|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Moderator | Notetaker | Participants | Date | Time | Venue |
| Garry Sneddon | Emma Candy | Local Interest Groups | Weds 6th Sept | 12 NOON – **1.30pm** | Portobello Library |

F1: I’ve got a bit of script to go through at the beginning, which you can appreciate to ensure I’m consistent. If you can just let me go through, so it’s the same stuff as everybody else. [agree] I’m going to read through, if you do need me to stop or you have any queries, no problem at all.

F2: Do you want me to pass out the maps?

F1: Yes, please. These are just to familiarise ourselves with… the maps so we’re clear on the location that we’ll be talking about today. Is everybody familiar with the area?

[group agreement]

Ok, so the reason that we’re here today is that the land at Westbank Street, which is currently owned by the Council, is being sold. Portobello Community Council and the Portobello Amenity Society have asked for the community to be involved in the decision about what criteria the Council should use to make the decision about who the land will be sold to. Now, we’re conducting the eight focus groups – this is number four of the eight – with local residents and local interest groups to help understand, give us an understanding of how people feel about the various options. Now, I will be going into a set of questions around all the various aspects around this but before I do that, I’d like to take you through the Westbank Street site, where it is, and some background on what’s happened so far.

So, everybody can see the map. You can see the prominent landmarks – you’ve got the supermarket opposite, the Figgate Burn which goes down the side and then the beach. At the moment, the site’s used by two businesses. Powerleague, that runs the five-a-side football pitches, next to Portobello High Street and Edinburgh Leisure, which runs Tumbles, which is the gymnastics / soft play centre next to Portobello beach.

Firstly, what will happen to Powerleague? Well, Powerleague, well they want to close the business at Westbank Street because they say it’s no longer financially viable, and that’s why they’re saying the site needs to be sold. Powerleague has a long-term lease with the Council which expires in 2088. They were first in contact with the Council about selling the site in 2004. Developers were interested in the site at that time, but the sale could not be completed due to the downturn in the housing market that accompanied the financial crash.

Powerleague contacted the Council again in January 2015 to arrange sale of the site. Now, as Powerleague do not wish to operate their business on the site anymore, the five-a-side pitches will be removed and they will not be replaced.

What will happen to tumbles? Edinburgh Leisure – which is a wholly-owned arms-length management company that run the city’s public sport and leisure facilities – operates the Tumbles facility. There are two options for what will happen to Tumbles.

One is that Tumbles will not be sold and it will remain in its current location. The location of the Tumbles car park may change to another location on the site, but the same capacity – fifty spaces – will be retained.

The second option. Tumbles will be sold and the current building will be removed, but a new facility will be created within the existing site. The new facility must completely replace all of the existing functionality of Tumbles, and will also need to provide those 50 car parking spaces, for exclusive use by Tumbles customers. If Tumbles were relocated, there would be no loss of amenity.

Tumbles may be relocated on the site in this way because the land that’s next to the Portobello beach is considerably more valuable than the land elsewhere on the site. Okay so far?

[Agreement] …

So, what’s going to happen to the site? It is important to emphasise at this point is that any actual development on the land will still be subject to the planning permission. However, developers who are interested have submitted their intentions about how they would use the site and how much they’re prepared to pay. We cannot share with you what any one developer has actually said but we will go through all the different aspects of the site. We also cannot share how much money developers are actually bidding for the site but generally, you could assume, that the more developed the site – the more developers are prepared to pay.

Following your feedback, all the developers will be invited to revise those proposals again to take into account community views. The appointed developer will take part in a placemaking exercise, where there will be an additional opportunity for the community to input into the planned development.

What will happen to the money from the sale? The sale will be split between Powerleague and the Council… I don’t know the exact split if I’m honest with you – I know that that was a question raised at a previous group and I can’t give you that information today but I’ll certainly look into that for you. All the Council’s share of the money though, from the sale, will go towards the development of the new Meadowbank stadium.

Does anyone, at this point, have any questions?

P6: Yeah, I’m not sure why Powerleague are getting any of the money from the sale because they don’t own the land.

F1: Em, as far as I know they are getting a proportion of that…

P4: Yeah, that’s been agreed um, you’re saying that they’re going to move. So, if they move, well they’ve been committed to leasing this until 2088, um, because you’ve got the lease agreement and it’s almost as if you’re rewarding them by them moving out, cause they’re getting paid to do this. And yet, um, this was intended to be open space – recreation space – by the Council and if they do move out then it could revert to recreational space in one form or another. I’m not sure why Powerleague is saying that they’re now going to move and withdraw from that site are being rewarded for breaking the terms of their lease?

F1: I mean, unfortunately I’m not… P4: No… F1: for me to speculate around as to how that deal has been struck up. I apologise for not having a Planning person sitting right next to me but eh…

P4: I think it’s somebody from the Economy department rather than a Planner, somebody who’s dealing with.

F1: I think it’s important to emphasise that today is actually all about these types of questions and opinions and views that you’re raising, quite legitimately. So what we’ve got to do is gather them and what we’ll be doing is going back with those questions for people as quick as we can. Especially for these specialised groups…

P5: I mean there is a feeling that because Powerleague are refusing to upgrade the facilities and saying that they don’t want to continue to operating on this site, that they are calling the shots and they are being rewarded for being intransigent, you know, blackmailing the Council and the community in getting money for not doing what perhaps they should be doing seeing as they’ve got the lease til 2088.

P6: Under normal business circumstances, if they wanted to walk away from their lease, before it was over, they’d be charged a penalty by the person who’s leasing the land. So, the Council should be charging a penalty to Pitz and that could go towards Meadowbank.

F1: So, am I clear, to summarise what you’re saying is that there’s some ambiguity about that particular deal and how that’s come about? [group agreement]

P6: Yes, cause I just don’t understand why they could get a split of the sale, of the proceeds, I don’t understand that at all.

P5: I think when the outdoor bathing pool closed, the then Council promised the local community that that land would remain in leisure use in perpetuity, and that was the phrase they used then, and they gave Portobello a promise. Which of course, they are now not keeping.

F1: Okay, okay. Any other points?

P2: I take it you’re just here to receive what we’re saying and, so, you might hear strong feelings but they’re not directed at you. [laughter] I just want to be clear about that! But there are strong feelings. You can communicate back and that’s great.

F1: If there’s anything that’s important to get off your chest…

P1: Just, when you, when you outline what’s happening, it does seem that absolutely everything… we’re losing space, then half of the sale that the Council gets is going to Meadowbank. Which yes, some people within the community use it but that’s appreciatively further away and the other half is going to the company. So, Portobello seems to just be losing possible future funding.

F1: I don’t know if it’s exactly a half split but to me, that’s to me…

P4: From what you’ve said, I think it’s the lesser going to the Powerleague but they shouldn’t be getting anything.

F1: It could be the cost of the facility itself, the amenity. Em…

P2: To me it seems we’re trying to support the Council, to get a good deal here and not to be shafted by somebody else walking away from its lease. But the question for us, as the community, would be do we fight to retain it as open space, as we were promised, or do we go into partnership with the Council to develop it in some way. Because the Council needs the cash, is short of cash, but make sure it gets developed in a way that works for the community. For me, that would be the question that we work collaboratively so that this is helpful for the Council and for ourselves, but I’m not saying the community would agree with that, they might say “no, it should be open space” but the other option is to work collaboratively to develop something useful. But if you go with a developer running it and Powerleague getting its cut then that’s not the right model to be going for and the Council should be going for collaboratively with the community, as it’s a strong community and can provide very good input into that process.

