

An aerial photograph of a city street development project. The image shows a mix of residential buildings, including a large multi-story apartment complex on the left and smaller houses in the center. A large, modern building with a solar panel array is visible in the lower right. The street layout is complex, with several roads and a central green space. The overall scene is a dense urban environment.

Westbank Street Development

REPORT ON THE FINDINGS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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INSIGHT AND ENGAGEMENT | THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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Executive Summary

The first Participation Request made to the City of Edinburgh Council under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was a request to be involved in the decision-making process on the sale of land at Westbank Street, in the west of Portobello.

Known locally as the Pitz, the site's operator and long-term leaseholder – Powerleague – plans to close the five-a-side football pitches, as the location is not financially viable for them in the long term. In 2015, Powerleague contacted the Council and together the organisations have agreed to sell their collective interest in the site.

The Powerleague site was previously an open-air swimming pool, and is adjacent to a popular gymnastic and soft play centre – Tumbles – which is run by Edinburgh Leisure and owned by the Council. The final sale of the site may also include Tumbles, but if so, the entire facility would be replaced like-for-like elsewhere on the Westbank Street site.

In response to the participation request, and in agreement with Portobello Community Council and Portobello Amenity Society, the Council's Insight and Engagement Team undertook a series of eight focus groups, and an online survey involving Portobello residents and community activists. This report summarises the findings of those activities.

What has emerged from this engagement process is an ambition for what this site can provide for Portobello. Whether or not participants felt that the change represented a significant loss of amenity, they were interested in seeing a good result for the community from Powerleague's closure of its five-a-side football pitches.

The overarching themes of this feedback were that:

- Any development should seek to enhance Portobello;
- There was a rare opportunity to bolster the Promenade and reinvigorate the town through the right kind of development;
- The quality and scale of building was important and the key contextual feature in the development was the Promenade;
- There were good opportunities for community benefit to be created, but that these must be specific and binding commitments; and
- Negative impacts on the community should be meaningfully constrained by ensuring adequate parking, appropriate traffic measures, and further investment by developers in local schools if pupil numbers were expected to increase.

In summarising this feedback in a little more detail, it must be noted that there are members of the community who do not support the development. Some participants opposed any sale, believing that the land had been promised as open space "in perpetuity". There were other participants who did not support Powerleague receiving any revenue share from any sale.

In opposing the sale, participants were concerned about the loss of leisure facilities and open space in Portobello. While the current value of the open space and leisure facilities provided by the Powerleague site is probably small, overt opposition to the sale seems motivated by a desire to protect the long-term potential of the site for community use. Through the enhancement of leisure facilities in the town, it may be possible to address these concerns – for example, through improvements along

the promenade, inclusion of indoor or outdoor sports facilities somewhere on the site, or expansion of a redeveloped Tumbles to provide further activities.

Concern about the sale of the land was far lower in the focus groups than in the online survey, with this being substantially driven by a common misapprehension about Tumbles. Ensuring a clear message around the future of Tumbles should be a priority for the Council, Edinburgh Leisure, and any developer. The community highly values the facilities Tumbles provides, but the actual building and its car park were not felt to add anything to the Promenade. Some participants welcomed the potential move as an opportunity to improve the look of the site overall, the appearance of Tumbles, and its service offering.

There was no firm consensus about how the site should be developed, with different concerns over commercial and residential building influencing discussions. However, a mixed-use development was the favoured option of most participants. There was strong opposition to a supermarket, or to any development over four storeys, with particular concerns about high buildings on the promenade-side.

Participants were positive about learning lessons from year-round, mixed-use waterfront developments elsewhere. It is likely that all residents would be more receptive to a proposal that could show learning from sites elsewhere, which had successfully created vibrant, community spaces.

While a lack of affordable housing was recognised as a serious issue in Portobello and across Edinburgh, the negative impacts of including more housing at that site were felt to be significant in terms of traffic, demand on local services and school capacity. Surrounding residential developments were felt to have unknown impacts on all of these, as construction was still ongoing. This is most clearly reflected by the 46% of participants in the online survey who wanted the Council to minimise local impact rather than pursue the best price, and compounded by negative perceptions of affordable housing in general.

