old Town area over a four year period. The future development of the Tron by EWH as a visitor centre is on track as are the works in Riddles Court and Panmure House. Finally this year the problem of the closure of post boxes at Festival time did not arise – the Old Town Association wrote to Royal Mail well in advance of August to ensure there were no difficulties.

The Old Town Association has maintained links with amenity groups and local associations. Representatives attended meetings of the Old Town Community Council, the Edinburgh Civic Forum and Edinburgh World Heritage. At these meetings a more collective approach to advance mutual concerns and issues was mooted. The Association also had connections with the Cockburn Association, the Scottish Civic Trust, the Royal Mile Business Association and the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership. We are grateful for the help and support on many matters of our local Councillors, Joanna Mowat and Karen Doran and of our MSP, Marco Biagi.

The members of our Committee deserve our thanks for all the work they have done throughout the year. Bill Cowan, our Planning Secretary has been conscientious in responding to planning applications – both major and minor. Rosemary Mann and Eric Drake are responsible for our thrice-

yearly newsletters -Eric as editor and Rosemary as photographer. The newsletters are informative and stimulating and the photographic sections are quirky and thought-provoking. Naomi Richardson, our Activities Secretary again produced a diverse and interesting programme of events for members. The programme included talks on Panmure House, Mapping Edinburgh, the Treasures of Edinburgh City Libraries, Journey and Evocation in Edinburgh Old Town by Donald Smith and the Royal Mile Project. There were visits to St Giles for a talk on Remembering WW1, the Queensferry Crossing Education Centre, a Democracy Walk led by Jean Bareham and a special visit to the Botanic Cottage being rebuilt at the Royal Botanic Gardens. There was a very successful Christmas party in the newly refurbished Scottish Poetry Library.

Other members of the Committee are:-Roma Crampin as Membership Secretary, Jean Fairbairn as Minutes Secretary, Rosemary Mann in her role as Treasurer, Laura Harrington, Katie Kerr and Anja Amsel our Honorary President. I am sorry to report that Robin Tait has stepped down from the Committee. We are grateful to him for his commitment to the work of the Association over so many years and wish him well. I am sure that our members will join with me in my appreciation of the dedication and time given to the OTA by the Committee members on a voluntary basis. We would welcome new members to the Committee -our meetings are monthly so please get in touch for more information if you are at all interested.

Financially, the OTA is in good heart:

Summary Accounts for year to 31.08.15		Receipts	Payments	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Events		1,164	772	392
Donations made			900	(900)
All other receipts and payments		1,283	660	623
Total		£2,447	£2,332	£114
Balances	31.08.14	Receipts	Payments	31.08.15
	£6,503	£2,447	£2,332	£6,617

The surplus from activities and administration allowed the Old Town Association to support donations made by the Brownlee Old Town Trust. We gave £150 towards the £300 grant of Lego for the Children's Section of the Central Library. The success of this grant was magnified by a matching donation from the Lego Company, making the Children's Library a magnet for young people, especially boys! Other donations included £250 towards a basic children's library for the Edinburgh City Youth Café, £250 towards reprinting costs of the leaflets produced by the Friends of Canongate Kirkyard and £250 towards reproduction costumes at Edinburgh City Museums. These donations more than make up for the low returns on capital investments in these times of austerity.

Current membership of the Association is 214 individual members and 11 corporate members. I would like to thank all our members for their continued loyalty and support. We also welcome new members. For more information about the OTA including newsletters, activities, links to other relevant websites, current issues and a booklist I recommend our website www.eota.org.uk.

Barbara Logue
Convener