P4: Following on from that, I think that one thing that might be clear is that anything that comes out of the discussion with the communities about how its developed does not necessarily mean that we acquiesce to that development. Um, because keeping it as open space, the planners have determined that there’s a shortfall in open space and the new developments across the road are going to exacerbate that. One option that maybe should be thought of and clearly thought about by the Council, at this stage, is that under the terms of the Portobello Park Act, the Council committed to replacing open space lost on Portobello Park. Now, at the moment they’re intending to develop the former St John’s site or when St John’s is demolished. However, that’s next to Figgate Park, where there’s a surplus of open space.

P6: It’s 14 hectares… It’s a large park.

P4: Yeah, but there’s no legal commitment – ah, there’s been a promise to convert it. But, I think that it would be beneficial for all because the St John’s site was originally in 2010 committed for development. And they were going to get at that time something like [inaudible] million pound receipt. So, before we get too far, I’d like the Council to really, seriously consider its promise to replace open space, which can be honoured by retaining this when Powerleague disappear. As an open space and form a better connection through to the Promenade with a park in this area.

P1: I know that you have a script to read, it is going to be sold. That’s what I’m aware of, so it’s about, essentially, I think, the purpose of this group feels like it’s about inputting into… So, I think, if there’s, if a feeling to want to protest or fight against then that’s probably another, a different forum.

[group talking over each other]

P2: But I think this is where we do communicate. One thing, as you say, would be to work collaboratively with… that wouldn’t necessarily mean selling it on terms that they’ve put up just now. Obviously, once the consultation is out – you’ve been told what you’ve to communicate – commercial, selling or housing or a balance between the two.

F1: That’s kind of the way that this has been developed. If we want to discuss about reasons why it’s been sold and whatever we can do that but that may be somewhat futile in that we’re trying to get how we actually should develop this site so that people get…

[group acknowledging]

P4: What I was getting at, retaining this as open space and getting the receipt from St John’s site so the Council gets the money.

P2: That’s a really important point, I’m glad we’ve caught that. Yes, the Council needs cash – that’s what it’s looking for out of this. You can get cash elsewhere and not lose this.

P6: Replacing open space in an area that desperately needs it. Especially with hundreds more houses being built.

P1: I think that’s what would concern me. There’s obviously all these new houses here and there’s some great public parks and so on and open space in Portobello but it’s all at the other end. And so, in this particular area, yes you have the beach but all of these new, and um presumably some of this new development would be luxury apartments and flats and housing so…

[group talking over each other]

P3: One more thing, just because I don’t know if it will come up again, it occurred to me if we’re talking about retaining this or some of this as open space, and for it to be developed and make an amenity of it – give the opportunity to do something about Figgate Burn, which as I understand it, currently comes out quite polluted into the sea. But there would be ways, particularly if there was open space, here of treating the water – like, I’m thinking about reed beds and things that could take out some of that contamination and means that it would be something that was…

P2: Good quality sea, improving…

P3: Yes, because you can’t actually swim down that end because of it.

F1: All of these points will be covered as we go through. But that’s good as it gives me an insight into what you are thinking and so on. So, I guess you could say that they are the most important issues – there’s maybe a misunderstanding about where we’re at in terms of the sale and so on. But we’ve got it recorded and that’s the main thing.

The first part I wanted to talk about is the development – so height, volume of housing or commercial areas. Because there are a number of proposals for the site. I mean, some of them are mostly commercial, some are mostly housing. Eh, the total development on the site will substantially determine the price the Council’s going to get from that sale. More development generally means taller properties. So, plans received from developers range from two storey buildings to eight storey buildings. For comparison, I don’t need to tell you this, you’ve got your two storey and eight storey round about in the area. Especially at the new development, up there at Baileyfield.

The Council’s affordable housing policy means that 25% of any housing would have to be affordable housing. So, do you have any views?

P2: That word suggests that the rest is unaffordable. [group laughter]

F1: Do you have any views about what kind of development would be on the site? Residential, commercial, a mix…

P3: I’d like to see primarily residential but maybe also some commercial. In terms of spaces that would encourage local businesses and not encourage, you know, another big supermarket or any kind of chain to come, it could be smaller kind of workshops where local people could set up – crafts or arts or even sort of mini factories you know, whatever to contribute to the local economy.

And if there was to be housing then I would, I think it is very in keeping with the area that it should be high spec kind of environmental as possible and that’s not just kind of energy footprint, all of that would be important, but the building and materials that kind of lock carbon in.

There’s a new building in Bath Street that has been built completely with wood and it’s four storeys and it’s a technique that’s come in from the continent and I think it should be happening broadly, across the board but I think Portobello’s already kind of leading the way in that kind of building and I think it would be great if the Council could pick up on that and insist on that for the development. One more thing, although it’s maybe just gone out of my head…

P4: Just, while you’re thinking about that, the consent to develop across the road is four storeys, maximum. There is an eight storey block from the 60s in Portobello High Street but we don’t want to replicate the mistakes of the 60s. The highest point on the Pipe Lane development is five storeys and that’s the corner townhouse. So, really, what we’re talking about for heights should be a maximum of four storeys, I would suggest.

F1: Given that the site is on a slope, isn’t it?

P4: It is but…

P6: You’ve got to think about the Welmar development adjacent, and that’s no more than four storeys.

P4: Well, it’s a mixture of storeys. The other side of it is principally two storeys, maximum, one storey, two storey, which is in the Potteries area. So, that to blend in from the four storeys at the Welmar site maybe gradually reducing it. But four storeys to max, to fit in with the tenements and the Pipe Lane development, I’d suggest is the maximum. I think [P3] touching on the workspaces brings us back to the 2008 North West Portobello Design brief, which the community worked on, we had a meeting with the then Head of Planning, 200 people attended, lots of feed from the local community in to that, which to a great extent has been ignored in considering Baileyfield development.

F1: Was that 2008 you said?

[group agreement]

P4: This is something that, the Council seems to have gone into this without really, going back to [P5]’s point about the commitment to retain it as open space, recreational space. The Council seems, it’s short term memory loss - or long term memory loss - as to what’s happened before.

P2: The thing about being overstretched and too much work.

P5: Well, the thing about the North West Portobello Masterplan that was drawn up at these public meetings referred to, one of the things that was put forward, and was discussed, was people are saying, you know, workshops, units and small businesses. And the recent development of North Baileyfield and South Baileyfield has excluded all of these, and it’s primarily housing with a small commercial element. But all of the community ideas and all of the community facilities that were proposed in this whole area of Portobello… Because the Council divvied up South Baileyfield and North Baileyfield into separate planning applications, there was never any possibility for the community to get together to give community engagement to say “wait a minute - we want workshop units, we want smaller density, we want smaller height” and the Council has just sort of ploughed ahead with the developers for North and South Baileyfield, going primarily for housing. And all these things that were talked about and agreed and discussed have been forgotten about.

P2: So, I think what you should take away from this is that there is a creative involvement, an engagement from people here, but there’s been quite a strong pushback against what was engagement earlier in 2008 and beyond that, and this is not really the point that the Council can get away with, get away with the same kind of approach.