Traffic in Portobello was considered an insoluble problem. Public transport is excellent, active travel within the town and farther into Edinburgh is good, but parking is terrible. Those living nearby the site report that their streets are already an overflow parking facility – an experience shared by the whole of Portobello on warm, sunny days. Participants wanted a development which did not worsen this situation by imposing a parking solution on the site that did not take account of the needs of its users, whether those were businesses or residents. Underground residential parking with secure access was strongly favoured as a way to address these needs without otherwise impacting on the community.

The engagement activity provided little clarity on the best form of open space that could be included on the site. It is obvious that some would like to see the whole site become a park, or imagine that a large park and any development can exist on a site smaller than four acres in size. Facilities specifically aimed at children were requested by many as part of the focus groups and the online survey. However, as these new children's facilities would exist immediately next to a soft play centre, a gymnastic centre, and a popular beach, the additional benefit provided at that location is questionable. Others noted that the quality of the walkway along the Figgate Burn, and expansion and development of useable space on the Promenade-side would be of benefit to the community and to any businesses located in the development.

How community benefit is realised on the site is also key. As community activists believe promises made in the past have not been kept, the Council must be especially diligent in ensuring that this does not happen again; that all parties have clarity of what is contractually required, and that the Council is prepared to act to ensure contractual obligations are met.

In terms of what community benefit is in the context of this development, there are a number of prominent options. The development of the Figgate Burn and Promenade beyond the frontage of this site would bring returns to the developer and the community. Redevelopment of Tumbles, were this option taken forward, should be an opportunity to look at local facilities and address pressing need. However, improvements to community facilities should also be considered off-site. Requests for a community space could perhaps be better accommodated by investments at Portobello Library or Portobello Town Hall, where some facilities already exist, and likewise the impact of the development of new homes should be considered in the context of the schools estate.

This report has been shared with prospective developers, and community groups, and has been published on the Council's Consultation Hub.

October 2017

Background and introduction

This report provides the findings from a series of eight focus groups and an online survey in relation to the sale and use of land at Westbank Street.

The Westbank Street site (the site) extends to around 1.86 hectares. It covers an area of land between Portobello High Street to the south, the Promenade to the north, and is bounded by Westbank Street and the Figgate Burn. A map of the site is included as an appendix.

The site is currently split between two organisations and the Council.

- **Powerleague**, a private company, operate the five-a-side football pitches adjacent to the High Street and have a small function suite in the middle of the site. Powerleague have a long-term lease on the five-a-side pitches, valid until 2088.
- **Edinburgh Leisure**, a wholly-owned, arms-length management organisation of the City of Edinburgh Council, operate the Tumbles, an indoor soft play and gymnastics facility. Tumbles also has a café and car parking for fifty customers.
- **The City of Edinburgh Council** (the Council) owns all land at the site.

Sale of the site

In early 2015, Powerleague contacted the Council to indicate that expected spend on upgrading and maintaining the five-a-side football pitches meant it would not be viable for them to operate their business on the site in the long term and that they wished to sell their interest in the site. The Council agreed to join its interests with Powerleague, so that the site could be sold as freehold.

The receipt from any land sale will be split between the Council and Powerleague. The Council's share of that sale has already been allocated to the redevelopment of the Meadowbank Sports Centre.

To maximise the potential revenue from any sale, Tumbles was also offered to developers. Several developers have expressed an interest in the site and have submitted bids and outlined their intentions should their bid be successful. Some of these developers have included Tumbles in their bid and others have not.

- If the site were sold **excluding Tumbles**, then Tumbles would remain in its current location however the Tumbles car park would likely be relocated elsewhere on the site. If the carpark were to be moved, it would maintain its current level of parking (fifty spaces). The five-a-side football pitches would be removed, but Tumbles would continue to be run by Edinburgh Leisure at its current location.
- If the site were sold **including Tumbles**, then the existing building and its car park would be removed, but must be replaced like-for-like elsewhere on the site. Developers may choose to do this because the value of the land next to the promenade is greater than land elsewhere on the site. Any replacement facility for Tumbles would also be run by Edinburgh Leisure and owned by the Council and would have the same car parking (fifty spaces). In this option, the five-a-side football pitches would also be removed.

