**Councillor's Report**

**Maureen Child, Labour Councillor for Portobello/Craigmillar**

**June-July 2014**

**Local Development Plan - What Now?**

Thanks for all the letters and petition signatures from local people in Newcraighall, Brunstane, Gilberstoun and Milton Road East about the Green Belt site at Brunstane. By making the early case for Brunstane to remain Green Belt, we helped enable everyone across Edinburgh to have an equal opportunity to have their voice heard in the process of considering the new Draft Local Plan for Edinburgh when the Planning Committee met on June 19th. Some areas had a head start in their campaign to have a say on what does or doesn’t happen in their immediate area. But now all the Green Belt and green field housing sites that are in the Revised Local Development Plan (LDP) Proposals Map have equal status. They have the same chance of being put forward for exclusion or inclusion when the LDP comes back to Planning Committee in February 2015. In August, there will be a well-trailed six week period for Representations on the draft Plan for communities and neighbourhoods right across our City. Of course, developers and landowners will put in their Representations too. But at least Brunstane and Newcraighall South in the East will have equal consideration to Cammo and Maybury in the West and Broomhills and Gilmerton in the South East. There will also be a reconsideration of another site in the West that might afford Planning Committee a little flexibility in the LDP. The Scottish Government insist that a ‘generous’ designation of a variety of types land for housing has to be offered up now, not in 10, 20 or 40 years time. For today, with Draft LDP proposals in place, we show that we can ‘provide’ the land for those numbers of housing units that the Scottish Ministers insist upon. And 74% of it is on brownfield. This means that the Council’s planning function is still armed with the strongest possible arguments to sustain any refusal of planning consent on Green Belt. Otherwise, without an LDP, the whole process would become a lottery. It should be noted in Craigmillar that Cairntows Park, which was flagged for possible development before, has not come back again now. We do need the help of Scottish Government to find a mechanism that will allow brownfield development to happen first and foremost. This is particularly critical in Craigmillar where brownfield land - already in at least three successive Local Plans - is crying out to be developed before any green field is threatened or Green Belt released. The Council is not all-powerful in these key planning matters. The Scottish Government is calling the first shots, and they have the final say.

**Portobello High School - Portobello Park Decision**

Now, if there really was a brownfield site suitable for our new school In Portobello, it would have emerged during a very lengthy site search and campaign lasting well over 10 years. There is not, and never has been, a realistic brown field alternative for the school building and the sporting facilities that this community have every right to aspire to have. After a very extensive and bruising process, our lawmakers in the Scottish Parliament unanimously voted in favour of the City of Edinburgh Council's Portobello Park Private Bill. This law applies only for this space and simply changes the Common Good status of Portobello Park from a recreation purpose to an education purpose. The whole area remains Common Good as does the rest of the park, including Portobello Golf Course and surrounding paths and woodland. Once the Bill has Royal Assent, in about four weeks, the Council will ‘appropriate’ the land and sign the build contract so the work can begin. Then - at long last - the building of our best possible new high school can start. The new building is set to open in August 2016. The vast majority of families living in the catchment area of the school are relieved and overjoyed as they well know that this site was the only realistic option. The new school’s first potential S1 children are now entering P6 at the feeder primary schools. P4 pupils in the catchment who first planned the new school, aged 8, hoping to be the first S1, are now in their 6th Year or have left already. Once the eight storey block is demolished, the space will provide some options for Portobello High's current neighbouring school, St John's RC Primary, which could be extended or built anew on site. St John’s waited patiently for the solution to their accommodation problems for just as long as Portobello High School. Now our community can help plan what kind of public space we might create on a vacated and restored brownfield site alongside St John’s Primary School.

**Consultation on Baileyfield Site**

The new owners of the Scottish Power Site at the west end of Portobello High Street - Aldi and Crudens – are in the midst of pre-application consultations. The retailer and house builder jointly held an open exhibition in Portobello Town Hall. Portobello Amenity Society (PAS) is consulting their members and contacts on what their reaction should be, as are Portobello Community Council (PCC). A preliminary meeting with members of PCC has already resulted in at least one change in plans presented at Portobello Town Hall recently. Their plans no longer suggest a through road from our High Street to Fishwives Causeway. The final shape of the development proposals will be informed by previous planning history, current planning policies and recent decisions on retail, brownfield development and street design - to name but a few.

**Environmental Improvements**

Across the local area in ex-Council estates, the Portobello/Craigmillar Neighbourhood Partnership sub group – the East Area Board - has been instrumental in allowing local people to decide on which improvements projects would be best for the whole area. Through their good local decision-making, a range of environmental improvements have been put in place with new paths, fences and parking areas making a real difference over the years. These improvement projects have been paid for via the housing rents budget. A sum of money every year has been earmarked for environmental improvements in estates where many of the properties are no longer generating rental income for the Council as landlord. Understandably, the Council is concentrating rental income on improvements to tenants’ homes and making rents affordable. The Council must meet the housing standard for its own remaining tenants. A large part of current rent is still paying off the Council’s ‘mortgage’ used to build houses which were sold to tenants at a huge discount through Right to Buy. That led to a sad decline in the quality of those common areas which still held as Council assets on the Council’s Housing Revenue Account. Council tenants, many of whom bought their homes through the Right to Buy, are left wondering ‘Who maintains these areas?’ And the answer has increasingly been ‘Nobody.’ Some ex-tenants have claimed bits of land and maintain them as their own. Others haven't the time, energy and resources to do this.

**Maintaining Private Amenity Ground**

The same confusion – about who is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of what bit of land – also applies to common areas in some private estates such as Gilberstoun, Peacocktail, and Vexhim Park. From a sample of the deeds held at Register House and in people’s own house files, we can see that the common areas belong to the home owners collectively. The expectation would be that homeowners set up a factoring arrangement to maintain those grounds or were given help to do so. In many developments, this has not happened. Instead land was transferred from the developers to the Glasgow based Greenbelt Trust, now defunct. These areas are not the responsibility of the Council to maintain and there is no prospect of their being taken on. I would be happy to work with any group of residents to help find an agreed neighbourhood solution to the care of these areas.

**My Contact Details**

My regular reports and updates on local issues are freely available by email. Just let me know if you want to be on my distribution list. I also put hard copies in the libraries to pick up. My contact details are: Councillor Maureen Child | Labour Elected Member | Portobello/Craigmillar (Ward 17) | City of Edinburgh Council | City Chambers | High Street | Edinburgh | EH1 1YJ | Direct Line 0131 529 3268 | Phone/Text Mobile 07718 666 481 or Follow me on Twitter @MaureenChild1