And the solution of, I know the Council needs money and that’s what it’s looking for, solution of St John’s being a site to generate the funding for the Council, and a combination of open space here, but with possibly some workshops, some residential housing and maybe by a housing association rather than a developer so that… You’re not really going to get that much money off this site but you’ll get money off a different site. But with this, you develop it in a way that gets the community really behind the Council and that way you’ll get somewhere rather than… You’re going to have the community up against it and it’s just going to get blocked, you know, through community right to buy and other approaches that can happen. I hope the message you take back is that greater collaboration…. Ensures the funding but doesn’t leave the community absolutely furious.

P1: And I think that the sense of there’s a short-term sense of realising the value of a site but then it’s gone. It’s lost. And so, the Council would never again be able to kind of realise value in that. Whereas, if it’s developed in a way that actually there are commercial units and some really exciting, innovative ideas or there’s something that’s going on but … and I do think when people are in financial holes the understanding of value becomes all about bottom line, excel spreadsheets but actually, the value of the carpark, the space, and this is something that I mean, Beach Wheelchairs…

One of the things is that we chose that space because it’s the only place in the prom where, pretty regularly, you could get your accessible vehicle a space and the Council say that they can, they’ll designate some of those spaces as disabled access spaces within the Tumbles carpark. And to be honest, I know it’s, it was interesting because the parking is exclusively for Tumbles customers but the reality is actually that users of the community - of the beach - that carpark is a fantastic space to park and to pick up people and the school use it for coaches. So, the school, when they have trips, it’s a safe route for pupils to come and go on school trips to visit Edinburgh and the rest of the city. So, I think in terms of thinking about how Tumbles and how that carpark goes on, which is part of this focus group definitely, is about losing that would be a huge loss. And it seems that that is retained, but then moving it back somewhere else, again, seems to be a very expensive thing to do when there’s a building that’s just been renovated, massively.

So, my point would be – Tumbles wasn’t originally included, I think – and that’s one of the points that’s come up in the comments on the Facebook sort of thing, and the fact that Tumbles is now in the picture because that is prime property and I think that’s the point about St John’s - that’s not as attractive, I guess for developers. Because it’s not views of Fife and the Firth of Forth and so. I think my point is in the short term, in 6 months, there could be a big wad of money that comes in to help sort out the short-term solution. But long term, you’re losing the potential value of it, which over a number of years could actually be worth far more to the community and to helping answer some of the priorities for the Council as being open space and all these other things. Not necessarily money attached to them but value shouldn’t be lost lightly.

F1: It’s interesting, as the topics are running into one another. We will be talking about Tumbles specifically and the relocation and so on, but just to cover this. Is there any issues about the amount of housing that is being built? I mean the actual volume?

P6: Yes, absolutely. Because of the density that’s being proposed down at the Standard Life site is higher than the density that’s being built on the former Scottish Power site – the Barratts part. There’s a planning application at the moment on its third iteration for the Standard Life site - where the blue ships are across the other side of the park, and there are great concerns about the density and the numbers. And again, the development doesn’t provide the requisite amount of open space within the development, you know, going by the Council’s own guidelines for open space in the new developments. So, you know, I’m just concerned that at a time when thousands, literally, thousands more people are coming to live here we’re having a reduction in community facilities, recreational facilities. And what that means is, going back to environmental problems, you’re going to have more people getting into their cars to drive off somewhere like Meadowbank, or some alternative facility. We need more community facilities here, for the population that’s going to come and live here. Not fewer.

P3: Yeah, and young people as well.

P6: Yes, and that’s been raised by other people.

P3: More and more young people, with less and less to do, then that’s going to lead to issues with communities. Where if there was a skate park as part of the development in the open space, then that…

P4: In addition, there’s pressure on other services. Like doctor surgeries etc. There’s one on the High Street that’s just closed its books to people. So, people are going to have to travel outside of Portobello just to get a doctor. This is never taken into account by the Planning department. So, increasing the numbers there and of people coming to live here… there’s advantages to that, in that, it might help to regenerate the town centre or something like that. But at the same time, it’s putting pressure on all the other facilities.

P5: And with all these hundreds of houses being built at this end of Portobello, these people will have cars and they’ll want somewhere to park their cars. And the first Baileyfield development, that’s currently going through the planning application process, were told it’s only going to have 68% probably of car parking spaces per household. And some of these households will have two cars and they will want somewhere to park their cars. And Portobello High Street, at this end, already has major traffic problems. The crossroads at Kings Road is already operating at capacity, at certain times, and if you put a lot of houses on this site that we’re talking about, that is going to compound all these traffic problems.

F1: That’s a neat segue way into the next bit. Which is about parking on the site, and transport and travel in general. As I said earlier, the Tumbles facility will have dedicated parking facility of fifty spaces for use by its customers. Otherwise, the Council has requested that parking within the new development be kept to a minimum. So, what concerns do you have about parking in that area?

[group laughter, P5 already said it very well, more laughter]

P6: And if you’re talking about high-end, seaside facing flats then people who will come to live there will have money and they’ll have vehicles. And not to provide sufficient parking spaces is just unrealistic. Because, already, parking round the streets is extremely difficult and we haven’t even got people living in all the flats on the Scottish Power site, the Standard Life site isn’t, as you said, providing adequate parking. There’s already overspill of parking on that site, you know, even though there’s nobody working on there. So, there’s already huge parking problems in Portobello and I think this is totally unrealistic.

P1: Problem as well, is there’s a sense that as both sites are being developed at the moment – so nobody actually knows the impact that that is going to have. And so, the potential is for it to be opening the floodgate to more and then… So, I think the speed of this, when there’s a development right across the road. And I think that’s another thing, a sense from the community that there’s a huge number of houses being built and, I don’t know if this has been mentioned, but the school catchment and there’s a very large primary school which might be… but obviously, if there are families with children at school age then the pressure on the school is massive already, and actually the school do use this site. So, it would be silly…

P4: Do they use just the carpark or do they use the pitches as well?

P1: I don’t know about how much they use the pitches…

P4: I just wondered.

F1: What about public transport?

P4: It’s pretty good.

F1: Any concerns?

P4: To some extent I can understand the Council wanting to social engineer the use of cars by restricting parking. Unfortunately, it doesn’t work. And then, it needs more of social change…

P2: Sorry, just following on from an earlier point. I mean, if you’re looking at more sort of social housing that’s going to meet the needs of young people coming through Portobello, need a place to live there and currently it’s unreachable, then that’s going to be a demographic that are much more likely to be able to use the bikes and the bus and so on. You know, or older folks as well. But if you’re aiming for this high-end luxury stuff, then [P6] is absolutely right – at least two cars per flat there. Which makes you think, who has the need and suddenly those people don’t have the need, and could go somewhere else, but other folk do have that need, so to meet that need and, as you say, actually go for more public transport then you could restrict the car parking.

P4: One of the things as well, the Baileyfield South site is that they’re just talking about affordable housing as opposed to social rented housing. Now, to my mind, affordable housing we have the argument in Windsor Place, where the houses are likely to be taken by people who are nurses, teachers etc. – who are likely to travel outside and would probably be able to afford a car. So, the parking standards for that is the same as for social rented housing. And it’s really… it doesn’t reflect car ownership.