Engagement activity

In April 2017, Portobello Community Council contacted the Council and asked to be involved in the decision-making process through a participation request, a power created by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, 2015 (the Act). Shortly afterwards, Portobello Amenity Society also requested to be involved in the participation request.

This is the first participation request received by the Council under the Act. The Council accepted this request and organised a meeting to discuss how the desired outcome could be achieved.

Jointly, these three organisations agreed that there should be a series of focus groups with local residents and an online survey to gather the views of residents. A focus group methodology provides the best way for participants to receive and give information, while also working together to respond creatively and imagine multiple scenarios.

Eight focus groups would be conducted in total:

- Four focus groups were with **residents of the Portobello Community Council area** or residents living outside of this area who lived in postcode areas at least partly within 400 metres of Westbank Street. Participants were recruited in-street – on Portobello High Street by the Town Hall and on Portobello Promenade by Tumbles – by independent research agency, Research Resource. Participants in these groups were paid £30.
- Two focus groups were with **residents living either side of the site**. One group in the housing immediately to the east, and the other with residents immediately to the west. Participants were also recruited by Research Resource, through a combination of in-street recruitment and going door-to-door in the relevant areas. Participants in these groups were paid £30.
- Two focus groups were with **community activists**; generally, these were members of local special interest groups or societies. These participants were invited by Portobello Community Council and Portobello Amenity Society and all individuals who requested to attend a focus group were accepted. Participants in these groups did not receive any remuneration.

Otherwise, the focus group participants were selected at random, but provided a good, general cross-section of adults in the area. There were 68 individuals who actually attended a focus group. The youngest participant in the discussion was 20, while the oldest was 76. Participants were roughly evenly split between men and women.

The focus groups were conducted by the Insight and Engagement Team from the Strategy and Insight division of the Council's Chief Executive office. Insight and Engagement manages the Council's major social and customer research projects. Six staff were involved in moderating and note-taking across the eight groups.

The topic guide used in the focus groups was agreed between Insight and Engagement, Corporate Property, Planning, Portobello Community Council and Portobello Amenity Society. The purpose of the topic guide is to show what subjects should be discussed as part of the focus group, but also to show what information should be given to all participants. This topic guide is included for reference at the end of this report.

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Anonymised versions of these transcripts were shared with all parties involved in the creation of the topic guide, but are not included in this report.

Participants in the focus groups completed rating forms at the end of each session. 100% of participants agreed that they were able to express their views (77% strongly agreed), that the focus groups were worthwhile (56% strongly agreed), and that they took place in a suitable venue (70% strongly agreed).

While it is the view of the Insight and Engagement Team that the focus groups provide a better way of engaging residents in a complex discussion, an online survey was also created to enable residents not involved in the focus groups to contribute. This survey was designed by the Insight and Engagement Team to present realistic options and alternatives. The survey was not as open as the focus groups, and because there was no opportunity to answer the questions of those completing the survey, the contribution received in this way was not as informed.

There were 1,185 participants in the survey. In total, 918 provided their age. This identified that a majority (52%) were aged between 25 and 44, while a further 36% were between 45 and 64. The online survey was particularly unrepresentative of younger people and older people, with 8% of respondents being aged 65 and over, and 4% being aged under 24.

The results from this survey are summarised as part of this report. Open-ended comments from the survey have been anonymised and shared with all parties involved in the creation of the focus group topic guide.

Analysis of the results of both these activities was conducted by the Insight and Engagement Team.

Use of this report

It is intended that this report will assist in the following ways:

- Developers who have already submitted their proposals for the site will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit based on the feedback from residents. The report may also be used to inform later place-making activity or planning applications.
- The Council's Corporate Property Service and representatives of Portobello Community Council and Portobello Amenity Society will consider its findings when making a recommendation to the Council on which bid to accept for the site.
- Interested parties in Portobello will be updated on the general views of the community on this issue.

Main report

Assumptions and limitations

The engagement activities have been conducted, and this report has been written, in good faith. On seeking views from the community, it was the belief of the Insight and Engagement Team that community views could influence the outcome of the sale and the development on the site. This remains our belief.

However, considering feedback received, it is important to recognise that all engagement undertaken was bounded in specific ways. There are always assumptions or restrictions on discussion. These do not invalidate responses, but provide the context in which responses should be understood.

