



Edinburgh Old Town Association

Convener's Report 2013

It looks as if there will be major changes in an important part of the Old Town because of the recent contentious decision of the Planning Committee of the City of Edinburgh Council by the close margin of 8 votes to 6 to give planning permission for the New Street/Market Street development (Caltongate). Artisan's proposals for the area include the building of 3 budget hotels, 3 office blocks, 145 2/3 bedroom homes and the provision of 40 affordable homes. The overall cost will be £150 million. Work will start in the summer of 2014 and will be done in stages. The plans have been controversial and differing opinions have been expressed by individuals and groups. Some believe that the proposed buildings are inappropriate for the Old Town site while others argue that progress must be made since the site has been vacant for a number of years. The construction of 3 hotels and 3 office blocks together with the opening of the Ibis hotel on South Bridge and the rapid erection of student accommodation in Holyrood Road will mean a bigger number of short-term inhabitants in the Old Town. We are sure that tourists, office workers and students will enjoy the time they spend in the Old Town and their economic input is valuable but they will not have the same connection and commitment to the area as those who are permanent residents. In my previous reports as Convener a recurring theme has been balance in the Old Town between different priorities. It is to be hoped that the balance between the temporary and long-term population does not become skewed.

Unfortunately the Old Town Community Council ceased to exist at the end of 2013. Members of the Community Council resigned because they did not feel they had the support of the City of Edinburgh Council in their endeavours. The Old Town Association expressed its concern about the demise of the Community Council as a statutory body with an important role to play in local democracy. There have been positive responses from local Councillors and now a motion in the Scottish Parliament to uphold Community Councils supported by our local MSP. It is imperative that we see progress on this issue so that the Community Council can be re-established.

The Old Town Association was involved in a 'Thinking Day' at Holyrood Palace with many other interested bodies. Tourists in Edinburgh visit the Castle in their thousands but only a small proportion venture down the Royal Mile to the Canongate and Holyrood Palace. The contributors to the 'Thinking Day' discussed the issues and a number of proposals were put forward. A document will be published in due course. We also had a meeting with Edinburgh World Heritage about the future of the Tron Kirk. We have always felt that the Tron as an iconic building in a central position in the Royal Mile deserved better than to be used as a pop-up pub during the Festival and at New Year. The plans by Edinburgh World Heritage to develop the Tron in future as an interpretation centre are therefore to be welcomed. The upgrading of the Tron Kirk would benefit the area around Hunter Square and make it a more pleasant public space. The proposal depends on raising the finance but we are hopeful.

We also continue to maintain links with the Cockburn Association, the Civic Forum, the Safer Edinburgh Forum and the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership. We have communicated with the City of Edinburgh Council on various issues: e.g. the siting of A-boards and with Police Scotland on the pop-up pub at the Tron Kirk. Bill Cowan, our Planning Secretary, is assiduous in responding appropriately to any planning applications relevant to the Old Town. As always we are grateful for the support of our local police officers and our local councillors.

Our thrice-yearly newsletters, about which we have had many complimentary comments, continue to offer opinions, articles and information to members in a stimulating and enlightening manner. Our thanks and congratulations are due to the editors, Rosemary Mann and Robin Tait.

As always over the year we had a diverse and interesting range of activities. Talks included Dragons and Painted Ladies by Paul McAuley, The King's High Road by Robin Tait, Archaeology at the Old High School by Ross Murray of Headland Archaeology, Filth, Nastiness and Stinks in 18th century Edinburgh by John Lowrey and the Scottish Language Dictionary by Dr Chris Robinson. Walks included a Walk around the Bridges with Dominic Echlin and The New Town and its Gardens with Jean Bareham. There were also visits to the Scottish Vintage Bus Museum in Fife, Powderhall Bronze and the Chapel of St Albert the Great in George Square. These imaginative and popular events were researched and organised by our indefatigable Activities Secretary Naomi Richardson for which we are grateful. There are three members' meetings a year where members of the Association are invited to express their views and discuss concerns.

Bill Cowan, Robin Tait, Rosemary Mann and Naomi Richardson have already been mentioned and on behalf of the Old Town Association I would like to thank them and the other Committee members: Rosemary Mann as Treasurer, Jean Fairbairn as Minutes Secretary, Fenella Kerr as Membership Secretary, Katie Kerr, Eric Drake, Roma Crampin and Anja Amsel. Martyn Lambourne has decided to resign this year as a corresponding member. I am sure that you will appreciate the work and commitment of the members of the Committee who all serve on a voluntary basis. Without their efforts the achievements of the Old Town Association would not be possible. We would welcome new members of the Committee – our meetings are monthly – so if you are interested please get in touch!

Financially, the OTA is in good heart:

Summary Accounts for year to 31.08.13		Receipts	Payments	Surplus/ Deficit
Events		1,083	511	572
All other receipts and payments		1,445	964	481
Total		£2,528	£1,475	£1,053
Balances	31.08.12	Receipts	Payments	31.08.13
	£5,451	£2,528	£1,475	£6504

Membership of the Association as of August 2013 was 249 individual members and 13 corporate members which is a slight drop on last year. We have made a moderate increase in our annual subscription but we feel this is still excellent value. I would like to thank our members for their continued support and welcome new members. The Brownlee Trust continues to support projects for young people in the Old Town. We are hoping to update the OTA website in the near future but until then more information including our newsletters can be found at www.eota.org.uk.

This year has also seen some cheer in the Old Town. A photograph of the Old Town Association Honorary President, Anja Amsel, and part of Chessels Court were featured on the front cover of the RHS Community Update magazine to celebrate Edinburgh's award as overall winner in the Large City category in the Britain in Bloom national awards 2013. The film *Sunshine on Leith*, although not based in the Old Town, brought a feel-good factor to Edinburgh. Finally there was good news too when the Wardrop Court Dragons in their resplendent colours were finally put back in place after months of delay.

Barbara Logue
Convener