P1: What is the definition of ‘affordable’ – there’s a percentage, isn’t there, of, and it’s actually not very cheap.

P4: It may not be but…

P1: Affordable housing that lots of people could ‘afford’ afford. I mean it’s a bit of a… it’s a word that sounds good but actually in reality it doesn’t solve the problem. This idea, it’s ok, lots of people with very little money will be able to live here is just not true.

P3: And it’s also not locked in, is it? I mean, once somebody moves, the house price is then affected by whatever is happening around. House prices in Portobello are going bananas and that’s partly because we’ve got an active community, which is doing stuff and I think it’s an opportunity for the Council to look at how to social engineer or how to have an influence on the gentrification of areas. So, folk who grow up there can still stay here, you know. Because people are working hard to make this a really good community but are then getting priced out of it.

P1: I think that point about the nature of housing, so if housing is going to be there then it’s the number of… I mean I’ve got two kids and live in a small flat at the moment and basically can’t, there’s a real shortage of three or four bedroom, affordable places. So, it’s be great, quite interesting to know if they’re all going to be kind of two bedroom flats.

P4: You have got family housing but that’s at the top end... Your kind of thing as affordable are £250,000 are just small two bedroom…

P2: And the second bedroom is not… in many respects...

P5: We started talking about cars and parking, and there’s one other point I’d like to make at this point and that is that… planners often forget or choose to ignore that Portobello isn’t just like any other part of the city.

In terms of new development and parking and cars. That, you know, in the summer, a lot of times of the year, you’ve got a huge influx of people coming to the beach. And we’ve only got one, tiny carpark in the whole of Portobello – which is at the other side of the Figgate Burn. And on hot summer days, it’s chock-a-block. So, you’ve got all these houses and you’ve got all these people with cars, wanting to park in this area. Where you’ve also got tourists and people with cars coming down to visit Portobello and there is nowhere for them to park their cars. And yet, they still come.

We have good transport links, good bus links but they still bring their cars and still want or need to park them somewhere. So, if you’re going to put high density with low rate of car parking spaces on this site then that’s going to compound this particular problem, That Portobello is a seaside resort has got in terms of where people put their cars. And it’s a reality, it has to be thought about because it happens. And it happens on a regular basis and Planners ignore that.

F1: Okay, thank you.

P6: One other issue that comes up with traffic and that’s air pollution. And that’s been raised by a number of people in my residents’ association. Nitrogen Dioxide levels at the foot of Portobello Road are already close to breaching the standards, and so, with all this additional development that’s likely to go over the standards. And yet, you’ve got an area where kids are going to school and all the rest of it and breathing in these noxious fumes and as we’re becoming more aware, air pollution is the cause of thousands of deaths every year. So, it’s a public health issue that needs to be addressed.

P2: But then there’s the question about whether you, that is why you don’t provide enough parking. So, I’m just saying we do need to think about it but that’s separate. We need to think about how we do respond to and not encourage people to come with cars – to say we’re open but not for cars [chuckles].

P4: With the Aldi approval across the road, the Council had twice the amount of parking than is standard. They’re happy for that to become an attraction for cars outside the area, so sometimes the Council talks double standards. “Oh, we want to restrict it by penalising residents but all-comers can come to the carpark…”

P2: First of all, it’s not more receipt for the building, you get more receipts from the supermarket, so it might not be that contradictory.

P1: Did you say there was something about the options for Tumbles?

F1: Yes, I’m just conscious that I’ve got a couple of points to raise about active travel – cycling, walking - healthy pursuits, that kind of thing. What are your thoughts on that?

P5: I mean, you’ve got the cycle route down Fishwives Causeway, you’ve got a cycle route along the prom. You were talking about missed opportunities, I mean one opportunity would be to develop. Surely, this is our one opportunity to, and it should not be a missed opportunity, to link Fishwives Causeway to the cycle route along the prom. And the obvious way to do it is down Figgate Burn. Because I mean, in terms of city planning, you want to make the most of the river and you want people, cyclists to enjoy that. So, I would argue that we should be thinking a lot of people in Portobello would like the linear park, not just a tiny strip, but a generous strip which is currently zoned as open space. To have a connection between the High Street and the Prom, down the side of the burn.

F1: That is definitely one of the options, and we’ll discuss it in more detail later on. Along the Figgate Burn, having some sort of walkway along there. Any other concerns about active travel?

P4: While I agree about that Fishwives Causeway, it’s not a very attractive cycle route. You’ve got to cross over the road and one of the big bugbears there is that you’ve to wait for the traffic, well of course you have, but if you press the button nothing happens for half a minute. That’s a long time just waiting. It should be responsive. Residents should come first, cyclists second, motor cars after buses. But, the point is it never works that way. So, I think by making the whole route more attractive and maybe doing something up towards Jock’s Lodge as well… I know there’s constraints there as well and make this an attractive route so that people will use it to commute. Because we tried organising bike trains / community cycling up to town one morning and it doesn’t really work – it’s not an attractive proposition, to go through all that traffic. Anything that can be done.

P2: But it’s expanded, they expanded. I mean, not getting rid of those trees but expanding that whole, taking it all the way down to the prom as well. Because you’ve got that whole area that’s just like concrete at the bottom. But you could have it as a really attractive cycleway and walkway all the way down.

P1: I mean, this is one of the points I was, cause if you’re talking about developers who are going to make a lot of money out of it and basically there’s a contract somewhere saying that this is all a done deal then we may be in a position to sort of say, well – actually in order to get us on side you need to commit to a few things, like a cycle path and if that area could be developed maybe they could build, in terms of Beach Wheelchairs… I mean, that’s still a good location to access. And the point I want to make is that the harbour development, there’s a community room which has not been used once. Which was designated… agreed, but never written down by the developers, to use that for community use. And I think the original idea was historical, the history of the town, so the corner… we went as far as tracking down the company in North Berwick and basically it wasn’t written down and so the point for me that would have been a brilliant place to put the beach wheelchairs. Because it’s secure, it’s safe and all level access but they’re just sitting on it, waiting for the time to lapse so that they can just commercially use it.

F1: This is an opportunity for you to influence the criteria that the Council set…

P1: And I’d love to think that they didn’t deliberately do it, but I think they deliberately…

P4: You’re talking everybody’s strict contract, rather than the Council saying they’ll do something, which is what happened last time.

P1: Well, the developers. So, the developers legally have to write something down… because, what I can imagine happening is that, you know, like all things it’s a negotiation, a push-pull, there’s a decision that is made. And it feels like actually, yes there could be a degree of protest but actually we could be in a situation where the sale still goes through but if developers say they would, they say well, yes this strip of land… we will actually invest some of our millions into making a nice… and then a flyover, we’ll make a bridge over the road for the bikes. If they say that and then two and a half years later they’ve, it’s not been written down anywhere in minutes of a meeting, they’ll be like oh well, the economy hasn’t allowed us to do that.

F1: If I could just jump ahead to the community benefit part.

P1: Because, that’s the thing, my opinion at the moment is that the community benefit is just lost. I can’t see how the community is benefitting at all, through any of this.

F1: A developer is required to provide a benefit for the community, and that can vary from site to site. Depends often on the scale and the type of development but it might include things like jobs, training, improvements to infrastructure, public realm. For example, if you have a big housing development then you might have a school that is built. So, just to throw that out more to the group, what community benefit do you want to see?