The following assumptions and limitations are relevant here:

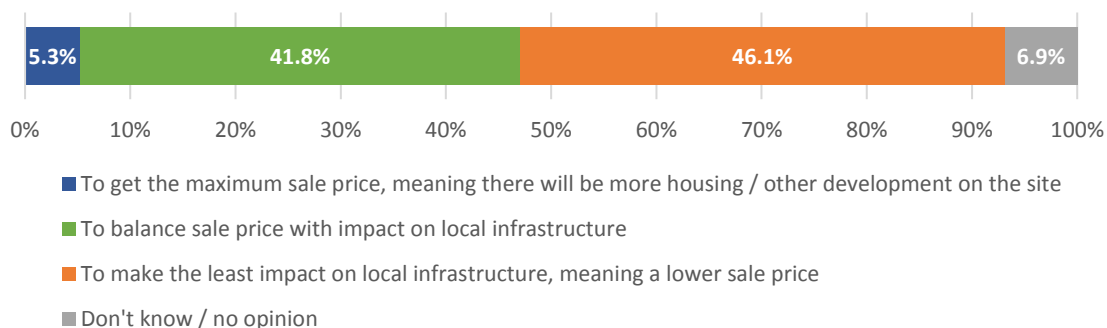
- Only the site was discussed, though it was clear that other projects in the Portobello area were of interest to participants and had shaped their views.
- The decision on whether the site would be sold had already been taken by the Council, and the Council's plans included how revenue from the sale would be used. Therefore, all participants were informed that the land would be sold.
- For reasons of commercial confidentiality, neither the Insight and Engagement Team nor participants were permitted to view any individual proposal for the site, or to know the amount of any bids or the range of bids. These issues were discussed in general.
- Given the range of potential outcomes, it was not practical to present any visual information about what could be done on the site. As it is much easier to comment on an existing design than imagine alternatives, this may have limited the ability of some participants to engage.
- There was no focus group engagement activity with customers of either Tumbles or Powerleague. In the case of Tumbles, it is important that customers have an opportunity to input into the development of the new facility if Tumbles is sold.

Sale of the site

Participants expressed concerns about the sale of the site. In the first instance, participants believed that the site had been promised as open space “in perpetuity” following the closure of an open-air swimming pool that had once been on the site. The sale of the site for development was felt to be incompatible with keeping this promise. This view was held by community activists rather than other residents as part of the focus groups, though there was also opposition to any sale expressed through the online survey.

When asked what the Council’s priority should be when selling the site, those responding to the online survey were strongly in support of a sale that brought benefits to the community and took a long-term perspective on the value of the land, rather than seek exclusively short-term gain. Those responding also felt that a sale needed to make commercial sense and receive a fair price.

Online survey, Q5 - Which of the following should the Council seek from the sale? (Base 1,003)



There were broader concerns that sale of a sports facility was counter to the Council’s aims of keeping people fit and active through regular exercise, and combating obesity. It was felt that there may be potential for a significant reduction in access to sports facilities – especially for younger men – if the Powerleague site were closed before Meadowbank reopened.

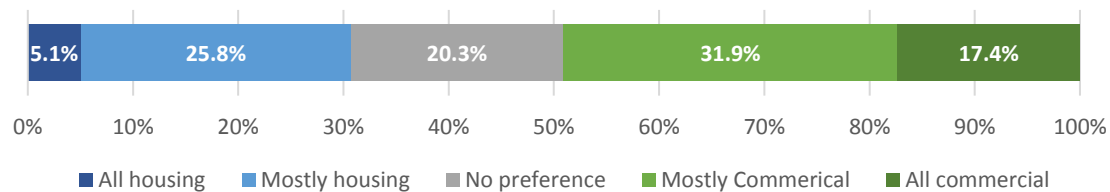
However, given the price of booking a five-a-side pitch for an hour is in the region of £50, it is unlikely that the five-a-side pitches are currently an important resource for socially or financially marginalised youth in the area. Likewise, the green space on the site is not accessible and has no pathing, seating or function. Calls for these to be protected for the benefit for the community should therefore be viewed as protecting potential; this site could become a valuable asset, but is not widely-used and valued at the moment. Ordinary residents in the focus groups were broadly supportive of the sale and development of the site.

Finally, participants did not understand why Powerleague were entitled to any share of the sale of the site. Powerleague’s desire to end their lease was viewed like a breach of contract or the end of a rental agreement, and this sale was, at best, rewarding them for undesirable behaviour.

Development type, volume and height

There was no clear preference for the type of development that should take place on the site. In the focus groups, participants usually settled on a mix of commercial and residential development as being best – though this was not always the case. In the online survey, there was a stronger preference for commercial over residential (49% vs 31%), but again, some form of mixed development had a majority of support (58%).

Online survey, Q1 - What would you prefer the Westbank Street site be used for? (Base 1,080)



Those who preferred housing identified a need for more housing in the area, especially affordable housing options. Portobello was felt to provide few options for people to take the next step on the housing ladder, with some smaller properties and many more expensive properties, but limited opportunities for housing for young families.

The concept of affordable housing was challenged in the focus groups, with participants sceptical that affordable would really mean affordable. It was expected that most of the housing developed would be exclusive and unaffordable to Portobello residents. New developments of two bedroom properties – which were needed – would in reality be one bedroom and one box room and would otherwise be unsuitable and poorly made.

They also did not believe any affordable housing would benefit the local community, but would instead be used for people across Edinburgh with various social problems – this was a common stereotype for social rented tenants – and would bring down local property values.

However, the primary concern around introducing more housing was pressure on local services, especially schools, but to a lesser extent also GPs. While some participants asked whether any consideration had been given to the number of school places available locally, others stated their belief that local services were already at capacity.

Attitudes to development in this area were also impacted by other local developments nearby. The implications of the creation of nearby care facilities and additional local housing were still felt to be poorly understood. It was felt that adding yet more residential development to the area could create traffic, service access, and pupil attainment problems.

Support for housing in the area was also based on what was nearby; both east and west sides of the development are substantially residential. Amongst those who favoured more commercial options, this was seen as a problem to be addressed. On the promenade-side, the site was felt to be unattractive and run-down. On the High Street, participants could see value in extending retail sites along to the supermarket and encouraging visitors to disembark buses earlier and walk into the centre of Portobello.

It should be noted that many participants responding to the online survey favoured leisure uses for the site instead of development. These included open green space, parks, community garden, outdoor facilities for sports, exercise, or children's play.

How any development would interact with the rest of Portobello was important to most participants. Discussion here focused on three areas:

- The nature of commercial elements on the site
- The look and feel of buildings, and what buildings were made of
- The scale of any buildings

There was strong opposition to any supermarket on the site. Portobello has a history of opposition to large-scale retailers in favour of smaller, independent retailers. Despite this, the town is currently served by two mid-sized supermarkets (Scotmid, located near the town centre, and ALDI, immediately opposite the site) and a small Sainsbury's on the High Street, to the east of the town centre. It was felt that a retail offering of this type would cause further traffic problems and add nothing to town.

Participants expressed mixed views on the form of other commercial potential. It was suggested that some commercial or office accommodation could be occupied by services like GPs or could be used for artistic and creative space. While there was some negativity towards chain retailers – such as Costa – there was also support for a family-friendly pub on the site – with Wetherspoon mentioned specifically.

Regardless of how retail commercial space was designed, participants were concerned that it would remain empty for a long time and that this would have a negative effect on the area. This had been observed by participants in other areas of Edinburgh, where ground floor commercial units were often unlet.

It was recognised that Portobello had seasonal attraction, which participants felt offered an opportunity for commercial development that would enhance the experience of visiting the beach during the summer months. Various food outlets were suggested. Participants who had experienced similar facilities elsewhere said that a café or restaurant built on the front could be successful all year round, making use of extended outdoor seating in warm weather. A flagship development on the site, built around public access to enhanced facilities on the promenade was a persuasive idea amongst groups who discussed this.

Participants also suggested that the promenade-side could be better used as a hotel or other short-term stay site than for housing. Holiday visitors would bring money to the area, while making little impact on traffic. Focus group participants felt that managing these competing objectives was something that other cities must already have tackled, and that the developer should put forward a proposal which integrated year-round activity on a mixed-use commercial, leisure and residential site.