P6: I think that things like jobs and training are a bit nebulous, really. What kinds of jobs? What kind of training? And what kind of improvements to public realm? It could be nicer bike racks or, you know, planting a flowerbed or something like that. It’s not a really big benefit to the community.

F1: What would you see as a big benefit?

P6: Well, along the lines of what people have talked about. Still retain the right, we shouldn’t be losing it as it was designated as open space and we were promised it would remain so. But, if we have to lose it then there should be things like using it to improve cycle routes, a substantial linear park to provide some recreational space for people in the area. I think these terms are very vague and the problem is how can they be quantified. They’re not very tangible, wouldn’t necessarily see them or know about them and we need something tangible and visible that the community can see – that’s what we got.

P2: Maybe what we need is a process, that this is what we come up with what do we want from this site. It’s nebulous, but maybe we don’t want to ask the Council to come up with what they’re going to do, or the developer. We maybe need to do that ourselves – and take that as a very strong proposal that there’s actually a process that the community deciding what it needs, bearing in mind the Council needs to get funding and bearing in mind [P4]’s possible solution on that one. But what we could look at with the site – maybe it does have some social housing, maybe it does have…

I was talking to the guy, the duty manager up at Tumbles on Sunday night and he said they’re just breaking even now and they may not under the new tax system – they’re just breaking even, they’re employing a lot of people there, it’s been intensely used – you can see at nine o’clock at night on a Sunday. It allows for activity for little kids, it allows for the parents to crawl through things with them –you know. And then there’s the gymnastics part of it – it’s effectively a part of an indoor, which you need in winter, yeah, indoor kind of active space. And, it is possible that it overhangs – it’s crazy to move it but it is overhanging the prom in a way that’s not really nice. And I’m not saying replace it with very rich, tall buildings, but bringing it back and actually making some cafes, activity spaces, stuff along the prom there, and making some kind of technology space, workshops along the High Street – while retaining this big wad of open space that [P5] was referring to, and maybe retaining a pitch or two, a skate park or some kind of space for youths to use. And have some social housing in there. I mean, if you’re asking for a picture of what can be done, I can see that having all, people saying great or improving on that. So, that’s not really about a developer, the Council choosing a developer who is going to put in a lot of commercial or housing – that’s about the Council coming back to communities and saying let’s work together on this.

P4: Having dealt with many contracts, there has been a move for all contractors to provide a social benefit, a community benefit. So, whatever’s going to be done, like the jobs, all contractors now come in and say “we will be employing so many trainees, apprentices from the community.” Now, what we want here is something over and above, it has to be over and above that, I would suggest. And we’re talking about the linear park as being a community benefit, I think that looking at 25% to 33% of the land area should be put over to that, to make it a worthwhile park going through that area.

P5: Because we don’t want just a token gesture, a thin green strip with one or two trees – that isn’t really of much use.

F1: The site includes some open space, existing open space, across the… beside the Figgate Burn. And actually, at the moment, the five-a-side football spaces are still designated as open space… it’s currently not accessible space, the Council’s requested to developers that they have equivalent open space within the new site.

P5: Equivalent to what? To the existing pitches?

F1: In terms of the area it covers.

P2: So, that sounds like it includes about everything. So, I think what [P5]’s question is what does equivalent mean?

F1: Let me read it to you… as it says so there’s no discrepancy.

[group talking over each other, laughter, what does it mean… ah right, laughter]

P2: Okay, let’s hear the words.

F1: The site includes some existing open space along the Figgate Burn. The five-a-side football pitches are also designated as open space. While this space is currently not accessible, cause obviously you’ve got to go through Powerleague to get to them, the Council has requested that developers have equivalent open space within the site.

[group laughter and chatter, go on let him finish]

This could take several forms, including the development of a walkway alongside the Figgate Burn, provide additional pedestrian access to the promenade. There may also be other space within the development. And I want to ask the group, if the developer were to include open space on the site, then what form would you want that to take?

P5: Well, I think we would need equivalent to be absolutely nailed down…

P4: What usually happens when they talk about equivalent, they them say well actually you’ve got 100 square metres of very poor… we’re going to provide 20 square metres of very good [group chatter] … better quality. That’s how they get around – actually its better. When you say equivalent, are we talking about equivalent area or quality?

[group chatter, inaudible] … No, it includes the pitches as well as open space.

P6: What the Council’s saying is it expects an equivalent area to the area of the football pitches and the grass district down the side of Figgate Burn to be retained.

P4 & 2: No, No.

P2: I don’t think that would be possible – otherwise there would be nothing else.

P6: This is the question, and that’s my view… interpretation.

P4: I think that needs clarified. Absolutely.

F1: The Council has requested that…

P5: Ah, ok. The Council has requested that – pretty please, could you – and the developers can say no way, jose – and the Council says ah, ok, I’m sorry I asked.

F1: The important thing here though, is to try and think – they’re asking for open space from the developers. This is about, as you say [P2], influencing the criteria and trying to get the developers to look at their plans and incorporate as much as they possible can with what the community wants, needs and desires. So, at the end of the day, if they’re going to have open space at all – what do you want it to look like?

P2: I think you’ve heard quite clearly.

P1: There isn’t a decent park, a decent park for kids in that area. And it’s one of the things for me, about Portobello, that there’s two very distinct sides to it. You know, there’s a huge amount of less expensive housing and lots of families live here – all of the beautiful parks are at the other end. For me, again, I’m talking about the value. Now, the Council own this - and I know this because the decision has been made to monetise it, but the Council own this and actually when it’s gone, it’s gone and I think that the value of… Cause the other thing is we’ve lost over the road the artists’ studios and recording studios and there was some fantastic theatre makers and people who actually… They didn’t just do it, they ran courses and classes and so, I suppose one thought as well is, if this area is being developed, then surely some thought should be made to the idea of when all that was lost. Well, all this community space, studio spaces for artists all went. Presumably that could all generate income on a longer term… [group chatter]

P2: Can I just say, just because it’s been put to the side doesn’t mean they’ll sell it… The Council is owned by the people who vote for them, as it were. [laughter]

F1: What about developing the Figgate Burn and making it a pedestrian route? So, you could actually access, how do you feel about that?

P2: Probably in from the trees, because, I mean, just walking down there on Sunday. That is open space but you’d want to broaden it…

P4: You’ve also got some hard features down these as well, there’s a lot of brick walls, tarmac and the rest of it. There needs to be more naturalised.

P1: And also, wheelchair accessible all the way.

[group agree]

P2: Reed beds, you were talking about? [P3 agree]

P3: I’m not sure if reed beds would do it, as I’m not sure what variety of toxicity it is. But it would be…

P4: Shopping trolley toxicity [chuckles]

P2: But no, it’s more than that… it’s the actual water. You can’t swim down that part.

F1: Do you think there’s any negative aspects to that?

P6: What, to retaining the open spaces? No. Absolutely not and I mean, another suggestion might be… because that was a popular idea for the replacement park at St John’s and I don’t know whether that’s actually going to be incorporated into the final design but there’s quite a lot of desire for a skate park. And that would introduce a recreational element for people.

P2: And a kickabout football space would be good. Not like that, but kids use it during the day… it’s quite a crucial bit.