It was felt that any new buildings should be in-keeping with Portobello, however it is useful to observe that none of the buildings on any side of the site are similar to buildings elsewhere in Portobello, or each other, in terms of architecture, building materials, or scale. In this context, it may be better to treat this feedback as a desire to tie together various disparate elements into something coherent.

There was an expectation that building quality would be low – especially for housing and affordable housing. Making sure that building materials enhanced the look of the area was important, this was even more important to those who lived nearby or who viewed the development as an important lynchpin for the promenade.

Almost a quarter of participants responding to the online survey felt that green elements should be included in the buildings on the site. While participants did not spontaneously mention grass roofs or green siding, it is likely that these or similar elements would have significant local support.

The height of buildings on the site was controversial. Participants were informed that proposals varied from two-storey buildings to eight-storey buildings. Eight storeys was regarded as far too high, even though a building of similar size is very close to the site. Local residents had concerns about being overlooked, but all participants felt a building of that size close to the promenade would block sun on the beach and negatively impact on the appearance of the promenade.

Four storeys on the promenade-side was a generally tolerable maximum, and participants felt that this could be maintained across the site, stepping up as the buildings were closer to the high street. This is broadly the same proportions as buildings surrounding the site at present.

Parking, travel and transport

Portobello was felt to be a seaside town and the experience of residents of a seaside town is that when the weather is good, people will bring their children to the beach. People with children often have cars. Those cars will invariably be parked on residential streets. Participants also assumed that people who own houses tend to also own cars, and that it is not unusual for families to have two or three cars.

Local residents reported that their streets were already used as overflow parking for facilities on the existing site and this, combined with their expectation of increased use, put them in opposition to the Council's initial guidance to developers – that any additional parking on the site should be kept to a minimum. Participants instead favoured a large increase in the amount of parking available on the site, regardless of the type of development, and suggested that all new resident parking could be private and underground.

It was observed that the Tumbles carpark – though notionally identified as being exclusively for customers of Tumbles – is actually used by a range of organisations including local schools, local leisure groups, and Portobello Beach Wheelchairs who are using a temporary storage structure in the Tumbles carpark. At the time of writing it is believed that an alternative, long-term alternative is being put in place for Portobello Beach Wheelchairs, however it is clear that some continuing use of the carpark by organisations other than Tumbles may be of benefit to the local community.

Participants recognised that the five-way junction at the end of Portobello High Street and Sir Harry Lauder Road, etc. was very busy, but felt that little could be done about this issue. Participants did not see availability or convenience of parking as being a factor that created additional traffic. One suggested action which might help to relieve congestion was to address access to the Baileyfield Industrial Estate, closing the road between the estate and the High Street, requiring all traffic to enter and exit via Sir Harry Lauder Road.

Traffic during the period of the development was an issue in several focus groups, and participants were also concerned about safety. It was suggested that vehicle access to the site be restricted during peak travel times and when schools were going in or coming out.

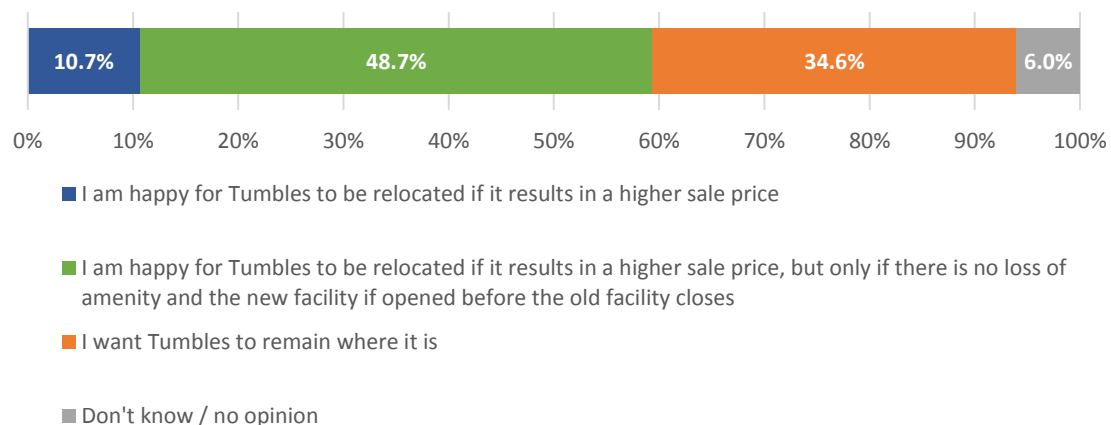
Participants in the focus groups were very positive about public transport and active travel in Portobello. Lothian Buses were felt to provide an excellent service, though very busy during peak travel times. There were no reported problems with being able to walk or cycle around Portobello or travel into town.

There were some frustrations with co-occupation of the Promenade by cyclists and pedestrians, with the speed of cyclists often mentioned. Participants felt what was required was more care and attention from cyclists, but that any developer could also contribute to better walking and cycling routes, and that it was better to consider Portobello as a whole, rather than just routes through the development.

Relocation of Tumbles

There was uncertainty amongst residents about the future of Tumbles. It is obvious that participants, those responding to the online survey in particular, were under the impression that Tumbles was being closed. A third of those responding to the online survey say they did not want Tumbles to be relocated, while just under two-thirds were in favour of relocation. However, when the options for Tumbles were explained to focus group participants, opinion was either positive towards the move or broadly indifferent.

Online survey, Q7 - Which of these best describes your view? (Base 1,000)



It was reported that the current location of Tumbles was inappropriate, as it placed a large warehouse-type building and a carpark immediately on the Promenade, neither of which were seen as desirable or enhancing the area. While it was felt that Tumbles was well-used even in its current location, moving the facility closer to the High Street could help to raise its profile further, while at the same time improving the aesthetic appeal of the building.

It was suggested that enhanced facilities could be added to Tumbles as part of community benefit, which is discussed later in this report.

However, there were also concerns about relocation, the most important of these appears to be ensuring that the facility is replaced on an at-least like-for-like basis. Participants felt that the Council risked being duped by a developer who would cut corners wherever they could. The Tumbles café was felt to be well-used; it is likely that customers would consider this as much a core component of Tumbles as the gymnastics and soft play areas.

Ensuring continuity of service for customers of Tumbles was essential. Almost half of those responding to the online survey were happy for Tumbles to be relocated provided continuity was assured. This was also an issue in the focus groups, where participants identified habit as being a driver of behaviour for accessing children’s activities.

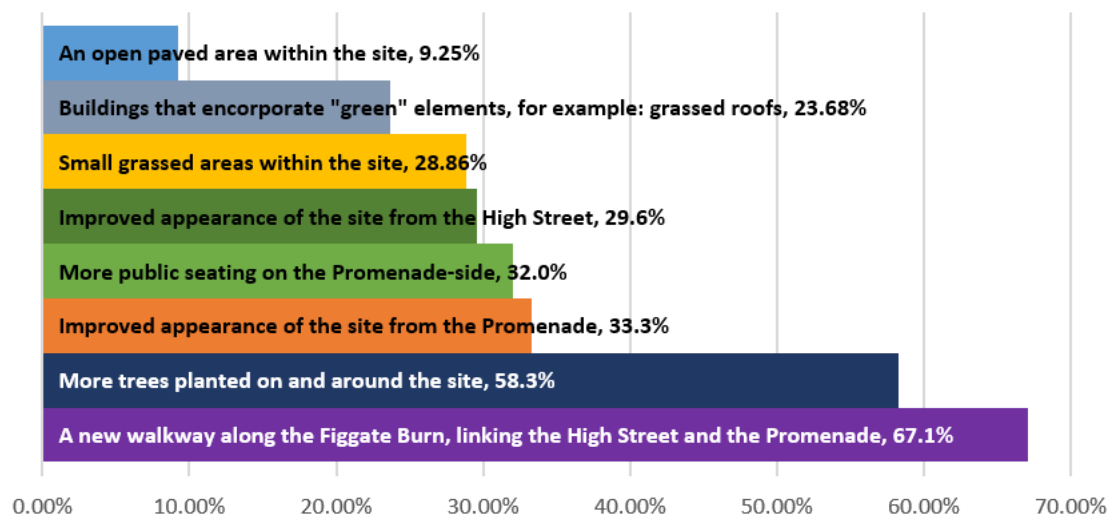
It was felt that an entry point on the high street presented additional risks. This would encourage parents to stop on the High Street to drop off children, and would also result in far more children next to a very busy road. If Tumbles were moved directly onto the High Street, consideration should be given to the relative position of the entrance, parking, and associated road safety measures.