P6: Something that meets the needs of a variety of people. And a quiet place for people to go and just be out in nature. Especially, as the developments are being put up – they have no real open space attached to them. Some of them have got gardens but all the flats, they don’t even have balconies. And the green space being proposed is inadequate according to the Council’s standards. We need places for people to go and just be in nature.

P2: And wheelchair accessible. That’s good, that’s great.

F1: I want to make sure we cover everything, we’ve been jumping about, so please bear with me. About the relocation of Tumbles, not all of the developers are actually proposing to move it. One possible option for where the facility might be closer to the High Street, with pedestrian access from the High Street. Do you have any preference about whether Tumbles is relocated or not? What concerns do you have about the relocation of Tumbles?

P4: Seeing as, listening, it’s a well-used local facility, I think on that site, moving it around that site is neither here nor there. It isn’t an attractive building there, I can tell you about the design process we went through to arrive at portable shed. It’s also been mooted that Tumbles is relocated somewhere else, so, within a site my view is that I’m not bothered. I don’t know about people with children, I don’t know if you were getting broody earlier, when you were talking about… [group laughter]

P2: I can see you could relocate, the business of carparking. If you were to relocate it up to the top end, not right at the top, where you could have your studios, if you had a spare cooperative, creative… you could put the carpark underneath, in fact – so that would be in terms of, I could see how, it’s a real useful… Your [P1] purpose could be met in a better way, just because you need wheelchair access doesn’t mean you need to have the container there, you could have something much more useful.

P1: One point to make is that if the developers are building various buildings, then it – from the very start of the design process – if they can say well, this part is going to be fully accessible then that’s actually quite attractive to us. But…

P2: At the same time, if Tumbles was moved to the top, then that carpark is on a bit of a slope but also you could have it double up, the same height it is but you could split it. I could see ways that actually building a new one could increase its capacity. It’s just one big space with a mezzanine at the front. But some of it does need that for gymnastics, the height, but for most of it doesn’t. and they’re expanding in terms of what they’re people coming through. They’re going to need to expand for their profitability if they’re going to be taxed – as of when that decision is made. So, they’re going to need to actually up that in terms of people using it, and people use it a lot.

P1: Are the developers proposing to redevelop that on their cost? [group talking over each other] …

P2: Given the conversation so far, I don’t think we trust the developers to do anything right. I mean, I know that’s your remit [gesture to discussion guide] but I don’t think we trust the developers to be held to what they are agreeing. It’s more what would the Council agree, with the community, should be the use of the site.

P6: Something brought up by someone from our residents’ association is if Tumbles is moved, what guarantee is there that it will actually be rebuilt and how quickly. Because obviously, there’s going to be a gap between – okay, you knocked it down and we won’t get the new one for two years.

P2: No, it would have to rebuilt first, would it not?

F1: That’s not mentioned here [discussion guide]

Group: Well, that’s, it would need to be, that needs to be part of the plan.

P2: You’d have to rebuild the lot first, wouldn’t you? It would have to be rebuilt first.

P3: There would be big carbon implications in knocking a building down, building a new one. My feeling would be to avoid relocating it if possible and to try and adapt the existing building – so bring the mezzanine out and more space, to create more floor space.

P1: The idea of having, being able to sell flats for so much more because they’re right on the prom, it’s clear that that’s what’s attractive. But at the same time, at the moment this is still ours and so it’s the idea of, well, no – the Council own it but that’s –

P5: It’s a local facility that local people value – we don’t want to lose it.

F1: As I say, it is to be retained.

P2: But the question is about whether you rebuild within it, rather than somewhere else.

P1: So, there’s potential that the whole building could be improved but then that would… knocking down a building with nothing particularly wrong with it, other than it’s not particularly beautiful, to then build another one. Which will have an environmental impact – materials and…

P3: And you could also build out from it, because it has this sort of overhang balcony at the front – which you could potentially just build out onto the prom.

P2: But then it’s be worse, you’d overhang it more.

P3: I was thinking of glass and…

P2: You’re going to make it nice!

P4: You’ve got the job!

[group laughter]

P4: One of the problems that’s always been about the promenade is that it’s north facing. So, all these high buildings just add to the overshadowing and sometimes it can be quite cold, as you don’t get any sunlight.

P5: And it’s not just overshadowing the prom, it’s overshadowing a big part of the beach as well. I mean, you raised the question earlier on which we didn’t follow through. What do we feel about heights? Something between two storey and eight storey. And I think we were saying eight storey would be far too big because, particularly, it’s a north facing promenade and you don’t want it to be overshadowing. But there’s also the fact that it’s near the conservation area. And surely, you’d want to take into account the effect of the new buildings, what that will have on the adjacent conservation area. As well as, the two storey houses in the factories.

P2: You’d actually want it two storey at the prom end and actually, those beach houses along the prom – the fact that you look right out and look at the line of it, it’s actually sticking out.

P4: That was pointed out at the time and the planners didn’t do anything. They were built further into the promenade than what the building line was.

P2: You can see that, it’s obvious.

P4: Anyway…

P1: The reticence is based on experience. That they say, we’ll retain something but what you then get is not equivalent. Not the same. That’s really interesting, the word equivalent – it gives people legal room to say well, actually, what we’ve done is built you a taller building but it’s only this big. And it’s like, well, you know…

F1: That fits perfectly in with the next bit, about the High Street frontage. Some of the developers are planning to include some of what they call active frontage. By active frontage what they’re meaning is commercial space, shops or work units or access to the relocated Tumbles. Now if different submissions that active frontage is either on the High Street, with a new pedestrian route along the Figgate Burn, or it’s along the promenade. So, what concerns, if any, do you have about active frontage on the site?

P4: Active frontage to that would be welcomed if, to the High Street, as long as it’s for Tumbles or for the work units, maybe artists’ studios – something like that. Quite a few years ago, the Council thought of moving the library there because this building was falling down… um, it’s still here [laughter] and in some ways, moving the gravity of the town centre westwards now. There’s residential development between, Victorian tenements, between the existing High Street. What I wouldn’t like to see is them trying to develop shops opposite Aldi and, as it were, one part of the Council tried to support town centres and another part of the Council taking away from the existing town centre. If anything, we want to protect that. The town centre doesn’t go as far as that.

 P1: One of the options, presumably, would be – Lidl and Aldi always seem to be opposite each other – so, would Lidl, I mean is that one of the developers could be keen to… commercial.

P2: Well, we’re being quite clear, that’s not what we want. Small shops and small units.

F1: I can assure you, none of us have seen the bids but it could be a possibility.

[group chatter, talking amongst themselves, it is their business model…]

P2: But they can still have that at one end and residential further down.

P5: I think the group would want to… if there is active frontage there, it shouldn’t be another big supermarket. But we want to protect the town centre and the smaller independent businesses. Yes, we approve of an active frontage – you don’t want a dead frontage – but we don’t want something like an Aldi or a Lidl that’s going to be a threat to shops in the centre of Portobello, which are struggling as it is.

P2: I guess there’s also the question about, coming back to your place here on the corner of those flats, which the developers just left empty.

P1: They boarded it up with black…

P2: So, there’s an agreement, “oh yeah, your active frontage – we agreed to do that” but actually in reality nothing happens because if you leave it long enough then they can use it for more residential property. History shows us from what’s happened here that, actually, the developers, we can’t trust them to do what they said they’ll do. So, there’s a real issue about whether you have this… developer.