Open space and Figgate Burn

The site is currently considered to be open space, and any developer would need to show appropriate consideration of this in any planning proposal. The Council suggested to developers that part of this requirement should involve improvements along the Figgate Burn, while participants in both the focus groups and the online survey were invited to suggest additional elements they would like to see included on the site.

Participants from activist groups were sceptical of how open space would be protected through the development process, citing previous examples of how developers had been required to include an “equivalent” open space in a development, but a failure to define equivalence had led to unmanaged and inferior outcomes than were initially indicated.

Online survey, Q3 - Which THREE of the following would you most like to see included on the site? (Base 1,081)



Amongst those responding to the online survey, the Figgate Burn pedestrian walkway was the most popular option. In focus groups, this was also well-received, but with several important caveats. The walkway by the Figgate Burn could not simply be a path or a strip of grass, but should be broad, open, well-lit at night, and attractive. Participants were concerned that if buildings were too high, a narrow walkway would feel enclosed and unpleasant.

Otherwise what was desired from open space varied enormously between participants. Some participants only considered aspects of open space that related specifically to children and some form of children's park or play area was popular, though others observed that any such play area was likely to be heavily overlooked from nearby. Outdoor sports facilities were also requested, including multi-sport pitches, tennis courts and a skatepark.

There was uncertainty about who would maintain any open space on the site; it was felt that Council either would not or could not do this. This question could not be answered at the time, as this might depend on the nature of the development, but is highlighted here to illustrate that long-term quality and maintenance was of higher importance to some participants than just what was present on day one.

Air pollution was a concern, given traffic in the area. This was both a negative – impact of pollution on park users – and a positive – impact of park on local air quality.

Green options for buildings, such as green siding and grass roofs, were somewhat well-received, though regarded as slightly ridiculous by many participants. It is possible that a more fleshed-out proposal involving these elements, or examples of how these have worked elsewhere, would result in broader support for their inclusion on the site.

High Street frontage

Participants felt that the site had potential to either encourage or discourage visitors to Portobello. As previously discussed, a Tumbles entrance directly onto the High Street was felt to be risky, though positioning the facility prominently could deliver positive benefits. While participants had no strong views about what should go on the High Street, they did not want to see a smoked glass wall sheltering offices; their view was that on the High Street, active frontage must mean active frontage.

Promenade

The Promenade was valued and well-used, seemingly by most, if not all participants in the focus groups. They were highly critical of previous development on the Promenade. Others had built too close to the front, right to the edge of their land and this had disrupted the line of the Promenade to its detriment. Flood defence measures were ugly. The west side was tired and run-down. Where community facilities had been promised in the past, these promises had not been kept. Blame for this fell to developers, and to the Council, for not managing engagements, contracts, and sales. While community activists could more precisely pinpoint these criticisms, the sentiment was reported and recognised more widely.

As previously discussed, commercial elements on the Promenade-side were felt to have the potential to create a special attraction for Portobello. Participants recognised the seasonality of the Promenade as it is now, with spikes in use associated with good weather, and very little active use during winter. This was felt to create a difficult environment for any business to operate in, meaning that there was little of interest on the Promenade apart from the beach.

More seating, more bins, and some outdoor fitness and sports facilities would all be useful additions, but the most important issue for the Promenade-side was how any development would look in the context of the Prom in its entirety, not just the housing to either side of the site.

Community benefit

Community benefit was explained to focus group participants as something which could be addressed in a range of ways, from social housing, building of permanent community facilities, to training of local people and creating local jobs in the development process. There was some scepticism that any training or employment would ever translate through to benefits for local people, and similarly community representatives in the focus groups felt that community facilities clauses in contracts could be got around.

The potential relocation of Tumbles prompted participants to suggest changes to the facilities available there, including community space or in-door sports. Though there was also a question about whether any investments in community space should instead be to existing local facilities – focus groups took place at Portobello Library and Portobello Town Hall.

There was a belief amongst community activists that there had been a loss of creative and artistic spaces locally – this was not mentioned by other focus groups – and they suggested these elements should be considered for inclusion in the site.