P5: And I think as local people, we’d question the commercial viability of an active frontage on the prom. Because the prom is very seasonal and I think businesses would struggle to function there throughout the year.

P4: The only commercial ventures that have succeeded are the high-end cafes – like the Beach House and Miro’s has moved in. so, if there was anything along the prom, it’s likely to be catacomb restaurants. Whether that would be viable at that point, as opposed to the normal shops that you might get…

F1: The Tumbles carpark is included in the sale. If the building itself remains in its current location, then it’s very likely that there will be new development next to the promenade. So, do you have any concerns about developing near the promenade?

P4: Principally, the height.

P2: I mean having, I think you could have a new play park down there, I mean there’s not that kind of provision down by the sea, but if you have that and then a kind of café for families – I can see that kind of managing through the… you could have something connected to what kids will be using.

P1: I mean, Edinburgh Leisure have their kind of café and crèche, which is – obviously, they would lose certain. Because it’s the only place where you can get an indoor coffee.

P2: You wouldn’t necessarily lose, you’d be increasing the number of people coming through. As much as a café opens, it doesn’t decrease what’s going to the next door café – more people turn up.

P3: They could use that as gym space, take their café out and just bite the bullet. Do more classes.

P1: We’ve all talked about Powerleague and the pitches and actually this whole area is actually pretty rubbish looking. And it is designated open space, but what they’ve done with that open space is not served the community particularly well. I mean, people love playing five-a-side football but it’s quite a limited number of people, and it wasn’t busy enough. So, they have come to the Council and said we want to get out and I think that it’s disappointing that the opportunity to sell than actually how can this open space bring more value to the community? Rather than saying, actually, we have a financial hole to fill and this could give us a huge amount of money. And I can understand that position but I know that lots of the community feel strongly, because if you could make a park and if there was a better cycle route and if there was some artist studio… actually that could be a fantastic space that could help regenerate, because it feels different – that end of Portobello. And there isn’t that opportunity. So, if Powerleague want to get out then they’re going to take, they’re taking away a lot of that value. I wonder if there’s some way of Freedom of Information for the contract – so they signed something that then means when they pull out they get a percentage of the sale. That strikes me as a bit suspect. That’s crazy. Well it’s not suspect, it’s wrong. But I think that’s very important to record that that, I think, is a real problem and I think the community… You can understand the Council selling it…

P2: Getting something out of walking away from a contract.

[group chatter]

P5: Perhaps at this point you should record that the group feels the fact that the online survey, question one gives you all these options… do you want it developed as housing, housing / commercial, there’s no option to press the button for – you want it as open space. And a lot of people I’ve been talking to, and it was raised at the community Council meeting, that the fact that people get to question one to do the survey and there isn’t an option for local people want to retain this as open space – you’ve got to choose between housing, housing / commercial, mainly housing… Yes, you can put your comment in the box but then people don’t know how this is going to be analysed. Whether greater weighting is going to be given to the boxes that were ticked and whether the comments done in the box are going to be slid away to the end and forgotten about.

P2: That’s an important point to say that we would encourage you to make sure that the comments are prioritised over the boxes. I, for example, didn’t tick any box but I put a lot of comments in and I would encourage you to do that with everybody’s.

F1: Our team, we’ve got to do that. We’re impartial to the whole process. I mean, we have our views on certain points but we’re not in a position to make a decision but what we can do is be as fair as possible and we’ll be doing it exactly by the book.

P2: So, you’ve got the remit for the options but just to say that we object to those options. We feel like we should have had much, many more, options.

F1: That should become clear from the comments in the first part. We should be saying we’re aware of a lot of this stuff.

P5: A lot of the amenity society members have been emailing me and saying – look, I’ve started to do the survey, I got to question 1, what do I do? And you know, this is what a lot of people are saying. That they want to give their views but they didn’t feel that the online survey was allowing them to express their views.

P1: The consultation is coming in half way through the process, where there’s a sense that there’s a deal. And rather than saying should this happen, I think that’s…

P2: It needs to start again, basically.

F1: just to clarify, what you would have preferred there was to have had an actual specific option for open space.

P2: To retain open space. But deeper than that, we would like for the Council to have consulted with the community prior to the developer. So basically, start again. Consult with the community, let’s work out – as you say, there’s a lot that could change here, beneficially – the Council could also get money out of the St John’s site. So, there’s ways of meeting the needs – if we sit down together and work our way forward we could get something better. But actually, starting from the developer and Powerleague and the Council – that doesn’t feel very good. So, yes there are things about how the survey was done that you need to note but deeper than that there needs to be a consultation between the community and the Council.

F1: It would’ve been interesting, to be at that stage. That discussion could have been quite a different discussion.

[group agreement]

F1: As I said, this is only part of the process. There will be another opportunity and also the place-making exercise will be quite important as well. That will determine how things have to be set out and so…

P2: Yes, but I don’t know if you’re catching me. I don’t think this sale will go ahead as it is. So, I don’t think your particular line of work, I just think that you’re going to be starting again – consulting with the community from the space one and thinking ok, what do you want. We, the Council, need to get funding. We’re desperate for cash, we need it… for services we’re all receiving, so we’re with you on that but what the community needs to get is what it needs. So, Powerleague actually that’s not a question, the developer – isn’t even in the picture. So, what I’m saying is, I know you have a programme but I think we’re going to need to stop that. I’m not asking you to – we can do that collectively but stop that programme so we can start by consulting with the community and work out what we and the Council need for the future. Not on this site, or to do with this issue, but with a lot of this happening around Baileyfield – which is the Council consulting quite late and then the developer not keeping to what they agreed. So, rather than thinking we can tweak the system. I just, not through you to them, we’ll do it direct. Rather than trying to tweak the system so that it will work, obviously you have to deliver what you’re doing just now, we start from the Council consulting with the community on this site. How does the Council get the funding it needs, which it does need – we get that, but how do we – the community – get what we need. Forget Powerleague. Forget the developer. So just to let you know, that’s where we’re at.

[group chatter… done deal… more discussion]

P6: So, I just wondered, cause there was a leap made from what we were told earlier in the year from the site was being marketed but then suddenly it leapt from it’s being marketed to it’s definitely being sold and we weren’t informed at this stage. A leap had been made to the Council.

P1: I was speaking to the Council representative, [Name], about using that space and he said, I have to let you know that this site is part of a designated, you know, there’s all sorts of sites all around in Edinburgh that are being looked at but in order to realise the value in order to help, you know, sort out the financial situation, and so that was two years ago. So obviously, that was part of some kind of idea. And basically he said, I can’t promise you that this will be available… but it was more about him saying, basically, that although it’s currently Council basically there are Council are always looking at ways of…

P4: This is going back to 2015 where and it was put that an area of surplus land was going to be sold. Now, it’s a completely twisted way of defining surplus by the Council officer, who said surplus is any land that the Council doesn’t have to provide any statutory services on, so if you saw that you’d think surplus – a bit of ground with nothing on it, that’s fine. Do something with it. But what they meant, at such time in 2015, when it slipped under the radar and nobody really picked that up was, that site, because it’s recreation land as opposed to something like a school, where you’ve got to provide that…

P2: What you’re saying like where the Council doesn’t have to provide services on. [P4 agreement]

P6: You could say this [library] wasn’t a statutory service. I don’t think libraries are statutory services, are they?

P4: Well, look at down south. They’ve closed most… [group chatter] And the officer who was quizzed about this, about community consultation about this, said well, we’re not forced to. So, why would we? So, it would seem to me that there was a decision then that there was a panic to get money for Meadowbank and they decided that this is going to be sold. And they’ve gone to Powerleague and said, we know you’re wanting to move out of it because it’s not big enough for you to develop and compete with some of the other competitors that have come in, and it was a win-win for Powerleague and the Council but it was a loss for the community. Perhaps, in 2015, we should have been having these discussions then. It was also clear from the Council, and maybe Councillors decided this at the Finances and Resources, had their briefing from Powerleague so they were also in the mindset… because I think it’s quite rigidly. Mind you, this is the former Committee of 2015. Maybe the new one will think differently.

[group chatter… maybe that’s an opening…]

P5: But with this lack of consultation, you can safely say was the fact that when the Council first marketed the site, the red line showing the area to be sold, didn’t include Tumbles. And then, now, suddenly it does include Tumbles. Now, it’s not the only thing that is being done by staff without consultation with the community.

P1: I’m concerned that as part of the Beach Wheelchairs group, that if the developers say well, what we’re going to do is we’re going to build a super-duper beach wheelchair facility therefore that somehow means that we can do something else… the point I’m trying to get to, I suppose our consent to something that… I’m quite wary of saying yes. The way we want this development to look is to include a beach wheelchair and a cycle path and the developer was like sure, we’ll do that, that’s fine, but then they still get to do something that essentially, we’re completely unhappy with.

P2: We need to be consulted as a whole, not just individually.

P1: The idea of the developer saying, well this and this and this are the way that we are able to make it all sweet.

F1: so, you want the developers to take into account your earlier point that people in the facility, use the parking facility for Tumbles are actually not necessarily doing it for the use of the Tumbles facility. They’re using it for wheelchair access to the beach.

P1: It’s an important space that’s used for people, I mean the schools, I mean that’s a safety issue again because they can walk along the prom and they use it whenever they have school trips.

P2: And the coaches could never get down to the Towerbank.

P1: A coach got stuck down Bath Street the other day.

P4: Going back to the point that about the facilities for the beach. That the Council legally challenging the developer who has to provide 50square metres of space, which is for the community but let’s remember this is the wider community. It’s not just the people of Portobello, who will be using the beach wheelchairs. It’s the whole city and we’re being asked time and time to take the hit for the city facility at Meadowbank.

P1: People from Edinburgh use the beach and that is, that’s great for the shops and the cafes do fantastically well on a hot summer’s day but a lot of the people park at Kings Road and they don’t all go into Tumbles.

P6: And that’s the point that’s being made by numerous people that I’ve consulted with that say why should we have to trade off our recreational facilities for citywide ones? Why’s it Portobello that’s taking the hit? Isn’t there any other Council land that could be used?

P2: What’s interesting is that Tumbles is used for South East Scotland gymnastics. So, it both is provision for local people but also provision for much wider areas than Edinburgh. So, just saying that we’re already taking care in that way of the larger area, which were happy to continue to do. It’s not just against us.

P6: The whole thing would be lost and it’s the local and the wider facility. But why is it Portobello that’s got to give up its recreational space at a time when thousands of young people are coming to live here and we should be increasing it. Not decreasing it.

[group chatter]

F1: Any final questions?

P4: One is that, we’ve been here before with another development, is that sometimes the Council works in silos and the Economic Development department will say oh well, that’s a Planning thing, bring it up at planning. Then Planning says, oh well, actually, that’s already been decided. So, we can’t do anything about it now. So, right at the start when the economic development or whoever it is that is deciding this, and the committee…can we have a bit of joined up thinking? And that we’re considering the thing in totality and not just kicking it into the long grass saying oh well, you might pick that up at Planning.

P2: But that needs to be us doing that, with the Council.

F1: Have you found, even through this process today, that it’s been useful? Is there any sense of movement? I’m just wondering how you feel about this change in direction for the Council?

P6: It depends on what happens after today. If this is a tokenistic exercise which then just gets ignored and the Council then ploughs ahead with its plans to maximise as much money as it can from the site or whether this is the start of a proper dialogue with the community. If it’s the latter, then it’s a good thing. If it’s tokenistic then...

P2: If it is tokenistic then we’ll move to try and stop this from happening. Something to benefit for the Council and the community but not others taking their slice out of it.

F2: There was a second point…

P4: It’s come up from several people who’ve asked us, Powerleague have been totally tight lipped about where they’re moving to. Now, I can understand if they’re interested in a site that might increase in value because the owner knows that. Somebody on the outside, no control over it but the Council. Are they actually… this would help a lot of people… is there any other site that they want to relocate to? Are they in Council ownership? And if they are, is it surplus at the moment? Or is it useable greenspace? Or is it another facility that the Council is thinking of offloading? We don’t need to know the details, just a clear statement whether the Council has an interest in where Powerleague moves to, for them to become another tenant.

P2: And if they’re moving to other Council land then they don’t need to be paid off to be moved.

[group chatter]

P4: The site I can think about round here is the freight lining terminal. But it would be hopeless for getting access to Powerleague. But, that’s National Rail. Are they moving to some other Council land? You don’t know and we’ve met a total wall of silence, commercial confidentiality.

P6: But that’s an important part of the jigsaw actually.

P2: The nature of the land they’re moving to?

P4: No, is it Council owned?

P5: If local people use it at the moment, if they’re still going to be able to use it and not have to travel too far.

P6: So, while we don’t expect to be told where the alternative sites, it would be nice to know whether or not it is Council land, is the question that should be answered.

F1: Are you sure we’ve covered everything you wanted to?

[group laughter]

F1: Thanks very much for your input, we’ve got lots of good stuff there. Thanks very much for your time. We’ve got another group tomorrow and another special interest group next Tuesday.

P3: About the kind of style of consultation, I think there’s a lot of very good precedence been set recently, very kind of accessible, engaging consultation on community projects. I would really encourage the Council to try to be imaginative and thoughtful about how it engages with the community. It’s quite easy to engage with people in a way that is off-putting, boring way, that they don’t actually ant to engage… you don’t actually get nothing meaningful. So it’s really important that, yeah, the consultation – that we hope will happen – is actually meaningful and works hard to make sure people actually get the space and time to get their ideas out there.

F1: Thanks, I appreciate that.

P2: My last question is when will we see the results of the consultation?

F1: Let me think… I’m not exactly sure of the full timescales we’re looking at

F2: Focus groups continue into next week and there will also need to be some time to transcribe. I can’t remember the closing date for the survey – the 18th. We’ll need to double check and come back on the fuller timescale.

P2: And do you know what the Council’s time plan is in terms of agreement for planning.

F2: no sorry, we’ll need to check that too.

P2: That’s fine.

P5: Is that not part of the evaluation process?

F1: I can say that from a previous group they asked when will we see anything happening on the site. That could be anything from a year plus. So, you’re really looking at a bit of time before all these areas and processes have been gone through, plus the planning permission.

P4: Getting the developer, getting plans drawn up… you’re talking at least two years.

P2: Yeah but it’s getting to any prior agreement. We need to make sure that the agreements that happen benefit the Council and the community and not the developer in that sense.

F1: Thank you very much.